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YU TORAH TO-GO 2023

Hagaddah Insights

Rabbi Michael Taubes

Rosh Yeshiva, RIETS and YU High School for Boys

**INSIGHTS FROM THE RAV ON THE MAGGID
SECTION OF THE HAGGADAH**

As the thirtieth Yahrzeit of the Rav approaches, we are again privileged to share a collection of his insights on the Haggadah. As we noted in these pages in advance of his twentieth Yahrzeit, the Rav often observed that the Yom Tov experience of one who devoted time before its arrival to studying and reviewing the laws and themes of the holiday is immeasurably greater than the Yom Tov experience of one who did not do so. The Rav himself would thus offer many special shiurim prior to each holiday, including, of course, Pesach. What follows here is a small sampling of his many profound lessons and teachings relating to the Haggadah. I was zocheh to hear a few of these thoughts directly from the Rav myself; the

others are culled from notes written and published in various venues by others. Any mistakes or inaccuracies here should be attributed solely to me.

1. This is the bread of affliction which our ancestors ate in the land of Egypt. Let all who are hungry come and eat; let all who are in need come and observe Pesach.

We begin Maggid with a reference to the matzoh, describing it as “the bread of affliction which our ancestors ate in the land of Egypt.” Immediately thereafter, we declare that anyone who is hungry may come and eat (with us) and anyone who is in need may come and observe Pesach (with us). What is the connection between the fact that our ancestors ate matzoh in Egypt and our invitation to others to join us?

When in Egypt, not all the Jews there were slaves; Chazal tell us, for example, that the enslavement was not imposed upon the tribe of Levi (see Rashi to Shemos 5:4, d”h lechu, citing Shemos Rabbah 5:16). It may further be presumed that not every Jew who was a slave suffered in the identical fashion; some may have been subjected to much harder physical labor than others, and some may have been more deprived of basic necessities than others. What they shared was a sense of solidarity, of responsibility for one another. Those who had food, who were able to get even a small piece of matzoh to eat, shared what they had with those who were worse off, breaking their own matzoh in half, as we symbolically do at Yachatz. And it was this spirit of unity that led to the redemption.

When we invite the less fortunate to join us at our Pesach Seder, we are carrying on this tradition of solidarity and responsibility. By using the double language of this invitation, extending it both to those who are hungry and to those who are in need, we are reaching out both to the poor among us, that is, those people who are literally impoverished and may truly not have enough food for themselves and their family members, as well as to those who may be financially quite wealthy and who have plenty to eat, but are “in need” because they are lonely, because they don’t “fit in” anywhere, and because they have nobody with whom to celebrate and enjoy the holiday. We begin our retelling of the story of yetzias Mitzrayim by announcing that following the example of our ancestors in Egypt, we are one people, always ready to help each other.

2. How different this night is from all other nights.

In the introduction to his Hilchos Chametz U'Matzoh, the Rambam records that there are two mitzvos asei incumbent upon us nowadays at the Seder on Pesach night (in the absence of the Beis HaMikdash, when we are unable eat the meat of the Korban Pesach, which we obviously cannot offer), namely the mitzvah to eat matzoh, and the mitzvah to tell the story of yetzias Mitzrayim. Among the Rabbinic mitzvos of this evening is the requirement to eat maror, which was Biblically mandated only as an accompaniment to the Korban Pesach and is now performed as a commemoration of what was done in the past (see Pesachim 120a, and Rambam ibid. 7:12).

It is noteworthy that the questions presented as part of the Mah Nishtanah include one question about matzoh, one question about maror, and two questions connected to the telling of the story of yetzias Mitzrayim, the one about dipping, a practice introduced in order to inspire children to question, sensing something irregular, thus setting the stage for sharing the story (see Pesachim 114b and Rashi to 114a there, d"h 'ad), and the one about reclining, a practice designed to highlight our having achieved freedom as we reenact that which we talk about in relating the story (see Rambam, ibid. 7:7). One may wonder, then, why there are two separate questions in the Mah Nishtanah regarding the mitzvah of sippur yetzias Mitzrayim, and only one each regarding matzoh and maror, and, we may add, none at all regarding another prominent (Rabbinic) mitzvah of the night, namely, the obligation to drink four cups of wine.

The answer is that the mitzvah of sippur yetzias Mitzrayim actually has two very different aspects to it. One aspect is the simple retelling of the story to one's children (see Shemos 13:8), particularly as prompted by their questions (ibid. 13:14); that aspect, the intellectual aspect, is represented by the question about dipping, which is done, as mentioned above, to encourage the children to raise questions. The second aspect is the reliving of the experience, and the demonstration, both to ourselves and to others, that we truly feel as though we personally have just been redeemed from Egypt (see the Mishnah in Pesachim 116a and Rambam, ibid. 7:6). That aspect, the experiential aspect, is represented by the question about reclining, through which we indeed show that we are now free people, able to recline and eat in the manner of nobility. The drinking of the four cups of wine

is just another example of that demonstration of freedom (note that the Rambam, ibid. 7:7, clearly states as much in linking the mitzvah to recline with that to drink the four cups as manifestations of freedom); no separate question is thus needed about the four cups, as the question about reclining already "covers" this aspect.

3. We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt.

We begin our response to the questions of the Mah Nishtanah by reporting the undeniable historical fact that "Avadim hayinu L'Paroh..." we were slaves to Paroh. It must be emphasized, though, that our statement is that we were indeed slaves to Paroh, but not that we were "Avdei Paroh..." Paroh's slaves. What is the difference? The former phrase describes a legal, social, status; each Jew in Egypt "belonged" to Paroh and had to function as a slave to him. This status did not, however, define the essential personality of any Jew there. He was a slave in the sense of being in a particular political and economic condition, a defined station in life, but that condition, that station, was incidental and external to who he truly was. The Jew in Egypt retained his independent mind, his own approach to reality, and thus continued to long for redemption. His status as a slave to Paroh was not existential; it was extrinsic to his personality, and he was therefore able to retain his dignity and his spiritual essence.

Strikingly, Paroh's Egyptian servants are indeed referred to as "Avdei Paroh" (Shemos 10:7 and 11:3); these people were in fact Paroh's slaves in the fullest sense of the term. They were inwardly and intrinsically slaves, their entire personality was identified with Paroh, and serving him was their entire purpose in life. They had no aspirations for freedom or for a change of status; this was their way of life. Jews, however, may find themselves in a certain socio-economic situation in which they suffer from terrible oppression, but this does not extinguish their desire for redemption. It is only before Hashem that we surrender our freedom; our status as servants to Him alone is substantive, not incidental, existential not foreign, intrinsic to our personalities, not extrinsic. When reciting Hallel, we thus proudly declare ourselves "Avdei Hashem" (Tehillim 113:1), but we are not Avdei Paroh (see Megillah 14a).

4. Blessed is the Omnipresent One, blessed is He; Blessed is He Who gave the Torah to His people Israel, blessed is He.

The Haggadah introduces the famous passage regarding the “Four Sons” with a paragraph that serves as a kind of abbreviated Bircas HaTorah, preceding our embarking on the first of many expositions of Torah verses relating to yetzias Mitzrayim that follow. In this paragraph, Hashem is referred to as HaMakom, the Omnipresent. Why is this particular Divine Name used specifically here?

The Gemara (Chagigah 13b) discusses the prophets Yechezkel and Yeshayah, whose respective prophetic styles were very different, and notes that they each perceived the identical vision of Hashem’s throne, but their reaction and hence their depiction of it were not at all alike. Yechezkel’s description is quite detailed, while Yeshayah’s is relatively brief. The Gemara explains this distinction by comparing Yechezkel to a villager who rarely gets a glimpse of the king and is thus elaborately descriptive when he eventually does, while Yeshayah is likened to a dweller in the capital city who sees the king regularly and is thus not as dramatic in his presentation of what he sees.

This distinction might not, however, have anything to do with the level or intensity of the prophecies of Yechezkel and Yeshayah. Rather, their different styles reflect the very different times in which they lived. Yeshayah lived when the Beis HaMikdash was still standing and Hashem’s Divine Presence could therefore still be openly perceived. His vision of Hashem’s throne was brief, as a detailed description was then not necessary, and his signature description was about His holiness (Kadosh, kadosh, kadosh... — Yeshayah 6:3), which then was still palpable. Yechezkel, however, flourished during the time following the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash, and he prophesied while in exile. A more descriptive presentation was then needed, and his signature depiction was about Hashem being distant and transcendent, no longer immanent (Baruch Kevod Hashem Mimkomo — Yechezkel 3:12), but even having receded to “His place,” still relating to us.

The name “HaMakom” referring to Hashem thus describes His interaction with us from a distance, during challenging times, when His holiness is not that perceptible. One of the four sons is of course the rasha, the wicked son. He is alienated from holiness and thus far away from the God defined as holy. But although he is removed from Hashem, Hashem is still ready to embrace him, for while He may be distant, He Himself is still “the

place of the entire world” (see Bereishis Rabbah 68:9). As such, He does not abandon anybody, and He is prepared to include everybody without concern for the person’s current moral standing. As we introduce the Four Sons with a word about the giving of the Torah, we refer to Hashem specifically as “HaMakom,” calling our attention to those who may yet seem far away from Hashem, because we wish to stress that the Torah was given to everybody, even the rasha, and he too has a share in it. Hashem is ready to invest in and devote significant attention to him as well, as we too should be.

5. The Torah addresses itself to four sons.

Why is it that particularly on the night of Pesach we stress the importance of reaching out to all different types of students, as represented by the “Four Sons?” A famous passage in the Gemara (Niddah 30b) relates that every embryo, while yet in the mother’s womb, is taught Torah by an angel, but before being born, he is smacked upon the face and he forgets what he has learned. The obvious question is, why bother to teach the child Torah at all if he is going to forget everything anyhow? The answer is that since the child has already learned Torah in the womb, that Torah, while ostensibly forgotten, remains in the deep recesses of his heart and mind. When he starts to learn during his lifetime, he then subconsciously begins to recall that which is embedded within him, and that recollection of something from long ago enables him to better internalize and actualize that which he is now learning.

On the night of yetzias Mitzrayim, every Jew experienced, among other things, the public display of giluy Shechinah, Divine revelation, which raised each person, at least for a moment, to a place of great understanding and perception of the Divine. Everybody there felt the presence of Hashem, and the extraordinary giluy Shechinah of that great night became embedded in our national psyche, and in the heart and mind of every individual Jew. At the Seder, we thus address every type of Jew, regardless of his intellectual ability or level of interest, and we restage the events of yetzias Mitzrayim in an attempt to reawaken that giluy Shechinah experience resting in the inner conscience of each and every Jew. The Seder night is thus a most appropriate night to try to connect with every type of student.

6. . One might think [that the discussion of the exodus should start] from Rosh Chodesh.

Why might one think that the mitzvah of sippur yetzias Mitzrayim should be in effect starting from Rosh Chodesh Nissan (if not for a specific source limiting it to the night of Pesach, as it is connected specifically to the mitzvah to eat matzoh and maror, which applies only that night)? We do not find such a similar proposition regarding, for example, the mitzvah of lulav, suggesting that it should be obligatory starting at the beginning of the month (of Tishrei). Why is sippur yetzias Mitzrayim different?

The answer may be derived from the Rambam's presentation of the mitzvah of sippur yetzias Mitzrayim (Hilchos Chametz U'Matzoh 7:1), which he says is derived from the verse in the Torah that directs us to always remember ("zachor") the day when we left Egypt (Shemos 13:3). He then notes that this mitzvah is parallel to that which directs us to always remember the day of Shabbos (Shemos 20:8), which is also introduced by the same word "zachor." When it comes to Shabbos, we find that there is a requirement to remember it not only on the day of Shabbos itself, but starting already at the beginning of the week (see Beitzah 16a); the Ramban (to Shemos ibid.,) points out that this is why we identify the days of the week based on their progression towards Shabbos ("Yom Rishon BaShabbos," "Yom Sheini BaShabbos," etc.). This being the case, just as one must remember the Shabbos by anticipating, yearning for, and talking about it in advance of the day itself, perhaps so too we should remember the day of yetzias Mitzrayim by anticipating, yearning for, and talking about it in advance of the day itself. Hence the suggestion to begin relating the story of yetzias Mitzrayim on Rosh Chodesh Nissan, in order to be able to better prepare for and focus upon the day of yetzias Mitzrayim when it ultimately arrives.

7. Initially our ancestors were idol worshippers.

The Mishnah (Pesachim 116a) directs us that in retelling the story of yetzias Mitzrayim on Pesach night, we should begin the narrative by sharing the negative element and conclude with the positive element. The Gemara there records one opinion according to which the "negative element" is the fact that our ancestors were originally idol worshippers. But while that negative piece of information is certainly true, dating back to Terach, the father of Avraham Avinu, who was of course an idolator, there is a

positive lesson to be derived from this presentation as well, and that is the lesson of Avraham Avinu himself.

It is clear from the verses that are subsequently cited in the Haggadah (Yehoshua 24:2-4) that it was Hashem Himself who "took" Avraham and led him far away from the land of his upbringing; the initiative was that of Hashem, as He, in effect, chose Avraham and invited him to embark on his fateful mission. In that sense, it is not the case that our ancestors initially did anything to deserve being selected; they were simple idol worshippers like everybody else. At this point of the Seder, as we just begin to relate the events of yetzias Mitzrayim, we express our indebtedness and our gratitude to Hashem for the fact that it was our forefather Avraham whom He "took" to be the founder of the covenantal nation.

At the same time, though, we also focus here upon the greatness of Avraham himself. After all, he lived as part of a culture where idol worship was the norm and which had its own code of ethics and morality. Despite this, however, he was determined to discover and hone his relationship with Hashem, thereby demonstrating that if someone is truly determined to "find" Hashem, he can do so even if it means going against what society stands for and encourages. Whatever Avraham accomplished can be accomplished by others, and even in modern times, we should not be swayed from pursuing our mission by the expectations of the society around us. Like Avraham, who overcame hostile public opinion, we too have the power of our free will to elevate ourselves without succumbing to the values of the culture around us that do not dovetail with those expected of the covenantal nation. Our way of life revolves around finding Hashem in all our activities, in whatever we do (see Rambam, Hilchos De'os 3:3, citing Mishlei 3:6).

8. If He had only brought us before Mount Sinai and had not given us the Torah, it would have sufficed for us.

In the famous passage of Dayeinu, the Ba'al HaHaggadah declares that it would have been sufficient had Hashem only brought us before Mount Sinai but had not given us the Torah. The implication of this seems to be that there was independent importance in coming to Mount Sinai, quite apart from the fact that we received the Torah there. The question, of course, is what this means. Wasn't the entire purpose of going to Mount Sinai in order to receive the Torah? What happened there that was of value other than our having been given the Torah

there? The event of Ma'amad Har Sinai, the assembly at Mount Sinai, actually had two goals and hence two results. One was intellectual — the Jewish people there acquired the knowledge of Hashem's Torah and all its intricacies.

The second was experiential — the people there perceived giluy Shechinah, Divine revelation, and were thus able to see Hashem in a manner not attained by even the greatest of our prophets (see Mechilta to Parashas Yisro, Mechilta DeBaChodesh No. 3). Even had we not received the Torah at Mount Sinai, and hence not achieved the intellectual result of that event, there was still independent worth in our simply being at Mount Sinai and experiencing the giluy Shechinah which was such an integral part of the event. And that alone would indeed have sufficed to obligate us to extend our thanks to Hashem.

When we engage today in the mitzvah of talmud Torah, we similarly focus upon the above two aspects. On the one hand, learning Torah is an intellectual pursuit; we study, we analyze, we infer, we conceptualize. This is the work of the intellect. Beyond that, however, one who learns Torah properly feels that he is confronting the infinite, and reacts with a feeling of excitement, awe, and even ecstasy, as he recognizes that he is in the midst of an encounter with the Divine. The experience of talmud Torah is thus not only an intellectual one but an emotional one as well. The sense of giluy Shechinah that characterizes this experiential aspect of our having received the Torah at Sinai, while clearly intertwined with the intellectual aspect, stands on its own as significant enough to be highlighted.

9. This matzoh that we eat is for what reason? It is because the dough of our ancestors did not have time to leaven before the King of Kings revealed Himself to them and redeemed them.

The Mishnah (Pesachim 116b), cited in the Haggadah, quotes Rabban Gamliel as having taught that the reason we eat matzoh on Pesach night is that the Jewish people were redeemed from Egypt suddenly, and in great haste, before there was time for their dough to rise and become leavened (see Shemos 12:39). The problem with this explanation is that they had already been commanded beforehand to eat matzoh, as an accompaniment to the Korban Pesach that was offered prior to their having been redeemed (ibid. 12:8). This matzoh clearly had nothing to

do with their having to rush out before their bread could be properly baked.

The real question being addressed in this Mishnah is thus not why Hashem gave us this particular mitzvah to eat matzoh, or what He wants from us when we perform it. Rather, the question is what the mitzvah means to us, what we ourselves should think about and remember, what we should have in mind. Rabban Gamliel was looking to explain not why we eat matzoh, in the sense of why Hashem commanded us to do so, or what His motivation was historically in requiring this action, as that to a great extent is ultimately unknowable to us, but rather what message we should draw from performing this mitzvah, what we are meant to understand by doing so, and what the action should symbolize to us. And the answer is that our redemption from Egypt, while awaited and anticipated, ultimately came suddenly and in an unexpected manner, and so too will our future redemption.

10. In every generation a person is obligated to envision himself as if he had come out of Egypt.

Towards the end of Maggid, we cite the words of the Mishnah (Pesachim 116b), which teach that we are all to view ourselves as though we personally came out of Egypt. How exactly can we accomplish this? By trying to see the events of Yetzias Mitzrayim as something new, and not as an old, historical happening that took place in days of yore. We are to view our Biblical heroes — Avraham Avinu, Moshe Rabbeinu, etc. — as people who are alive, with whom we can interact and from whom we can draw personal inspiration. When relating the story of Yetzias Mitzrayim to our children, we should strive to present it as our own story, not as something that happened to unnamed ancestors of ours several millennia ago. We should talk as if we are an eyewitness to these events, not as someone relating testimony that we have heard second or third hand (which is unacceptable in Beis Din) even if it originates with a perfectly reliable source. By delving into, acting out, and recreating the events of Yetzias Mitzrayim, we demonstrate that they are still very much alive and part of our own personal story.

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The **Artscroll** Yom Tov Table Inspiration and Insight
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Whoever is hungry ... whoever is needy: the true meaning

Pesach With Rav Belsky

Whoever is hungry, let him come and eat! Whoever is needy, let him come and celebrate Pesach!

These two lines are very powerful, but to appreciate them one must contemplate them deeply. The translation is, “Whoever is hungry, let him come and eat! Whoever is needy, let him come and join in eating the Korban Pesach.”

It is important to ask: Is the offer that “anyone who is needy, let him come and join in eating the Korban Pesach” a real possibility?

The fact is that each Korban Pesach was brought as an offering in the Beis HaMikdash by specific members who had made arrangements to join the group before the animal was offered. Once the korban had been brought, no one could subsequently join that group. So, an offer at the beginning of the Seder for anyone not already in the group to “join” in the Korban Pesach is problematic, since for an outsider to “join” after the fact was prohibited.

Furthermore, if someone truly wanted to invite all those who needed to join in the Korban Pesach, or the meal, he might want to actually step outside before proclaiming that invitation. Now, he is sitting at the Seder with the door closed, and he won’t open it until Shefoch Chamascha. So, to whom is he saying Ha Lachma Anya? Even Eliyahu HaNavi is not invited in until after the meal!

The correct understanding is very simple. During the weeks preceding Pesach, we are in constant anticipation that Mashiach will arrive and we will be able to offer the Korban Pesach in taharah, a pure state, and fulfill all three mitzvos of Pesach, matzah, and maror as proper mitzvos d’Oraisa. Even if Mashiach will come within a week of Pesach and there will be no time for us to become tahor (ritually pure), we could still have a Korban Pesach this

year, since the Korban Pesach could be offered even if we were not tahor. Even a few hours before nightfall is still enough time to offer the korban.

Do you know what happens when we sit at the Seder? It’s a wonderful feeling, it’s a tremendous happiness to sit at the Seder, but it’s also a tremendous disappointment. You feel like crying.

Why? Because right now it’s blatantly obvious that this year there is not going to be a Korban Pesach.

So, when we sit down to the Pesach Seder there is a twinge of pathos: Mashiach hasn’t come yet and we are once again without a Korban Pesach. To alleviate that sorrow, we dwell on the possibility that by next year, Mashiach will indeed have come. To that end, we invite everyone present to next year’s Pesach Seder, and to join in next year’s Korban Pesach. We are not inviting guests for this year, but for next year (see Chasam Sofer, Derashos L’Pesach p. 260; for other explanations see Pri Megadim, Eishel Avraham 473:24).

That explains why we say the next line: This year we are here; next year may we be in the Land of Israel!

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ABILITY TO SOAR

Reb Meilech on the Haggadah –

Insights, Stories and Commentaries from

Rav Elimelech Biderman

Written by Yisroel Besser

1. Rav Shimshon Aharon Polansky, known as the Tepliker Rav, was one of the geonei Yerushalayim, and the most accomplished talmidei chachamim in the city went to learn under him.

A few days before Pesach, he entered the full beis medrash and looked around. He stood up in front of the aron kodesh and announced that he had a list of local women who were making Yom Tov alone and were in need of help with some basic tasks. The rav asked if any of the men were prepared to close their Gemaras and have a share in this great mitzvah. Almost as one, the young men lining the benches stood up, each of them understanding the magnitude of the zechus.

“In order to protect their privacy,” the rav said, “I would ask each of you to approach me separately and I will give you a piece of paper with an address and instructions.”

They lined up and approached, one at a time, and each one received a paper with...their own address, and a very clear message about what their role was on that day.

2. “We are assured that even in the dark, powerful galus, at the moment we sit and transmit the stories of Yetzias Mitzrayim to our children and imbue them with fear of Heaven, Divine flow comes down as it did during that night of miracles.”

These are the words of the Chasam Sofer (Derashos 2:252, Shabbos 5594), a revelation into the potency of this night.

This idea was written not just in his sefer, but on his face. The Chasam Sofer’s face was often radiant, but on the night of the Seder, it was nearly impossible to behold his countenance.

Rebbetzin Chava Leah, wife of the Chasam Sofer, recalled how when she got married, her sisters-in-law told her of this phenomenon, but she assumed it was an exaggeration — but it was not, as it turned out. He perceived the reality of the words he had written, that the energy of the original night of Yetzias Mitzrayim comes back on the Leil HaSeder.

With this idea, the Yismach Yisrael understands the words of Chazal (Pesachim 116a), “Maschil b’gnus umesayeim b’shevach,” we begin by recalling the shame of our humble origins, and we close with celebration and praise for how far we have come. This means that even if a person starts the Seder in a situation of gnus, one in which he feels lowly and ashamed of who he has become, by the conclusion of the night, he can reach a place of shevach, worthy of praise.

The Yismach Yisroel says that all this is included in the assurance of Chazal that V’chol hamarbeh lesaper b’Yetzias Mitzrayim, A person who increases the time and effort invested in sharing the miracles of Yetzias Mitzrayim, harei zeh meshubach. This means he is praised, and also that he is enriched. The experience itself has elevated him and lifted him up and turned him into one who is meshubach.

With this mindset, we are ready to begin the Seder.

There was an older Yid in Bnei Brak, R’ Moshe Baum. He was close to a hundred years old, and he had been a ben zekunim to his father, who had the merit of having the Rebbe Rav Bunim of Peshischa serve as his sandek. There was a real mesorah there, and the tzaddikim would

go visit R’ Moshe, eager to hear any memories of prewar Poland.

He described being by the Yismach Yisrael of Alexander for the Seder - and what an experience it had been! In contrast to other Chassidic courts, all the chassidim joined for the Seder, and the room was filled with thousands of chassidim.

He recalled how the Rebbe stood there in his kittel before the Seder, seemingly frozen in place, his face white with awe and fear. The chassidim did not dare disturb the silence, and then, suddenly, the Rebbe approached his seat and called out, “Leil hiskadash hachag! A Yid who does not believe that on this night he climbs from the lowest depths to the highest heights (fuhn nidregste bechinah biz tzum hechsten madreigah), he is the rasha referred to in the Haggadah!”

And with that, the Rebbe said “Kaddeish,” banging on the table to start the Seder. This was the vort said by the Yismach Yisrael in his sefer and this was the way he actually started his Seder!

A wise man heard this story and shared his reflection with me. The Rebbe did not just say who the rasha refers to, but also who it does not refer to; the one who stumbled, who fell into the depths of sin, is not considered a rasha, for he can climb up. The way one earns the title of rasha is only through not believing in one’s own ability to soar.

From: ArtScroll BookNews

TEFILLAH FROM THE DEPTHS

At the Maggid’s Seder

by Rabbi Paysach J. Krohn

In April 2010, Rabbi Yisroel Mantel, the rav of Khal Adas Yeshurun in Washington Heights, New York, received a letter from Rabbi Levi Weis, a member of the kehillah. Rabbi Weis had enclosed a copy of a unique prayer that had been found among the papers of Mrs. Irma Haas, who died in Israel at the age of 101.

Mrs. Haas was one of the few survivors of the Bergen-Belsen Concentration Camp. She came to the United States and settled in Washington Heights. Decades later, at 97, she and her sister Hilde, 94, made aliyah to Israel. They were the oldest survivor sisters ever to make aliyah. When Mrs. Haas passed away, her papers were given to her niece, Mrs. Judy Marcus of Teaneck, New Jersey.

When Mrs. Marcus read the creased paper with this remarkable tefillah, she realized the significance of the words. She made copies and sent them to Rabbi Weis, a family friend who was close to Rabbi Mantel. He, in turn, sent the tefillah to Rabbi Mantel.

The tefillah was composed by Rabbi Yissachar-Bernard Davids, who was the chief rabbi of Rotterdam, Holland before World War II. After Germany conquered Holland, he was sent to Bergen-Belsen with his family. Here is his poignant prayer:

“Before eating chametz [in the concentration camp], say this with heartfelt commitment.”

Our Father in Heaven, You know very well that our will is to do Your will and celebrate the festival of Pesach by eating matzah and being vigilant with the prohibition of chametz. But our heart aches that our enslavement restrains us and we find ourselves in mortal danger. We are set and prepared to fulfill Your commandment of “And you shall live by them” (Vayikra 18:5), “and not die by them” (Yoma 85b),” and be heedful of “beware for yourself and greatly beware for your life” (Devarim 4:9). Therefore, our prayer to You is that You keep us alive, sustain us, and redeem us quickly, so that we can observe Your laws and fulfill Your will and serve You with a full heart, amen.

Many people have told me that they read this tefillah at their Seder table to teach the assembled the mesirus nefesh of Jews in the concentration camps and the gratitude we must have to Hashem for the conditions we live in today.

From: ArtScroll BookNews

WORLD-HISTORIC EVENT

THE RAV SCHWAB HAGGADAH from the Shiurim and Writings of Rav Shimon Schwab

Had not the Holy One, Blessed is He, taken our fathers out from Egypt, then we, our children, and our children’s children would have remained subservient to Pharaoh in Egypt.

This means that if Yetzias Mitzrayim had not been performed by Hakadosh Baruch Hu bichvodo u’v’atzmo, through the personal involvement of Hakadosh Baruch Hu, the entire concept of human freedom would never have been implanted in the mind of mankind, and the Bnei Yisrael would have been permanently enslaved to

the Egyptian Pharaohs, or to a subsequent governing power. The accepted norm would have been for Jews to be slaves.

This is a remarkable statement. It means that without Yetzias Mitzrayim al yedei Hakadosh Baruch Hu — the event of the Exodus from Egypt as an act of God’s Personal intervention — there would never have been a concept of human rights, whereby the Egyptians and other civilized peoples would eventually have freed their slaves. The now commonly accepted principle that all human beings have an inherent right to freedom had its birth at Yetzias Mitzrayim al yedei Hakadosh Baruch Hu. Without the personal intervention of Hakadosh Baruch Hu in Yetzias Mitzrayim, never would have occurred to anyone that it is inherently evil for one group of people to subjugate or exploit another. Therefore, Yetzias Mitzrayim was a world-historic event, not only for the Bnei Yisrael, but also for all of mankind.

The acceptance of this basic human right of freedom from bonage which modern civilized society now takes for granted, has taken thousands of years to be accepted in the world. Indeed, the entire Greek culture was based on slavery. The middle class relied on slaves to do all their work, which allowed the Greek masters to pursue intellectual and physical pleasures. There was a similar situation in the Middle Ages in Europe.

And without Yetzias Mitzrayim al yedei Hakadosh Baruch Hu, there never would have been an abolitionist movement here in America, which resulted in President Abraham Lincoln freeing the slaves a mere century and a half ago. In fact, even in our own times, slavery has not been totally abolished; it still exists in certain parts of the world.

THE KEY TO MAGGID

PREPARED BY RABBI SENDY SHULMAN

[Assistant Rabbi - Cong. Torah Ohr of Great Neck]

The Mishnah in Pesachim (קט"ז) lists off the components of Maggid – there are 5 parts:

The introduction, 3 parts to the body, and a conclusion.

Now, to fully understand Maggid, we need to preface with what והגדת לבנך means:

The Malbim explains that the name of the Sefer, the ‘הגדה’, comes from the primary Mitzvah of the night, “והגדת לבנך – You shall tell your children what happened

on this night.” From the term, ‘והגדת’ we have the name ‘הגדה’. The Netziv here adds that the word “גייד” does not mean merely ‘to tell’. Rather, it means to tell in a way that reaches the heart.

Meaning: The primary Mitzvah of tonight is to tell our children what happened, in a way that will reach their hearts. *The components of Maggid all reflect that obligation.*

The Introduction

The introduction consists of two paragraphs, and the purpose of both is to get the children involved.

הא להמא עניא - The Malbim explains that the primary purpose of this paragraph is the middle line – “כל דכפין ייתי ויכול, whoever needs, come and eat”. He explains that while in the times of the Beit Hamikdash, they announced this on Erev Pesach, nowadays we announce it at the beginning of Maggid, to invite all the children to come join us, והגדת לבנך.

מה נשתנה - Any audience is more interested when they are actively involved. The Mah Nishtana is asked by the children, for the purpose of getting them involved and interested in hearing the story, והגדת לבנך.

Once we want the children involved, the commentaries give many reasons why these specific four questions were chosen.

Body One

When your son hears that someone who was worth ten million dollars made a major deal, and is now worth twenty million, he finds it nice, but not newsworthy. On the other hand, when the news breaks that someone who didn't have a penny to his name just earned twenty million, that is reason to jump for joy. A story of rags to riches reaches our hearts, far more than wealth to greater wealth. The Malbim explains that Body One of Maggid is formatted to accomplish the same purpose. The Mishnah states “מתחיל בגנות ומסיים בשבח” - begin with the disgrace and conclude with the praise”. Contrasting the two will reach our children's hearts, והגדת לבנך.

But what disgrace and success are we referring to? The Gemarah cites that Rav and Shmuel argue what it means – and the Haggadah includes both opinions. These two are:

עבדים היינו לפרעה במצרים - we were slaves to Paraoth in Mitzrayim and then we went free, and

מתחילה עובדי עבודה זרה היו אבותינו - at the beginning we served idols and then we grew to believe in Hashem.

R' Moshe Shapiro explains very simply that the argument between the opinions is: what is the main obligation of the night? Shmuel holds that the main obligation is to tell our children the physical- we were slaves, and we went free. Rav holds that the main obligation is to tell our children that on this night we became believers in Hashem. And the Haggadah includes both opinions- we relive both the physical redemption and the spiritual one.

(In middle of Body One, the Haggada digresses to emphasize that we are obligated to tell the story tonight even if there are no children there and we know the story already. The Malbim explains that the Haggada sources this obligation both in the logical obligation of Hakorat Hatov, and in the pesukim.)

The **Yesamach Av** (by Avi Mori [R' Eli Baruch Shulman] Shlit"a) points out that after finishing Body One we sing a mini hallel- והיא שעמדה לאבותינו – through all these times Hashem was with us and took care of us.

Body Two

The second part of the body is ארמי אובד אבי, which is a recitation of the pesukim that give in summarized form the story of our going down to Mitzrayim, our galus there, and then the geulah through the ten makkot. There are many reasons for sourcing it from these pesukim, but first and foremost it's because we source everything in the Torah, including the story of tonight. This recognition is especially important when we are giving our heritage to our children.

The Malbim explains the format the Haggadah uses- rather than read half of Sefer Shemot, which would take many hours, it reads a few pesukim from Sefer Devarim that contain within them the whole story. But the issue is that any summary will not bring out the drama of the story, thus failing in והגדת לבנך, reaching the hearts of our children. So, to bring out each point of the story, the Haggada reads a word or two of the pasuk and says one line stressing and sometimes explaining the point alluded to by that word- and usually that line is another pasuk elsewhere in the Torah. For example, the summary pasuk simply says that the Jews became great and strong- גדול עצום - so the Haggadah quotes a pasuk from Sefer Shemot that stresses and explains, they multiplied and became strong.

The **Yesamach Av** points out that again at the conclusion of Body Two, we sing another mini hallel, **דיינו**, listing the numerous kindnesses that Hashem did for us throughout the geulah from Mitzrayim to Eretz Yisroel. This also helps to strike in our childrens hearts an appreciation for Hashem's countless Kindnesses to us, **והגדת לבנך**.

Body Three

The third part of the body is the obligation to say **ומרור**, **פסח, מצה**. The Rokeach explains that Hashem insisted on saying things tonight, on telling things over, **והגדת לבנך** – not just performing the Mitzvah. Therefore, it's not enough to eat the Pesach, Matzah, and Maror, we have to explain as well. We have taught through the emotion of rags to riches, we have taught from the **pesukim**, now we teach with action-accompaniment, **והגדת לבנך**.

With each one, we explain what it symbolizes- that Hashem jumped over the houses, that we left Mitzrayim in a hurry hence the dough didn't have time to rise, and that the Mitzriyim made our forefathers' lives bitter.

Rather than sing a mini-hallel here at the end of this part of the body, we include it in the conclusion.

The Conclusion

Then we conclude Maggid. We thankfully read **לפיכך אנהנו חייבים**, that we are each obligated to view ourselves as having left Mitzrayim tonight, we sing Hallel to conclude all three parts, and we recite a final bracha. In the bracha we thank Hashem for bringing us from Mitzrayim till tonight, and we ask Him to bring us to Yerushalayim to serve Him and praise Him there. We then top off Maggid by drinking the second cup of wine.

<https://www.koltorah.org/halachah/gems-from-rav-soloveitchik-on-the-haggada-by-rabbi-chaim-jachter>
Kol Torah Torah Academy of Bergen County

Gems from Rav Soloveitchik on the Haggada

By Rabbi Chaim Jachter

Volume 12, Halachah (2003/5763)

Introduction

Rav Hershel Schachter recently published a work entitled "MiPenieni HaRav," his second volume of collections of Torah insights of Rav Yosef Dov

Soloveitchik. In this essay, we shall present a number of the Rav's ideas regarding the Seder that Rav Schachter published in this work.

Ha Lachmah Anya

The commentaries to the Haggada pose many questions regarding the introductory section to Maggid, Ha Lachma Anya. We shall focus on the question regarding the relevance of the declaration we make at the conclusion of Ha Lachma Anya, "this year we are here, next year we shall be in the Land of Israel, this year we are slaves, next year we shall be free." Many ask why we mention this at the conclusion of Ha Lachma whose purpose is to invite any who are hungry to come and join us at the Seder.

Rav Soloveitchik cites the Mishna in Bava Metzia 83a to resolve this problem. The Mishna there relates a story about Rav Yochanan ben Matya who instructed his son to hire some workers for a particular job. The son proceeded to hire Jewish workers and he agreed, among other things, to provide them with food. When the son told the father what he did, the father became concerned regarding the fact that the son did not specify to the workers what type of food he agreed to provide them. The father ordered his son to immediately tell the workers before they started the job that he agrees to provide them with only an average meal. Rav Yochanan explained that without specifying otherwise, the workers enjoyed the Halachic right to demand the most lavish meal imaginable. This is because the descendants of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov, are entitled to the finest treatment possible.

Similarly at the Seder, explains Rav Soloveitchik, when we invite a Jewish person to the Seder they are entitled to the most lavish meal imaginable unless we specify otherwise. Hence, when we extend an invitation to poor people to attend our Seder, we indicate that in principle they are entitled to the finest meal possible. However, due to our current pre-Messianic circumstances we are unable to provide them with such a meal. This indication raises the self-esteem of the poor guests as we gently imply that their status as Jews endows them with "VIP status" and that anything we give them is less than what they deserve.

Vehee Sheamda

Why do we mention at the Seder that in every generation there are people who seek to destroy the Jewish people? What does this have to do with Sippur Yetziat Mitzrayim,

telling the story of the Exodus from Egypt? The Rav explains that it places the Egyptian experience into perspective. We might have sought to explore whether there was some sociologic, economic, or political motivation for the Egyptians oppressors. However, we note that in every generation and in every imaginable circumstance, enemies have arisen to oppress us. Thus, we cannot attribute any particular set of circumstance as the trigger for hatred of Jews. We must conclude that the reason for the Egyptian oppression is the sad reality that Rashi quotes in his commentary to Breishit 33:4 that it is the way of the world that Esav hates Yaakov. The implications for the contemporary situation are painfully obvious.

Onus Al Pi Hadibbur

We emphasize that Yaakov went to Mitzrayim, Onus Al Pi Hadibbur, coerced by the divine instruction to descend to Egypt. The Rav explains that we emphasize this to contrast Yaakov's leaving Eretz Yisrael with Esav's exit from Eretz Yisrael. Esav gleefully abandoned Eretz Yisrael, regarding it a nuisance. Rashi (Breishit 36:7) explains that Esav felt that the price to inherit a share in Eretz Yisrael – four hundred years of being rootless and enduring slavery and torture as foretold in the Brit Bein Habetarim – was too steep and was happy to rid himself of this great burden. This attitude caused Esav to forfeit any right he had to Eretz Yisrael when he left the country. Yaakov, by contrast, left Eretz Yisrael unwillingly and thus did not forfeit his right to the land.

This is reminiscent of the Rama Orach Chaim 539:7 (citing the Maharil) who states that when one leaves his Sukka because of heavy rain or some other significant irritant his attitude should not be that he is happy to rid himself of a nuisance. Rather, he should be upset that Hashem has exiled him from his Sukka by sending rain or some other disturbance. Interestingly, our sages compare the Mitzva of sitting in the Sukka with the Mitzva of living in Eretz Yisrael. For example, the Vilna Gaon noted that the only two Mitzvot that we fulfill with our entire bodies are the Mitzva of sitting in the Sukka and the Mitzva of Yeshivat Eretz Yisrael.

Similarly, the attitude of those of us who do not have the privilege of living in Eretz Yisrael should be like Yaakov Avinu and not Esav. Our attitude should be that the circumstances that Hashem has placed upon us (familial,

economic, etc.) force us to reside outside the Land. We should not be happy that we reside in Chutz Laaretz.

Hallel

The Rav asks why don't we sing the Shirat HaYam at the Seder as the song that celebrates Hashem's delivering us from slavery. Why did Chazal choose Hallel as the celebratory song of the Seder? He answers based on Rashi's commentary to the Pasuk in Shmuel 2:23:1 that describes David Hamelech as the "sweet singer of Israel". Rashi explains "the Jewish people do not sing songs of praise to Hashem in the Bait Hamikdash unless it was composed by David Hamelech." The Rav notes that the same applies to Pisukei Dizimra, where we note in Baruch Sheamar that we will sing David Hamelech's songs of praise to Hashem. Indeed, it is for this reason that the Rambam (Hilchot Tefilla 7:13) records a custom to recite the Shirat Hayam, in our daily prayers only after the Bracha of Yishtabach is recited. He believes that since David Hamelech did not compose the Shirat Hayam its place is not in the P'sukei Dizimra that are recited between Baruch Sheamar and Yishtabach. Similarly, the Rav suggests that at the Seder we utilize only songs composed by David Hamelech to sing praise to Hashem for redeeming us from Mitzrayim.

The Division of Hallel

The Rav explains why the first two chapters of Hallel are recited before the meal and the rest of Hallel is recited after the meal. He notes (see Pesachim 108a for a basis for this assertion) that before the meal we should feel as if we were just redeemed from Mitzrayim. After the meal, the mood is one of reflecting on the fact that we have been redeemed in the past. Accordingly, before the meal we engage in Hodayah, an expression of thanks to Hashem for redeeming us from Egypt. Hodaya may be offered only by someone who experienced the redemption and thus may be expressed only before the meal. Shevach (praise) on the other hand, may be offered even by someone not involved in the event. After the meal, we can no longer thank Hashem for redeeming us (as at that point we no longer feel as if we were redeemed), so instead we express Shevach to Hashem for what He did for us in the past. The Rav explains that the first two chapters of Hallel are expressions of Hodaya and are thus appropriate to recite before the meal. The subsequent chapters are only expressions of Shevach and thus are appropriate for recitation only after the meal.

Shifoch Chamatcha

Many wonder why Chazal included the plea of Shifoch Chamatcha in the Haggada. The Rav explains that it is an introduction to the prayer of Nishmat that is recited soon after we say Shifoch Chamatcha. In the Nishmat prayer, we pray for the arrival of the Mashiach when the soul of all people will call out to Hashem. This is appropriate for the Seder since Hashem introduced himself to Moshe Rabbeinu and Am Yisrael as “I am who I am” (Shemot 3:14). Rashi (ibid) explains this term to mean that I am with them during this period of misfortune and I will be with them in future periods of misfortune. The Rav explains that Hashem promised Moshe Rabbeinu that just as He will redeem Klal Yisrael from Egypt, so too He will redeem us from future difficulties. As such, we ask Hashem at the Seder to fulfill His promise made on the eve of the redemption from Egypt that He redeem us from our current difficulties and send the Mashiach. Similarly, in the Malchiot prayer of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur we ask Hashem to bring the time when all of humanity will recognize Hashem “and all of creation will know that You created them”.

Accordingly, those people who do not know Hashem might be preventing the arrival of the Mashiach. It is for this reason we ask Hashem to take His wrath to those who do not know Him, so that an impediment to redemption is eliminated.

We may suggest a variation of this theme. We emphasize at the Seder that Hashem fulfilled His promise He made at the Brit Bein Habetarim (Breishit 15:14) to punish the nation that will torture and enslave us. We develop at length how Hashem punished the Egyptians both in Egypt and at the Yam Suf. Indeed, part of the Rambam’s (Sefer HaMitzvot 157) definition of the Mitzva of telling the story of the Exodus from Egypt includes telling how Hashem punished our oppressors. The point of this emphasis is to demonstrate that there is a heavenly Judge and there is heavenly Justice, which is a general theme of Pesach (see Ramban at the conclusion of Parashat Bo).

Accordingly, in Shifoch Chamatcha we ask Hashem to fulfill His promise to punish our contemporary oppressors, those who do not know Hashem, just as He punished our Egyptian oppressors. “Those who do not know You”, that we mention in Shifoch Chamatcha, seems to refer to those who reject the seven Noachide

Laws such as the prohibition to kill people. Even “religious” people who kill innocents seem to be included in this prayer.

Conclusion

We hope you found these insights to be helpful and inspiring. One might consider sharing them with his family this Yom Tov.

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Pesach

Adapted by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks; From the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe

Pesach is the festival of liberation, it celebrates a historical event: The exodus of the Israelites from Egypt. But one of the tasks that the event lays upon us is that “in every generation, and every day, a Jew must see himself as if he had that day been liberated from Egypt.” The implication is that freedom was not won once and for all. It needs constant guarding. And that every day and every environment carries its own equivalent of “Egypt”—a power to undermine the freedom of the Jew. Perhaps the most potent threat comes from within the individual himself. It is the conviction that certain achievements are beyond him: The strong and comfortable belief that he was not born to reach the heights of the religious life. To believe this is to set bars around oneself, to imprison oneself in an illusion. Pesach is thus an ongoing process of self-liberation. And the festival and its practices are symbols of a struggle that is constantly renewed within the Jew, to create the freedom in which to live out his eternal vocation.

The following extracts are adapted from Pesach letters of the Lubavitcher Rebbe.

1. The Meaning of Liberation

...The days of the Festival of our Freedom are approaching, when we will again recall that great event at the dawn of our history, when our people were liberated from Egyptian bondage in order to receive the Torah as free men.

Memory and imagination are the ability to associate oneself with an event in the past, and in so doing to live again through the emotions that were felt at the time of the event. Only physically are we bound by time and space. In our minds we can travel without limits, and the more spiritual we become, the closer we can approach the past, the more intensely we can experience its message and inspiration.

Remembering is a spiritual achievement. Commenting on the verse, “And these days shall be remembered and done” (Esther 9:28), the Rabbis say that as soon as those days are remembered, they are re-enacted in Heaven. The Divine

benevolence that brought the miracles in the past is wakened again by our act of recollection.

This is one of the reasons why we have been enjoined to remember the liberation from Egypt in every generation and every day. And why every Jew must see himself as if he had been freed from Egypt on that day. For every day he must personally “go out from Egypt,” that is, he must escape from the limits, temptations and obstructions that his physical existence places in the way of his spiritual life.

The counterpart of the liberation from Egypt is the liberation of the Divine Soul from the constraints of its physical environment. And this must be experienced every day if true freedom is to be reached.

And when it is achieved, as it must be, with the help of G-d who freed our people from Egypt, and through a life of Torah and Mitzvot, a great spiritual anguish is ended. The inner conflict between what is physical and what is Divine in the Jew’s nature, is transcended. And then, only then, can he enjoy real freedom, the sense of serenity and harmony which is the prelude to freedom and peace in the world at large....

(Source: Letter, 11th Nissan, 5713; Igrot Kodesh, Vol. 7 pp. 205-6)

...One of the most significant lessons of the festival of Pesach is that the Jew has the capacity, even within a short space of time, to transform himself from one extreme to another.

The Torah and the Rabbis graphically describe the extent of the enslavement of the Israelites in Egypt, and the spiritual depths to which they had sunk. They were slaves in a country from which none could escape. They were under the power of a Pharaoh who had bathed in the blood of Jewish children. They were destitute, broken in body and spirit by the lowest kind of forced labor. And then, suddenly, Pharaoh’s power was broken, the whole people liberated, and a nation who not long ago were slaves, left the land “with an outstretched arm” and “with great wealth.”

And their spiritual liberation was equally dramatic. They had reached the “forty-ninth stage of impurity,” to the point of idolatry. And then—they saw G-d revealed in the fullness of His glory. A few weeks later they stood at the foot of Mount Sinai, at the apex of holiness and prophecy and heard G-d saying to each of them, without any intermediary: “I am the L-rd, thy G-d.”

From this it follows that no matter where a Jew stands, or a Jewish community stands, on the ladder to perfection, the call comes every day to remember the liberation from Egypt, to strive after freedom, boldly (“with an outstretched arm”) and with a total commitment (“with great wealth”) to become “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” by accepting the life of Torah “as in the days of your liberation from Egypt.” Despair belongs to those who see with human eyes, not to those who see with the eye of faith.

There must be no pause nor hesitation on this road; no resting satisfied with what has already been accomplished. One must press on unrelenting until one experiences the call: “I am the L-rd, thy G-d....”

(Source: Letter, 11th Nissan, 5719; Igrot Kodesh, Vol. 18 pp. 318-19)

...One of the most striking features of the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt was their demonstration of faith in the Providence of G-d.

Consider the circumstances: An entire nation, men, women and children, numbering several million, willingly left a well-settled and prosperous country, a country whose pagan values had already left their impression on them, to venture on a long and dangerous journey, without provisions, but with absolute reliance on the word of G-d as spoken by Moses.

What is more, they did not follow the familiar and shorter route through the land of Philistines, which although it involved the risk of war, was far more attractive than the prospect of crossing a vast and desolate desert. In war there is the chance of victory; in defeat there is the chance of escape; but in a desert, without food or water, nature allows no chance of survival. Yet they followed this route, disregarding rationality, and trusting in the word of G-d.

The facts are more remarkable still. The Israelites had spent 210 years in Egypt, a highly agricultural country, where the nomadic life was mistrusted, where the soil was fertile and irrigated by the Nile whatever the caprices of the climate. They forsook all the security of the natural order....

Why did they do so? This question is echoed in every generation. The secular world, and the Jew who has strayed from Jewish truth, asks the practicing Jew: You live like us in a materialistic world. You belong to a competitive society. You too face the struggle for economic survival. How can you exempt yourself from its values? How can you adhere to a code of precepts that burden your life and restrict your actions at every turn?

The answer lies in the exodus from Egypt.

Then, when Jews responded to the call of G-d, disregarding what seemed reasonable at the time, breaking with the values of their Egyptian environment, it transpired that the path they took was the path of true happiness, spiritually in receiving the Torah and becoming G-d’s chosen people, materially in reaching the Promised Land, flowing with milk and honey.

It is so today and always. Through the Torah (the Torat Chayim, the “law of life”) and the Mitzvot a Jew attaches himself to the Creator of the World, and frees himself from all “natural” limitations. This is the way of happiness, in the spirit and the material world....

(Source: Letter, 11th Nissan, 5721; Igrot Kodesh, Vol. 20 pp. 204-5)

2. The Festival of Spring

Pesach is the festival of Spring. “Observe the month of Spring and keep the Passover unto the L-rd your G-d, for in the month of Spring the L-rd your G-d brought you out of Egypt by night” (Devarim 16:1). This commandment has dictated the form of the Jewish calendar, for although it is primarily based on the lunar month, the seasons are determined by the sun. As a result, every two or three years an extra month must be added to the year, to keep the solar and lunar dates in harmony, so that Pesach will indeed fall during the Spring. Is there a deeper significance in the fact that Pesach is always a Spring festival? True, that was the time of year when, historically, the exodus took place. But why did G-d choose just that season? And what is the lesson that is implied?

...For hundreds of years the Jews had been enslaved by a powerful nation, which had imposed its dominion on all surrounding nations, not merely by brute force (its “chariots and horsemen”) but by its overwhelming preponderance in science and technology, in everything which we now call “culture” and “civilization.”

The civilization of the Egyptians was based on the forces of nature and natural phenomena, especially the Nile river. Rain is scarce in Egypt; but human ingenuity had devised an elaborate irrigation system which had turned Egypt into a flourishing oasis, surrounded by desert.

This circumstance produced an idolatrous culture, which was characterized by two main features: The deification of the forces of nature, and the deification of the powers of man who was able to use natural forces for his own ends. From here it was only a short step to the deification of Pharaoh, who personified the Egyptian ideal of the god-man.

This system, which viewed the world as an aggregate of natural forces (of which the human element was one), combined as it was with the philosophy expressed in the verse, “My power and the strength of my hand have made me this wealth” (Devarim 8:17) led to extreme forms of paganism and was the “justification” of the enslavement of, and atrocities towards, the weak and the minority in society.

The cultic activities of the Egyptians reached their climax at the time of annual reawakening of the forces of nature, in the month of Spring, for which the zodiacal sign was the Ram (Aries), a sacred symbol of Egyptian paganism.

Moses’ intervention was dramatic. Suddenly he arrived with the announcement from G-d: “I have surely remembered you” (Shemot 3:16). Now was the time when the G-d of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had willed the liberation of the Jews from Pharaoh’s oppression and Egyptian exile. But there was one condition: “Withdraw and take for yourselves a lamb for your families and offer the Pesach (sacrifice)” (Shemot 12:21).

This was the command. “Withdraw”—withdraw from the idolatry of the land. “Take for yourselves a lamb”—take the

symbol of the Egyptian deity and offer it as a sacrifice to G-d. It was not enough to deny idolatry inwardly, in their hearts. They had to do it openly, without fear, in accordance with all the details they had been commanded.

If it were done, Moses assured in the name of G-d, not only would they be freed from Egypt, but Pharaoh himself would urge them to leave; and not when the forces of nature were dormant and concealed, but in the month of Spring, when they were at the height of their powers.

In this way the Israelites acknowledged that the world was not simply an aggregate of natural forces, nor even a dualism of naturalism and supernaturalism in which nature and the spirit struggle for supremacy. Their action declared that there is One and only One G-d, who is the Master of the world, and in Whom all is a Unity.

This received its highest expression in the Giving of the Torah, which was the culmination and the ultimate purpose of the liberation from Egypt. It lay in the words: “I am the L-rd thy G-d, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods....”

The gods of Egypt have their descendants. There are those today who base their lives on the deification of the forces of nature, and who still say “my power and the strength of my hand have made me this wealth.” And there are those who leave room for G-d in their homes, while forsaking Him outside for the sake of social norms.

But Pesach intervenes with the reminder: “Withdraw” from the idolatry of the land, in whatever form it is disguised. Do so openly, without fear and with dignity. “Take unto yourselves” all your powers and dedicate them to G-d. Do so “in the month of Spring” at the moment when prosperity, technology and the deification of human achievement is at its height. And remember that every achievement is a Divine blessing, every form of prosperity a facet of G-d’s benevolence.

(Source: Letter, 11th Nissan, 5725; Igrot Kodesh, Vol. 23 pp. 361-5)

3. The Fifth Son

The Seder service, and the reciting of the Haggadah, have always been considered to be directed particularly towards the children: “And you shall relate to your son on that day” (Shemot 13:8). Many of our customs at the Seder table were intended specifically to capture the attention of the child. And the different kinds of education which are needed by different personalities are illustrated in the passage in the Haggadah which tells of the four kinds of son, the wise, the wicked, the simple and the one who does not know how to ask. But there is a fifth, and far more problematic, son. There is a good reason why he is not mentioned explicitly in the Haggadah. For he is the absent son.

...While the “four sons” differ from one another in their reaction to the Seder service, they have one thing in common. They are all present. Even the so-called “wicked” son is there, taking an active, if dissenting, interest in what is going on in Jewish life around him. This, at least, justifies the hope that one day he will become “wise,” and that all Jewish children attending the Seder will become conscientious and committed Jews.

Unfortunately there is, in our time, another kind of Jewish child: The child who is conspicuous by his absence, who has no interest whatever in Torah and Mitzvot, who is not even aware of the Seder and the miracles it recalls.

This is a grave challenge, which should command our attention long before Pesach and the Seder-night. For no Jewish child should be forgotten and given up. We must make every effort to save the lost child, and bring him to the Seder table. Determined to do so, and driven by a deep sense of compassion and responsibility, we need have no fear of failure.

To remedy any situation, we must discover its origins.

In this case, they lie in a mistaken analysis of their situation on the part of some immigrants arriving in a new and strange environment. Finding themselves a small minority, and encountering the inevitable difficulties of resettlement, some parents had the idea, which they communicated to their children, that assimilation was the solution. But in their efforts to abandon the Jewish way of life, they created a spiritual conflict within themselves. They were determined that their children should be spared the tension of divided loyalties; and to rationalize their desertion of their Jewish heritage they convinced themselves and their children that the life of Torah and Mitzvot did not fit their new surroundings. They looked for, and therefore “found,” faults with the Jewish way of life, while everything in the non-Jewish environment seemed attractive and good.

By this attitude, the parents hoped to ensure their children’s survival in the new environment. But what kind of survival was it to be, if the soul was sacrificed for the material benefits of the world?

And what they thought was an “escape into freedom” turned out, in the final analysis, to be an escape into slavish imitation, which tended to be so marked by caricature and a sense of insecurity as to command little respect from that younger generation that it was intended for....

The festival of Pesach and the deliverance that it commemorates, are timely reminders that Jewish survival does not rest in imitation of the non-Jewish environment, but in fidelity to our traditions and our religious vocation.

Our ancestors in Egypt were a small minority, and they lived in the most difficult circumstances. But, as the Rabbis tell us, they retained their identity as Jews, preserved their uniqueness, and kept up their traditions without anxiety or shame. It was

this that made their survival certain, and assured their liberation from all forms of tyranny, physical and spiritual....

There is no room for hopelessness in Jewish life, and no Jew should ever be given up as a lost cause. Through compassion and fellow-love (Ahavat Yisroel) even a “lost” generation can be brought back to the love of G-d (Ahavat HaShem) and love of the Torah (Ahavat HaTorah); not only to be included in the community of the “four sons” but to belong in time to the rank of the “wise” son....

May the gathering of these “lost tribes of Israel” to the Seder table hasten the true and complete redemption of our people, through the coming of the Messiah speedily in our time.

(Source: Letter, 11th Nissan, 5717; Vol. 15 pp. 33-37)

From: **Rabbi YY Jacobson** <rabiyy@theyeshiva.net>
reply-to: info@theyeshiva.net to:
internetparshasheet@gmail.com date: Mar 30, 2023,
3:42 PM subject: The Seder of the Alcoholic - Essay by
Rabbi YY

The Seder of the Alcoholic A Tale of Two Cities: Kobe and Barditchov

The Synagogue in Kobe, Japan Twenty-six years ago, I observed a Passover in Japan.

It was a few weeks before Passover 1997. Rabbi Moshe Kotlarsky of Chabad World Headquarters in Brooklyn requested of a colleague and me to travel to the Far East and conduct public Passover Seders for the Jewish community living in the remote city of Kobe. Our journey to Japan and the numerous encounters with hundreds of Jews residing in that part of the world remain etched in my heart.

My friend, Moshe Leiberman (today a Rabbi in Boston), supervised the meticulous procedures of koshering the Synagogue kitchen for Passover and preparing the food for the Seder. We did not know how many people to expect; there are wandering Jews to be found in every corner of Japan. To our astonishment, our first public Seder attracted close to two hundred Jews, most of them from very secular backgrounds, some had not attended a Passover Seder in decades.

The energy was great. We sang, danced, ate the crunchy matzah and drank the tasty wine. The guests were into it, eating up the discussions as much as the delicious meal.

In the middle of the Seder, I was searching for words to describe my sentiments. My memory brought forth a

moving Chassidic tale -- one of my personal favorites -- about the holy Rebbe (spiritual master) of Barditchov.

Here goes.

A Drunkard's Seder

Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Barditchov (1740-1810) was one of the great spiritual masters of his generation. One Passover, following an emotionally charged Seder, the Rebbe was told from heaven, that Mosheleh the water carrier's Seder was superior to his. "This year," he was informed from above, "G-d's most lovable Seder was that of the water-carrier of Barditchov."

The next day after services, the Rebbe's disciples went up to Mosheleh the water carrier and asked him to come see the Rebbe. Mosheleh came before the Rebbe, and he began to cry bitterly. He said, "Rebbe, I'll never do it again. I'm so sorry; I don't know what came over me." The poor man was devastated. The Rebbe said, "Listen, my dear Jew, don't worry so much; just tell us what you did last night."

Here we must interrupt the story for a moment. It is well known that generally, intoxication and alcoholism are viewed in Judaism as repulsive and destructive. Yet our dear Mosheleh was orphaned at a young age and was miserably poor. He sadly succumbed to the temptation of alcohol as a way to deal with his agony and stress. Essentially, Mosheleh was a good and innocent man, a G-d-fearing individual and a pure heart, but this temptation, unfortunately, got the better of him, and he drank often.

The "problem" is that on Passover you can't drink whiskey. So Mosheleh had a tremendous idea: He'll stay up the whole night before Passover and drink an amount of whisky that would keep him "high" for eight days straight, throughout the entire Passover holiday.

This Moshe did: When the night before Passover arrived he drank and drank, until the minute when you must stop eating Chametz (leaven) on the morning before Passover. When the clock struck twenty minutes after nine, he took his last "L'chayim" and he was out cold.

Seder night arrived. His wife came to wake him and said, "Mosheleh, it's really not fair. Every Jewish home has a Seder. We have little children, and we are the only ones who don't have a Seder." Mosheleh gazed at the Rebbe of Barditchov and continued relating his tale: "By then, did I regret that I drank so much the night before! Did I regret it! I would have done anything not to be

drunk. But I couldn't help it. So I said to my wife: 'Please wake me up in an hour. I just can't get it together yet.'

My wife kept waking me every hour, and then every half-hour. Then, suddenly, she came to me and said, 'Moshe, in twenty minutes the Seder night is gone and the children are all sleeping. Shame on you. You are a disgraceful father and husband!'

"Gevald! I was so devastated," Mosheleh told the Rebbe. "Here, my children are precious beyond words and I am a lousy alcoholic father, I didn't even give them a Seder. I realized how low I have fallen, how my addiction destroyed my life and my relationships, how I sold my soul to the devil of alcohol. So, with my last strength I got out of bed and sat down at the Seder table. I said to my wife, 'Please, call our holy children.'

"She called the children and I said to them, 'Please sit down very close to me, I have to talk to you.'

"I want you to know, children, that I am so sorry that I drank. I am so sorry that I am a drunkard. If my drinking can make me not have a Seder with you, then it's not worth it." I said to my children, 'I swear to you, that I'll never drink again in my life. But, right now, it's Seder night, so let me just tell you the Passover story in a nutshell.'"

Mosheleh said to the Rebbe, "You know, I was still drunk, and I barely know how to read Hebrew. But, I tried my best. I said, 'Children, I want you to know that G-d created heaven and earth in seven days. Then Adam and Eve ate from the Tree and were thrown out of Paradise. Since then everything went downhill: There was a flood, there was a tower of Babel—that was as much as I knew. Then came Abraham and Sarah. They began fixing the world again. Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, Jacob and Rachel and Leah and their twelve holy sons. Then Pharaoh made slaves out of us, and tonight, G-d took us out from Egypt.

"My Sweet children, now we are also in exile. And I want you to know, that the same G-d who took us out from Egypt is still alive and present and very soon He will liberate us from this exile too."

"I turned to G-d, and said: 'Father in heaven, thank you so much for taking us out of Egypt. And I beg you, sweetest father, please take us out of our present exile very soon!' Rebbe, I'm so sorry. I couldn't say anything more because I was still drunk.

"I Took the Matzah, Maror and Charoses situated on the table and ate them. I filled four cups and drank them one after another, I turned over and I fell asleep again."

The holy master Rabbi Levi Yitzchok of Barditchov was crying bitter tears. He said to his disciples, "Did you hear that? Did you hear that? I wish that one time in my life I should communicate Yiddishkeit (the Jewish spirit) to my children, the way Mosheleh the water carrier gave it over to his children on Seder night. I wish that once in my life I should converse with G-d like Mosheleh did during his Seder."

A Women's Tale

I concluded the story and then I said:

"I want you to know that I celebrated many a Seder-night in a very observant Jewish community in New York. Yet I get the feeling, that G-d's most lovable Seder was the one done right here, in Kobe, Japan! Many of us here this evening may be unaware of the detailed Seder rituals and customs, and so many of us may not even know how to read the Haggadah in Hebrew. But, my dearest brothers and sisters, the sincerity and the passion of so many Jews thirsty to reconnect with their inner soul -- this I've never seen before during a Passover Seder and I thank you for allowing me this special opportunity."

I felt that the story has stirred up deep emotion in the audience. I could see tears streaming from some people's eyes. But one woman was sitting at the other end of the room and was weeping profusely. She later approached me and related her personal tale:

"I grew up in a very assimilated home," the woman said. "I know almost nothing about Judaism. I'm living here in Japan for more than twenty years, working as a school teacher and involved in the mystical disciplines of the Far East."

She related to me that she was uninterested in attending the Seder, as she felt completely alienated from Judaism, yet a friend persuaded her to come.

"The only thing I remember about Judaism," she continued, "was that my grandmother would always tell me, that I have a special spiritual connection. Why? "Because you are the tenth generation of Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Barditchov."

"Who is Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Barditchov? That my grandmother never knew. She just knew that he was some great man who lived in Eastern Europe. And she insisted that I always retain this piece of history in my memory.

"So thank you Rabbi for serving as the messenger of my holy grandfather to bring me to come back home this Passover night," the woman said to me.

I wiped a tear from my eye and thanked the Almighty for sending me to Japan for Passover.