

# Rav Soloveitchik on the Pesach Haggadah

Transcribed by Rabbi Aton Holzer<sup>2</sup>

## Ha Lachma Anya

*This is the bread of affliction that our fathers ate in the land of Egypt. Whoever is hungry, let him come and eat; whoever is in need, let him come and conduct the Seder of Passover. This year [we are] here; next year in the land of Israel. This year [we are] slaves; next year [we will be] free people.*

הָא לַחְמָא עֲנִיא דִּי אֲכָלוּ אַבְהֹתָנָא בְּאַרְעָא  
דְּמִצְרַיִם. כָּל דְּכָפִין יִיתִי וַיֵּיכַל, כָּל דְּצָרִיךְ  
יִיתִי וַיִּפְסַח. הַשְּׁתָּא הֵכָּא, לְשָׁנָה הַבְּאָה  
בְּאַרְעָא דִּישְׂרָאֵל. הַשְּׁתָּא עַבְדֵּי, לְשָׁנָה הַבְּאָה  
בְּנֵי חוֹרִין.

Why does *Ha Lachma Anya* appear at the beginning of the Haggadah?

It is important to establish that Matzah, the מהיב of Sippur Yetzias Mitzrayim, is a symbol not merely of חירות, our redemption, but of עבדות as well; it is important that both elements - עבדות and חירות - be included in Sippur Yetzias Mitzrayim.

There are many questions to be asked about *הא לחמא עניא*.

- First, why do we answer a question that is not posed until a moment later, in *מה נשתנה*? what is the meaning of Matzah?
- Second, in *הא לחמא עניא*, we recite: "כל דצריך ייתי ויכיל, כל דצריך ייתי ויפסח" - 'All those who are hungry, come and eat, all those who are in need come and join us for the Pesach meal.' Why do we employ this double verbiage?
- Third, why is this declaration immediately followed by the proclamation "השתא הכא", "now we are here, next year we will be in Eretz Yisrael"?

<sup>2</sup> Editor's Introduction: The following comments were transcribed from lectures delivered by Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik in Yeshiva University and Moriah Synagogue. To preserve the original flavor of the lectures we retained Rabbi Soloveitchik's proximately meandering yet ultimately focused style. Moreover, to preserve the wealth of meaningful insight evoked by Rabbi Soloveitchik's biblical and Talmudic allusions, we refrained from substituting translations and transliterations for most original Hebrew terms and sentences. Hence, this commentary on the haggadah lends itself more to studious exploration than superficial skimming. Yet, with investiture of proper time and effort, it will yield great and amazing dividends. We would like to thank Rabbi Menachem Genack for reviewing this article.

According to the Gemara, every time Rav Huna sat down to eat, he would say כל דכפין באו. Rav Matityahu Gaon explained that in ancient times, it was customary throughout כלל ישראל that all of כלל ישראל would announce and send out messengers inviting the עניים to eat with them days before Pesach - כל דכפין - for them was a reality, not just a ceremony. This fits beautifully with the concept of מעות חיטים.

Yet, why of all holidays in the year was Pesach singled out? The term שמה is used by all holidays, and the Rambam writes that true שמה is to share the Yom Tov with עניים. Why was Pesach singled out?

One reason is that the concept of sharing is particularly important on Pesach, for the Korban Pesach is brought only by a חבורה, a group.

The second reason is that when the Jews came to Mitzrayim, they were only a clan - איש וביתו באו. However, when the time of the Ge'ulah approached, when Hashem addressed Himself to Moshe, He referred to the B'nei Yisrael as an עם. The term עם (Am) is from that of עם (Im), with - denoting togetherness and solidarity. In Egypt, it was true that B'nei Yisrael spiritually were not much greater than their oppressor, but they were charitable people who helped each other and shared with each other. Their co - existence based upon their solidarity was responsible for their גאולה. On the Pasuk of "ראה ראיתי את עמי אשר במצרים ואת צעקתם שמעתי מפני נגשיו כי ידעתי את מכאוביו" - 'I have seen the affliction of My people who are in Egypt and I have heard **their** cry because of **its** taskmasters, for I know **its** pains', the Beis HaLevi asked: Why does the Pasuk begin speaking of B'nei Yisrael in plural and end in singular? For, though all 600,000 Jews were oppressed, they felt the pain of one person.

Thus, Pesach is a time of Tzedakah and Chesed - a Jew feels a sense of responsibility for his fellow Jew and extends aid to him. This has always been a beautiful character trait of the Jew, even if he is nearly assimilated. We have always retained the trait of עמי; no foe has ever succeeded in splitting the people.

In the 1940's, when the Jewish community practically tolerated the murder of 6 million Jews in the holocaust, I thought that the Jewish community was falling apart, for it appeared to have lost the trait of עם. However, they responded to the creation of מדינת ישראל without cowardice; the sense of solidarity was still there. Each member of B'nei Yisrael felt the pain of his friend and shared his Matzah with him.

What is the difference between דכפין and דצריך? Though דכפין means pauper, דצריך means not one who is in need of bread, but one who has food but is lonely, and wants to share a meal with another. We invite the lonely, as well, to celebrate with us.

Still, why does הא להמא עניא address a question before it is actually asked?

I believe that there is another concept involved. The first Mishna in פרק השוכר discusses the Halacha that if one does not stipulate what he will feed his Jewish day - laborers, he must give them of the most delicious delicacies. If he does, then he can give them a simple meal of beans

and bread. If the food was not designated, the laborers can demand the most expensive delicacies for all Jews are בני מלכים, princes.

As the laborer, anyone who is a guest at his friend's house for a meal can demand, "I expect a better meal." Thus, on Pesach, it is stipulated beforehand that we can only invite he who is satisfied with a meager meal of poor bread - הוא לחמא עניא.

With this approach, we can understand the transition between הכא and דכפין - Here, in Galus, we can't afford to serve better. However, next year, in Eretz Yisrael, we will be able to dine as בני חורין, and the invitation will be extended from one free man to another.

Thus, הוא לחמא עניא is a renewal of our pledge of solidarity. What is the meaning of גוי גדול? Numerically, the people are not great, but they are a great people, who commit themselves to each other. Slavery and oppression taught the Jew how to commit himself to his fellow Jew. No other nation knew of צדקה וחסד; the Greeks knew of courage and truth, but they did not understand צדקה and חסד. The Goyim were impressed by our courage in the 1967 war. The welfare state is a Jewish institution.

What taught us solidarity? Oppression, persecution and exile. הוא לחמא עניא is a renewal of our solidarity, a declaration that we are ready to share - Pesach is the night of sharing. If there is no manifestation of solidarity and unity, then the Seder is meaningless - as the Rambam said, "שמחת 'joy of his stomach'." So as not to deceive or arouse the hopes of the guests as of what to expect at the meal, we make this declaration.

הוא לחמא עניא announces that whoever wants to share our meager bread is welcome to; when we are redeemed, we promise to serve a better meal. This is the meaning of הוא לחמא עניא.

## Mah Nishtanah

*What makes this night different from all [other] nights? On all nights we eat chametz or matzah, and on this night only matzah. On all nights we eat any kind of vegetables, and on this night maror! On all nights we need not dip even once, on this night we do so twice! On all nights we eat sitting upright or reclining, and on this night we all recline!*

מה נשתנה הלילה הזה מכל הלילות?  
שְׁבֹכֵל הַלֵּילוֹת אָנוּ אוֹכְלִין חֵמֵץ וּמִצָּה, הַלֵּילָה  
הַזֶּה - כּוֹלֵוּ מִצָּה. שְׁבֹכֵל הַלֵּילוֹת אָנוּ אוֹכְלִין  
שְׂאֵר יִרְקוֹת, - הַלֵּילָה הַזֶּה מְרוּר. שְׁבֹכֵל הַלֵּילוֹת  
אֵין אָנוּ מְטַבֵּילִין אֶפְּלֵוּ פַּעַם אַחַת, - הַלֵּילָה הַזֶּה  
שְׁתֵּי פַּעַמִּים. שְׁבֹכֵל הַלֵּילוֹת אָנוּ אוֹכְלִין בֵּין  
יוֹשְׁבֵין וּבֵין מְסֻבִּין, - הַלֵּילָה הַזֶּה פְּלָנוּ מְסֻבִּין.

When does the Haggadah answer the questions asked in Mah Nishtanah?

The four questions of Mah Nishtanah are related to the four Mitzvos of the night of the Seder. The first question is about matzah, the second deals with maror, the third inquiry asks of roasted meat of the Korban Pesach (in the original question in the time of the Beis HaMikdash) and the fourth asks about *heseibah*, leaning, which is a קיום of Sippur Yetzias Mitzrayim.

The first three questions are resolved by the explanations in רבן גמליאל היה אומר, in which the Haggadah provides the reasons for *pesach*, *matzah* and *maror*. The fourth question is resolved immediately after that by מצרים הוא יצא ממצרים, "In each generation, it is incumbent upon man to see himself as if he personally had left Egypt." עבדים היינו is but a general answer to the four questions; the detailed answers follow later.

What is the purpose of the question "Why is this night different than all other nights?"

In truth, the four questions really are not questions. On Pesach night, it is essential not merely to retell the story of Yetzias Mitzrayim, but to establish the fact that the night differs from other nights, for the Rambam learns that מצרים הזו אשר יצאתם ממצרים means the same as זכור את יום השבת - there must be קידוש. Kiddush on Shabbos is a declaration that the day is different than all other days of the week, for only Shabbos has a prohibition of *melachah*.

On the night of Pesach, we must establish not simply that the night is different than ordinary nights, but that it is different than all other טובים ימים. What makes Pesach different than all Yamim Tovim? Pesach has certain unique Mitzvos that apply only to the Seder night. The first three, *Pesach*, *matzah* and *maror*, are elaborated upon in רבן גמליאל. Dipping represents the Mitzvah of כבד את הוריה - we dip twice so that the child asks questions, and הסיבה represents the חיוב of כבד את הוריה. This is the uniqueness of the night of Pesach; thus, the declaration of הלילה הזה מכל הלילות, "How different is this night from all other nights," is a קיום of the requirement that the Rambam has for זכירה on the night of Pesach.

Whenever we refer to מצה נשתנה, we call it "the four קושיות," but we always use the term קשיא, and not שאלה, which seems to mean the same thing. What is the semantic difference between שאלה and קשיא, and why was the term קשיא used here?

The word 'שאלה' denotes a practical question. When one asks a שאלה of his Rav, it is a 'yes or no' question; if the Rabbi will determine that a chicken brought to him is kosher, then it will be eaten. If he concludes that it is not, then the chicken will be discarded.

When the wicked and simple sons ask their שאלות to their father, if the answer will satisfy them, they will join the rest of the Seder community. If the answer of the father appears irrelevant to them, then they will walk away from this community. That is שאלה.

However, the קשיא, unlike the שאלה, has no practical bearing. If the קשיא is not resolved, the questioner will still remain devoted and loyal to the law - he only wanted to know the answer.

When the wise son asks מצה נשתנה, he is not declaring that if the answer is unsatisfactory, he will leave the Seder - he simply wants to comprehend what is going on. If he receives a proper answer, he will be delighted; but if the father is witless and fails to give him a proper answer, to explain the symbolism of *pesach*, *matzah* and *maror*, the son still will be obedient to and comply with the law.

The haggadah is filled with such inquiries and responses, theoretical and practical, as we were commanded to make such inquiries and responses. Bewilderment and explanation is the source of knowledge. When the child is amazed by what he sees, the father must explain it to him. רבן

Haggadah's statement begins with "מרהר זו על שום מה" and "מצה זו על שום מה" - the explanation is in a question and answer form. "יכול מראש חדש" - Why do we speculate? The reason is simple. The process of amazement and explanation, of intrigue and elucidation, is the foundation of the Haggadah. This is the source of procurement of knowledge.

## Avadim Hayinu

*We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, and G-d took us out from there with a strong hand and with an outstretched arm.*

עֲבָדִים הָיִינוּ לְפָרֹעַ הַבְּמִצְרָיִם, וַיּוֹצֵיאֵנוּ יי  
אֵל הַיָּנוּ מִשָּׁם בְּיַד חֲזָקָה וּבְזְרוּעַ נְטוּיָה.

In the Gemara in Pesachim (116a) we find a debate between Rav and Shmuel regarding the nature of Sippur Yetzias Mitzrayim, retelling the account of the exodus. Both agree that we must begin with our shame and end in our praise, מתחיל בגנות ומסיימים בשבח, but they argue as to what the shame and praise is. According to Shmuel, the shame is that of being physically subjugated as slaves, and the praise is that G-d brought us to freedom; thus, the fulfillment of Sippur Yetzias Mitzrayim, in his view, is עבדים היינו לפרעה במצרים. According to Rav, the shame is the spiritual enslavement of our ancestors who worshipped idols, and the praise is that G-d brought us to serve Him.

It is interesting that the opinions of Rav and Shmuel regarding the מתחיל בגנות ומסיים בשבח correspond to their opinions in הלכות עבדים. There are two aspects of עבדות, slavery - one is that the slave is the property of the master, who has a קנין ממון over him, and also, the Canaanite slave has a different status of קדושה than the non-Jew - he must keep all Mitzvos with the exception of מצוות עשה שהזמן גרמא. When he is released, he attains full קדושת ישראל and keeps all the Mitzvos.

In the Gemara (Yevamos 48a) we find that the opinion of Shmuel is that a freed slave does not need a writ of emancipation, a גט שחרור, to release him from the Halachic status of slavery - if he is released from physical slavery, he is released from spiritual slavery, as well. However, according to Rav, a separate גט שחרור is necessary to free the slave from the spiritual status of slavery.

Here, we find the same concept - according to Shmuel, we thank G-d for our physical release from slavery, as the spiritual slavery was removed with that שחרור. However, according to Rav, the Sippur must relate to the spiritual freedom that we obtained, which is completely separate from physical enslavement.

## Maaseh B'Rebbe Eliezer

*It happened that Rabbi Eliezer, Rabbi Yehoshua, Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah, Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Tarphon were reclining [at a seder] in B'nei Berak. They were discussing the exodus from Egypt all that night, until their students came and told them: "Our Masters! The time has come for reciting the morning Shema!"*

מַעֲשֵׂה בְּרַבֵּי אֱלִיעֶזֶר וְרַבִּי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ וְרַבִּי  
אֵלְעָזָר בֶּן עֲזַרְיָה וְרַבִּי עֲקִיבָא וְרַבִּי טַרְפוֹן  
שָׁהוּ מְסֻבִּין בְּבֵנֵי בֵּרַק, וְהָיוּ מְסַפְּרִים  
בִּיצִיאַת מִצְרַיִם כָּל אוֹתוֹ הַלַּיְלָה עַד שֶׁבָּאוּ  
תַלְמִידֵיהֶם וְאָמְרוּ לָהֶם: רַבּוֹתֵינוּ, הַגִּיעַ  
זְמַן קְרִיאַת שְׁמַע שֶׁל שַׁחֲרִית.

Strangely, there are two grammatical forms of the Hebrew word ספר. There is the normal ablative, as in את... - ויספר משה לחותנו יתרו את... Then, there is another form - as מספרים ביציאת מצרים. The conjunction of ב changes the semantics of the verb מספרים.

In actuality, the phrase סיפור יציאת מצרים is incorrect. It is used for convenience, but the most proper expression would be סיפור ביציאת מצרים. In the Haggadah, we never say לספר את יציאת מצרים, but ביציאת מצרים. What is the difference?

סיפור in general is a detailed story, in which a background and development of events are given; dramatic elements are added as to how the story began and how it culminated. סיפור never means to abbreviate, but to describe and explain completely.

לספר would mean simply to tell the story with all of its details. However, לספר ביציאת מצרים means much more than just to tell the story - it means to explore, study and do research. In מעשה ברבי אליעזר, the most outstanding scholars in our history did not just repeat a story several times; they were מספרים ביציאת מצרים - they studied, explored and investigated, suggested, responded and exchanged ideas. It would make no sense to tell and retell a story, as the רבנים sat and were מספר all night - if this were the meaning, they would never have done so. לספר ביציאת מצרים means to analyze and be intellectually and emotionally involved in the sippur.

This is why המרבה לספר ביציאת מצרים הרי זה משובח. It does not mean to re-narrate, but to explore in more depth and derive conclusions relevant to our era and us. If this is done, הרי זה משובח. This is מספרים ביציאת מצרים.

## The Four Sons

*The Torah speaks of four children: One is wise, one is wicked, one is simple and one does not know how to ask.*

כַּנְגֵד אַרְבַּעַה בְּנִים דְּבָרָה תּוֹרָה . אֶחָד חָכָם , וְאֶחָד רָשָׁע , וְאֶחָד פֶּתִי , וְאֶחָד שֹׁאֵל .

In Parshas Va'Eschanan, when the Torah relates the question of the חכם - חכם כי ישאלך בנך מחר לאמר - חכם, "If your child asks you tomorrow, saying, 'What are the testimonies and the decrees and the ordinances that Hashem, our G-d, commanded you,'" the response of the Torah is "עבדים היינו לפרעה במצרים... ויצונו ה' לעשות את...". "We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt... And Hashem commanded us to perform all these decrees, to fear Hashem, our G-d, for our good, all the days...." Yet, the Haggadah's response is "ואף אתה אמר לו כהלכות הפסח אין מפטירין" "And you shall explain to him the laws of Pesach until 'one may not eat dessert after the final taste of the Korban Pesach.'" The Vilna Ga'on writes that הפסח is to be interpreted as הלכות הפסח, "all the laws of Pesach," until the last one, מפטירין....

The בעל ההגדה's interpretation of the Pasuk teaches us that for the חכם, the wise son, the קיום of the Mitzvah of Sippur Yetzias Mitzrayim, relating the story of the Exodus, is attained only by teaching him Halachos. From the Tosefta, it is evident that מעשה ברבי אליעזר refers to a

discussion of the הלכות הפסח that took place on the night of ניסן ט"ו. Discussing the Halachos of Pesach is a fulfillment of the obligation of סיפור יציאת מצרים.

From the Pasuk in Va'Eschanan, it would appear that the discussion of any Halachos would be a fulfillment of Sippur Yetzias Mitzrayim; apparently, *Hilchos Pesach* are preferable.

To study Gemara Pesachim on Pesach night is thus a קיום of Sippur Yetzias Mitzrayim. Our instruction to the חכם - לעשות את כל החקים האלה, לעשות את כל המצוה הזאת must be חכם - the question of the Chacham is 'what,' not 'why,' and we thus answer his question by relating the Halachos of Pesach. This is the mark of identity of the Chacham.

The fact that the Haggadah must be said לפניך מוצה ומרור מונחים לפניך, "when Matzah and Maror are before you," teaches us that the Mitzvos of the night of the Seder are the root of the Mitzvah of יציאת מצרים. Without any of the mitzvos, haggadah is only דרבנן. The Mitzvah of Matzah, the only מצוה דאורייתא that applies הזה בזמן הזה, is the מחייב of Sippur Yetzias Mitzrayim.

## Mitchilah

*In the beginning our fathers served idols*

מתחלה עובדי עבודה זרה היו אבותינו

In the seventh Perek of Rambam's laws of chametz and matzah, The Rambam writes: אפילו חכמים גדולים חייבים לספר ביציאת מצרים וכל המאריך בדברים שאירעו ושהיו הרי זה משובח - "Even great sages are required to tell of Yetzias Mitzrayim, and all who lengthen their discussion of what happened and took place is praiseworthy."

The Rambam was always extremely careful in his wording. At first glance, שאירעו ושהיו would appear to mean the exact same thing - "that happened." The Rambam was never prone to redundancy, and each word that he uses has meaning.

In Hebrew, if one describes a situation such as his falling from a tree, he uses the word שאירע. If he describes a circumstance as one in which he climbed up a tree, he uses the word שהיה. שאירע means that something happened to an object that was passive; the gravitational pull caused the person to fall from the tree - the force overwhelmed him. שהיה, however, denotes that the object was active, that he executed a conscious decision, that he utilized his energy to accomplish an objective that he had set for himself. By climbing up the tree, the man implemented his decision to climb it.

In Mitzrayim, was the Ge'ulah שאירע, where an outside force imposed itself upon B'nei Yisrael, or שהיה, that we acted as human beings endowed with freedom and consciously implemented our choice?

According to the Rambam, these both were present in Yetzias Mitzrayim. The question whether the Ge'ulah merely 'happened' to the Jew, or whether he was a participant who caused the Ge'ulah, is the debate that we find in the Gemara about the meaning of גנות and שבה. According to Shmuel, the גנות ושבה is היינו עבדים, the physical Ge'ulah, the שאירעו - the Jew was merely pulled by force; he was enslaved against his will and redeemed without his participation.

According to Rav, who says that the *מתחילה עובדי עבודה זרה היו אבותינו* is *גנות ושבח* "from the beginning our ancestors were idol worshippers," that our redemption was from being idol worshippers to worshippers of Hashem, how did the Ge'ulah take place? Was Avraham forced to choose G-d? Spiritual redemption from idolatry, paganism and primitive religions and cults can happen only with *בחירה חפשית*, freedom of choice; it does not just "happen" to a Jew. Avraham realized that idolatry was wrong and saw the mistakes of paganism, so he chose G-d. No spirituality is decreed upon man by G-d unless man agrees to commit himself to the idea. *מתחילה* is not *שאיִרעו*; it is *שהיו*.

Certain events in Mitzrayim were *שאיִרעו*. Though Moshe told the Jews far in advance of the Ge'ulah, they still were not prepared. Matzah is the symbol of their unpreparedness, of *שאיִרעו*. However, *שהיו* was *קבלת התורה*; the Torah was not imposed upon the Jew involuntarily. There is no involuntary *גירוּת*; *Matan Torah* was only a possibility once there was *העם יחדו ויאמרו*. At *הר סיני*, the Jew was an active participant in events. This is *שהיו*.

## V'Eten L'Eisav

*And I gave Eisav Har Seir to inherit, and Yaakov and his sons descended to Mitzrayim.*

וְאֶתֵּן לְעֵשָׂו אֶת הַר שֵׁעִיר לְרִשְׁתָּהּ אֹתוֹ, וַיֵּצֵק בְּ  
וּבְנָיו יָרְדוּ מִצְרָיִם.

If in *Mitchilah*, we discuss our history, why do we read About Eisav? What place does Eisav's mention have in the *Haggadah*?

The *pasuk* reveals the different destinies of the two sons of Yitzchak. *ואתן ליצחק את יעקב ואת עשו* - Yaakov and Eisav both had the same mother and father, Yitzchak and Rivkah - their historical destinies should have been identical! But this was not so.

Hashem's promise was fulfilled immediately for Eisav; he had no difficulty in getting to Se'ir. *Beraishis 36:6* states: *ויקה עשו את נשיו ואת בניו ואת בנותיו ואת כל נפשות ביתו ואת מקנהו ואת כל קנינו אשר רכש בארץ כנען וילך אל ארץ מפני יעקב אחיו* - Eisav simply took the possessions that he acquired in Canaan and settled on Har Se'ir, without forty years in the Midbar, without the *מן*, and without the *Eigel*. There was no resistance to him! He took over the land due to Hashem's promise, which became a reality in a very short time.

Yaakov and his sons received that same promise, but its consummation was not immediate. Eventually, the promise would be fulfilled, but there would be a long wait. This is the uniqueness of our destiny, the destiny of the *זרע אברהם*; no nation in history could claim such a destiny. This is the source of patience as a character trait of a Jew; *על פי שיתמהמה עם כל זה אחכה לו בכל יום* - We eagerly await the redemption and fulfillment of Hashem's promise each day.

## Tzay Ulmad

*Go and learn what Laban the Aramean wanted to do to our father Jacob. Pharaoh had only issued a decree against the male children, but Laban wanted to uproot everyone*

צֵא וְלָמַד מֵהַבְּקָשׁ לְבִן הָאֲרָמִי לְעֲשׂוֹת  
לְיַעֲקֹב אֲבִינוֹ. שִׁפְרָעָה לֹא גָזַר אֱלֹהִים עַל  
הַזְּכָרִים וְלָבָן בִּקֵּשׁ לְעַקֹּר אֶת הַכָּל.

We begin Tzay Ulmad with the discussion of Lavan's hate for Yaakov. Lavan had every reason to love Yaakov, yet he still didn't like him. In some ways, Lavan could have done worse to Yaakov than Pharaoh, had Hashem not stopped him. Love for one's children and grandchildren is a natural phenomena, and yet, Lavan's hate for Yaakov was so intense that he would have killed his whole family. From this, we understand that hate for the Jew and the stories Goyim concoct about him can be irrational and insane. As Lavan, the Goyim hate Yaakov's spiritual independence and the tenacity with which he stood up for his singularity.

ארמי אובד אבי - Yaakov or Avraham was an ארמי אובד, a straying (Aramean) person, and could never find a place to define as his home, as there was always someone out to destroy him. The Midrash and Targum explain the pasuk of ארמי אובד אבי differently - that the Aramean was Lavan, and he tried to destroy (לאבד) Yaakov.

ירד מצרימה אנוס על פי הדבור - Yaakov left Eretz Yisrael involuntarily, for had he left voluntarily, he would have lost his claim to Eretz Yisrael. The Avos would not have left Eretz Yisrael at any cost, and Yitzchak didn't at all; only because Yaakov left to Mitzrayim did the Galus come. Yosef had to be taken first, for, as when a calf is taken to the slaughterhouse, the cow follows; when Yosef was taken to Mitzrayim, Yaakov had to follow.

If so, then a question arises - Hashem only gave Yaakov permission to leave, but did not command him to leave! Why did Yaakov not stay, and leave Yosef and Binyamin in Mitzrayim?

Yaakov had to leave, for if he gave up Yosef and Binyamin, he would have lost the K'nesses Yisrael, for כנסת ישראל was based upon the twelve character traits that each Shevet represented. Thus, Yaakov was stuck - he had either to give up ארץ ישראל or give up כנסת ישראל, and thus, he left for Egypt.

ויגר שם - Yaakov journeyed temporarily to Egypt - as a transient, not an immigrant. The proof to this is that B'nei Yisrael retained their native language. An immigrant usually gives up the customs of his old country, especially when he comes to a newly developed land. כי אין מרעה - Yaakov told Pharaoh that he came only because of the temporary reason of famine. This proves that his intention was to remain only temporarily.

במתי מעט, במתי מעט ... ככוכבי השמים לרוב - which comes from the word מת, refers to people, in a derogatory sense - (as in עיר מתים, a city and its population, which is בקבר). Thus, they were במתי מעט, both מעט limited in number, and מתי weak, helpless and defenseless.

However, when B'nei Yisrael left Mitzrayim, the opposite was true; they were ככוכבי השמים לרב both ככוכבי השמים many and לרב mighty and powerful.

גוי and עם - as the Vilna Gaon in Mishlei notes, there is a basic difference between גוי and עם. עם is from the word עם, meaning 'together' - a nation or clan that cares about its members; if one suffers, all feel pain. גוי is from the word גויה, countenance - a nationality possessing individual and singular traits, having a unique style and way of life. The Jews became a unique nation.

B'nei Yisrael were many in numbers, i.e., quantitatively great. רב is not superfluous for it does not mean many, but mature. The passuk quoted by the Haggadah illustrates this: רבבה כצמח השדה - 'mature as the sprout of the field' The Jews in Mitzrayim did not believe in themselves. Even Moshe had doubts - אכן נודע הדבר - if Jews deserved to be better than slaves. Only Hashem knew that this nation with ugly habits had tremendous potential. On the exterior, it appeared that the nation of שני אנשים עבריים נצים (the two fighting Hebrew men) were not ready to live as a separate nation. However, Hashem told Moshe: "I see another image, the image of a great nation - רבבה כצמח השדה - 'I caused you to thrive as the plant of the field, and you grew and developed and you attained great charm; you were beautiful of figure and your hair amply grown, but you were still naked and bare.'" B'nei Yisrael 'grew up,' and were ready for freedom, commitment and responsibility, but were unaware of their own potential. Chazal (Kiddushin 81b) derive that שתי שערות are necessary for גדלות from this Pasuk.

וירעו לנו has two interpretations, that the Egyptians conspired against us, and that the Egyptians made us appear wicked and accused us of disloyalty, as Haman did later. If "they have done evil to us" was the meaning of the Pasuk, it would have read וירעו לנו.

## Rabban Gamliel

*Rabban Gamliel used to say: Whoever does not discuss the following three things on Passover has not fulfilled his duty, namely: Pesach, Matzah and Maror.*

רַבֵּן גַּמְלִיאֵל הָיָה אוֹמֵר: כָּל אֲשֶׁל אֶאְמַר שְׁלֹשָׁה דְבָרִים אֵלוֹ בְּפֶסַח, לֹא יֵצֵא יָדָי חוּבָתוֹ, וְאֵלוֹ הֵן: פֶּסַח, מַצָּה, וּמְרֹר.

Why is the order of the three Mitzvos recorded as *Pesach*, *Matzah* and *Maror*? What is the significance of this sequence? Historically, it would be more accurate that the order be *Maror*, *Pesach*, and *Matzah*, as the bitter torment preceded the Korban Pesach, and both preceded the baking of the Matzos, which took place on the day of the 15<sup>th</sup>.

The sequence that the Haggadah provides is that of the importance of the Mitzvos. *Pesach* is the primary Halacha; the Mitzvah of *Matzah* is dependent upon that of *Korban Pesach* - על מצות - ומרורים יאכלוהו. However, there is a second Mitzvah of *Matzah*, that of תאכלו מצות, so it still does have a דאורייתא קיום. *Maror* has no דאורייתא today, for it is completely dependent upon the *Korban Pesach*; *Maror* is only a דרבנן when there is no *Korban*, and it thus is last in the sequence. The Rambam writes that באכילת מרור אינה מצוה מן התורה בפני עצמה אלא תלויה היא ... ומדברי סופרים לאכול המרור לבדו בליל זה אפילו אין שם קרבן פסח. "The consumption of *Maror* is not a separate Mitzvah, but it is dependant upon the *Korban Pesach* ... and it is from the words of our sages to eat the *Maror* alone on this night, even when there is no *Korban Pesach*." This is the meaning of the sequence that we have in our Haggadah.

## B'tzeis Yisrael Mimitzrayim

*When Israel went out of Egypt, the House of Jacob from a people of a foreign language, Judah became His holy one, Israel His dominion.*

בְּצֵאת יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמִּצְרַיִם, בֵּית יִעֲקֹב בְּמַעַם לְעֹז, הָיְתָה יְהוּדָה לְקִדְשׁוֹ, יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמְּשֻׁלוֹתָיו.

It would seem appropriate in the Haggadah of Pesach to read the שירת משה, which took place at Yetzias Mitzrayim, rather than בצאת ישראל, a psalm by David that deals with the same topic. Why do we read the latter?

If we study Shmuel II, the answer is evident. We read (23a): "The word of... the sweet singer of Israel." Rashi comments: "The sweet singer of Israel. In the Mikdash, the Jews do not sing any ballads but his poems and songs." There is no Shirah that Chazal established for B'nei Yisrael to recite that is not David's.

This is the implication of the title of נעים זמירות ישראל. This is true to such an extent that according to the Rambam, if אז ישיר is to be said in פסוקי דזמרה, it must be said after ישתבה, not before, for in ברוך, the פתיחה of Pesukei D'Zimrah, we say "with the songs of David Your servant we shall praise You, Hashem our G-d." Pesukei D'Zimrah is dedicated exclusively to David's praises, and no one else, not even Moshe, can have his psalms included. Only after ישתבה, when the Pesukei D'Zimrah as a unit are closed, can we say Az Yashir. The Rambam also was very careful in זכרונות and מלכיות ושופרות - although the Gemara writes that there must be three Pesukim from the Torah, three from Navi and three from Ketuvim, the Rambam replaces the word "כתובים" with "ספר תהלים," for זכרונות ושופרות also have a שירה; since they are שירה, the Rambam writes that the Ketuvim must be from Sefer Tehillim, the שירות of דוד. This is why we read שירת דוד on the night of the Seder rather than שירת משה - only David is the נעים זמירות ישראל.

## V'Nodeh Lecha

*And we shall thank You with a new song for our redemption and for the deliverance of our souls.*

וְנוֹדֶה לְךָ שִׁיר חֲדָשׁ עַל גְּאֻלֹּתֵינוּ וְעַל פְּדוּת נַפְשֵׁינוּ

Why does the Haggadah appear to repeat the same idea, "for our redemption and for the deliverance of our souls?"

עבדות, slavery, is a dual institution. There is a juridic, legal slavery, what we call ממון. The institution of property is totalitarian, and both the inanimate object and the human being can become property, owned by someone else - כשורו וכחמורו. A slave is a man owned by another man.

The second institution of slavery is a metaphysical institution; the slave has a different personality than the free man. He is exempt from certain obligations because of his subservience and dependence.

Thus, the Haggadah writes על גאולתנו ועל פדות נפשינו - in the Messianic era, we will be redeemed from physical subservience as well as from the slave personality.

# The Bread of Affliction

Rabbi Eli Baruch Shulman

Each Pesach we begin our Seder with the familiar words:

*This year we are here, next year in the land of Israel; this year we are slaves, next year, free men.*

השתא הכא לשנה הבאה בארעא דישראל,  
השתא עבדי לשנה הבאה בני חורין

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

Actually, it doesn't sound like a prayer. A prayer would begin יהי רצון, or the Aramaic equivalent: יהא רעוא, let it be Your will – to bring us by next year to Jerusalem, to make us free men.

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

And the years roll by, and the decades, and the centuries, and each year we are disappointed, each year our confident expectation fails to materialize. Last year we were here, and here we are still; last year we were slaves, and slaves we remain.

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

Why do we go on year after year, setting ourselves up for disappointment?

Another strange feature of this declaration is its opening: הוא לחמא עניא, *this is the bread of affliction*. After all, the Torah describes the matzoh as the bread of redemption, the bread that the Jews baked on their way out of Egypt because they were hurried out of Egypt so quickly that there was no time for their bread to leaven. And later on in the Seder, too, we say: מצה זו שאנו על שלא הספיקו להחמיץ עד, *what does this matzoh signify?* And we answer: משנגלה עליהם מלך מלכי המלכים, because as they left Egypt there was no time for their bread to leaven, until the King of Kings revealed Himself to them.

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

A commonly given answer is that the matzo had two historical roles. It was, as the Torah says, and as we say later in the Haggadah, the bread of redemption that we baked on our way out of Egypt. But it was also, for centuries, the bread of affliction, the bread that we were fed as slaves in Egypt

when we were not allowed the luxury even of waiting for our bread to leaven before being hurried back to our labors. And so the matzo is both the bread of *geulah* and the bread of affliction.

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

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

Only they didn't know it yet.

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

The process of *geulah* began the minute the Jews arrived in Egypt.

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

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

The great R' Yaakov of Lisa, the author of the *Nesivos haMishpat*, in his commentary on the Haggadah, records a beautiful insight. The Haggadah says:

*Blessed is He who keeps His promise to Israel; for the Holy One, blessed be He, calculated the end, in order to do what He had promised to Avraham.*

ברוך שומר הבטחתו לישראל, שהקב"ה חישב את הקץ לעשות כמה שאמר לאברהם

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

R' Yaakov explains that all those years in Egypt the עולם של רבונו was busy bringing the *geulah* about. All those years, when all we saw was misery, He was directing the strands of history towards that end. And the slavery itself, with all its horrors, was a necessary part of that *geulah*, even if we could not – even if we cannot – understand it. All those year when we were calculating

how long we had been slaves, He was calculating how long until we would be free, how much longer the process of redemption would require.

And therefore every bite of לחם עוני, the bitter bread of slavery, was a bite of לחם גאולים, the bread of redemption. The same matzo that we experienced as the bread of affliction, was really the bread of freedom – but only He knew it.

And that is the lesson that the matzo teaches us, and the lesson with which we begin the Seder. As we sit down to the Seder we take the matzo, that symbol of our freedom which is the centerpiece of our Seder table, over which we will soon recount the story of our miraculous deliverance, and we say: *היא לחמא עניא*; this matzo was for many years the bread of our affliction. We ate it in abject despair, not knowing what it was. And all that time – it was really the symbol of our redemption. All that time – we were being redeemed. The mills of *geulah* ground slowly but relentlessly on and on.

Only the process was hidden, until that final moment when – עד שנגלה עליהם מלך מלכי המלכים – He revealed Himself to us. Until that time when He showed us that He had been there all the time – being *מחשב את הקץ*, calculating and counting down and bringing the redemption into being. The *גאולה* was there all the time, what we waited for was its revelation.

*היא לחמא עניא*, today, too, we eat the bread of affliction. When we read of bombs and mortars, of the shattered lives and bloodthirsty threats that have become our daily fare – then we eat לחם עוני, the bread of affliction. *היתה לי דמעתי לחם יומם ולילה*, our tears are our bread, by day and night.

*השתא הכא*, this year we are here, still eating the bread of affliction – and there is so much affliction for our people today.

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

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