

# Toras Aish

A project of the AishDas Society

**RABBI AVI WEISS**

## Shabbat Forshpeis

**T**he literal approach to the Haggadah's four children is straight-forward. On four different occasions, the Torah describes questions asked by children about Passover. Based on the language of the question, the author of the Haggadah labels each of them. One questioner is described as wise, the second rebellious, the third simple, and the fourth not even knowing how to ask. And the Haggadah, basing itself on the Torah text, offers answers to suit the specific educational needs of each child. But if we go beyond the literal approach, hidden messages emerge.

While this section of the Haggadah is associated with youngsters, is it not possible that the children referred to here include adults of all ages? After all, no matter how old we are, we are all children—children of our parents and children of God.

From this perspective, the message of the four children is that every Jew has his or her place in Judaism. The challenge is to have different types of Jews seated around the Seder table in open respectful dialogue, each contributing to the Seder discussion, each exhibiting love for the other. It also reminds us that we have much to learn from everyone --- this realization is what truly makes us wise. In the words of Ben Zoma, who is mentioned just before this section in the Hagaddah, "eizehu hakham? Halomed mikol Adam. Who is wise? One who learns from each person." (Pirkei Avot 4:1)

Another approach to the four children: Perhaps they are not four separate individuals? After all, no one is completely wise, totally rebellious, perfectly simple, nor absolutely unable to ask. Rather, the four children are really one individual in whom there are each of these elements: wisdom, rebelliousness, simplicity and silence.

The message: as we sit opposite each other at the Seder, we ought recognize that everyone has strengths, represented for example by the hakham (the wise child), and weaknesses, represented, for example by the rasha (the rebellious child). The challenge is not to allow the weaknesses we know to exist within ourselves to destroy our self image. For that matter, neither ought we allow the weaknesses we see in others to destroy our relationship with them. As opposed to our first hidden message that teaches

integration, this approach teaches us that there are times when weaknesses should be set aside in order to continue on.

A final thought: Perhaps the most important child is none of the four, but the fifth, the one who is not mentioned, the one who is not even at the Seder table. It was Rabbi Eliezer Berkovits who once quipped: "Who is a Jew? One whose grandchildren are Jewish." The sad reality is that for most Jews their grandchildren are not Jewish or will not be.

The message at the Seder is to reach out to that fifth child. Maybe that's why we open the door for Eliyahu Ha-Navi (Elijah the Prophet). It's Eliyahu, according to the Prophets, who returns the hearts of children to their parents. (Malakhi 3:23-24)

As we reach out for the missing child, we ought recall the words of Rav Shlomo Carlebach, of blessed memory: "Do you know the way you walk back from the Holy Wall? You don't turn around and walk away. When you meet the Czar of Russia, you don't turn around and walk away, you walk backwards. And I want to bless you, when your children grow up and they walk out of your house, and they build their own houses, sad enough, a lot of children turn around and they don't build a Jewish house any more. I want to bless you your children should walk away backwards."

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**RABBI YISROEL CINER**

## Parsha Insights

**T**his week we celebrate the holiday of Pesach. We've mentioned a number of times that our holidays are not mere commemorations of events which transpired long ago. Rather, they serve as the tools which enable us to access that very same spiritual potential which was maximized then and is available, once again, now.

It's interesting to note that even amongst those whose level of commitment to other mitzvos and holidays might not be so strong, the commitment to some degree of a Pesach celebration has remained very firm.

Pesach, the Exodus from Egypt, marked our beginning as a nation. Not just a nation like the myriad others, but a nation whose course and destiny would be guided by Hashem to bring this world to its ultimate purpose. That connection to Hashem which Avrohom Avinu {Abraham the Patriarch} began on a personal,

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individual level, which was continued by Yitzchok and then by Yaakov and his twelve sons, the tribes of Israel, became the fortune and destiny of the nation at large at the time of the exodus. As Hashem revealed Himself to us at Sinai and revealed to us His holy will in the form of the Torah, it is the majestic responsibility of Bnei Yisroel {the children of Israel} to reveal His existence and involvement in this world to the rest of the nations.

As I was reviewing the Haggadah with some boys from my shiur {class} we came to the following passage. The Haggadah states that the Torah, in commanding us to relate the exodus to our children, speaks of four sons: echod chacham {one, wise}; echod rasha {one, evil}; echod tom {one, simple}; v'echod she'aino yodaiah lish'ol {and one, that doesn't know how to ask}.

One of the boys asked why it was necessary to write the word 'one' before each of these types of sons. We offered a possible explanation that the Haggadah is teaching us that every person is an individual with his gifts and abilities (sometimes still latent) and must be respected as such. Additionally, as the Haggadah then delineates, each must be treated and answered in an appropriate manner in order for the answers to hit home. There must be different approaches for different people—there is no 'one' method or answer which will be universally effective.

The rasha asks: What is this service that you do? He is clearly excluding himself from the whole business. Why do you bother with all of this outdated, silly ritual? The answer he is given is cutting and to the point. This is why Hashem took me out of Mitzrayim {Egypt}. Me. Had you been there with such an attitude, you would not have been redeemed.

This is why Hashem took us out of Mitzrayim. We, through the observance of the Torah and its commandments, bring the presence of Hashem into

this world. Taking that presence which is hidden and allowing it to be revealed. A process, a chain stretching from the time of the exodus throughout the generations, throughout thousands of years until the time of the moshiach {messiah}. Ultimately reaching to the point in time when the whole world will recognize and accept Hashem as the Master of the universe.

Imagine the dedication, love and gratitude that those who left Mitzrayim felt toward Hashem. Imagine their resolve to follow each and every iota of ritual that the Creator commanded, knowing that it's an integral piece of the puzzle, building the world toward that state. "In each and every generation a person is obligated to view himself as if he himself left Mitzrayim.[Haggadah]" Only then does a person feel a true obligation to continue the chain that was started then.

Imagine a chain that is painstakingly being formed, link by link, stretching across a great canyon. The other side has almost been reached. The work of thousands is on the verge of completion. Then, with only two or three links remaining, the people entrusted with those links get careless! They just don't bother to make sure they are attached. As others look on in horror, they see that chain slip from their grip, falling back, back across the great divide, until it's hanging limply from its starting point. All of the effort and work, sweat and tears, erased in a moment of indifference...

Every generation, every person, another link in the chain. We are the final links of the chain that stretches from the exodus to the moshiach, from the beginning of our nationhood to the end of time. Incredible pain and determination have been endured to produce this chain. I doubt there's a single Jew alive today who doesn't have ancestors who gave up their life for their Judaism, who sacrificed all that they had to guarantee that they would continue that chain. (Every convert is considered a direct descendant of Avrohom Avinu himself, the one who was willing to sacrifice that which was most dear to him.) How can we be careless and indifferent? How can we, the final, critical links of this chain, break that which was built from the blood of our great grandparents?

Perhaps that is one of the feelings which come around and is 'felt in the air' every year at this time. It is absorbed even by those who might not be as observant other times of the year. The feeling and realization that we are part of something much bigger than ourselves and that we have responsibilities to others who came long before us.

As we, during this z'man geulasainu {time of our redemption} attempt to feel as if we ourselves left Mitzrayim, let that be followed by our running to greet the moshiach, heralding the final and ultimate redemption, proudly presenting ourselves as those final, strong links in the chain of our nation.

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**RABBI TSZVI KLUGERMAN**

## Sanctification of Time

**T**he halachot for deciding what type of wine is permissible for the seder are extrapolated from the halachot of kiddush for Shabbat. (Orach Chayim 272:8) However, it seems that the similarity ends there.

Many follow the leniency quoted by the Mechaber, allowing yayin mevushal, literally "cooked wine" and sweetened wine for kiddush on Shabbat. However, for Pesach, we tend to be more stringent and follow the advice of the Chafetz Chaim (MB 278:19,21) to try to use unsweetened, non-mevushal (un cooked) wine for the seder. (Historically in America this was a difficulty for some time, given the sole availability of the acidic New York State concord grape. This is no longer the case).

However, there are additional differences between the kiddush of Shabbat and the kiddush of Pesach which will help us better define the unique character of Chag Hamatzot.

The Rambam in his Mishne Torah, Hilchot Chametz Umatzah 8:1-2, teaches that on the seder night each participant must have their own cup of wine, recite the kiddush and the shehechyanu blessing, and drink. This is peculiar to the holiday of Pesach, since on Shabbat and other holidays, one can recite the kiddush and exempt all who are present.

Additionally, on Shabbat and most other holidays, Shavuot excepted, one can opt to begin kiddush before the proper onset of night, tzet hakochavim, the appearance of three stars. On Pesach, we must wait until nightfall to begin kiddush and then we must begin immediately.

Kiddush is required to be bemakom seudah, where we will sit down and eat our meal. Granted that the seder will eventually end up at Shulchan Orech, the meal, but it will be some time until we get to eat some matzah. The hamotzi, the blessing over the matzah, establishes the meal as having been begun. This keviat haseudah, establishing the meal, follows on the heels of the kiddush. This concept is best demonstrated by those who have the minhag of washing Netilat Yadayim before kiddush and proceed directly from kiddush to hamotzi on Shabbat.

Why is the kiddush on Pesach so different from the kiddush of any other holiday or Shabbat?

We must realize that these distinctions of the kiddush on Pesach is that it not only fulfills the requirement of kiddush hayom, the sanctification of the day, that is accomplished by kiddush, but it is also the first of the four cups of wine to be consumed this evening. It is these four cups which I believe will lend us an insight to our question.

In the Talmud Babli, tractate pesachim, it is taught that one cannot drink the four cups at once. Also there is a requirement of cheirut, freedom, which

seemingly is lost when the mitzvah is rushed. The Rambam, in Hilchot Chametz Umatzah 8:1-2, also establishes that there are specific times that the cups must be filled, and the haggdah recited with the cups filled. Why not fill the cup just prior to reciting the blessing, and then drinking? Rather, according to the Rambam, we must have our cups filled at specific times in order to recite the appropriate sections of the exodus. The goal of Pesach is to experience zman cheruteinu, the season or time of our freedom. We must show that we are not slaves, who rush their meal time, in expectation of the next command of the master. Rather at the Passover seder, we show that we are considered as royalty who follow the minutae of etiquette.

Kiddush is more than kedushat hayom - sanctification of the day. It is also the first of the four cups. It is the cup over which we recite the shehechyanu. It is the cup by which we declare Pesach to be zman cheruteinu. Kiddush appears to function for more than simply kedushat hayom, the sanctity of the day. In fact, the kiddush is for sanctification of time. Tonight, we do not have to rush through our repast. If anything, the opposite is true. We take our time. We cannot have the four cups of wine all in one gulp. We are to savor the moment. We cannot have others experience this leisure for us. Everyone present at the seder must participate and sanctify the time we now have.

**RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

## Shabbat Shalom

**"T**he wicked child asks, 'What is this service to you!' Saying YOU, he excludes himself, and because he excludes himself from the group, he denies a basic principle of our faith. You, in turn, should set his teeth on edge and say to him: 'Because of what the Eternal did for me when I came forth from Egypt I do this.' For ME and not for HIM; had he been there, he would not have been redeemed." [Passover Haggadah] Last week, we dealt with the question and answer the author of the Haggadah attributes to the wicked child from the perspective of the Biblical citations. This week, I wish to analyze the attitude the leader of the seder is expected to express as a response to the questioner: "You shall set his teeth on edge (hakhai et shinav)," is what the Baal Haggadah is to do to the "wicked" child.

Granted, the words attributed to the wicked child are condescending and exclusionary, setting up a situation in which he—the child—is on the outside, judging those who are on the inside. "Why are 'you' going through all of this hard work," he is criticizing. Moreover, whereas the other questions are preceded within their Biblical context with "when your child will 'ask' you" (for example, Deut.6:20), the wicked child's words are preceded with:

"When your children 'say' to you; what is this service to you" [Ex. 12:26]. In other words the wise child asks his/her parents, the wicked child tells them!

Nevertheless, the instruction is "set his teeth on edge" still sounds rather harsh. It seems to have a nuance of corporal punishment—and if our purpose is to bring someone on the outside closer to the inside, striking or castigating him is hardly the way to accomplish that. The phrase is also a rather difficult one to understand. The Hebrew word "hacei" (with a hard "c") means to hit or smack, whereas the Hebrew word in the Haggadah—hakhei—means to blunt, or set on edge. Why use the latter, which is such a rare idiom in Biblical Hebrew? The fact is that a variation of the word 'hakhei' appears only three times in entire Bible, once in Ecclesiastes, once in Ezekiel and once in Jeremiah, and the usage of the term in the two prophetic works is virtually identical. In the context of his vision of ultimate redemption, Jeremiah declares: "In those days they shall say no more: 'The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge' (tik'hena). But every one shall die for his own iniquity; every man that eats the sour grapes, his teeth shall be set on edge." [Jer. 31:28-29]

In order to understand the significance of this prophetic vision, we must remember that juridically speaking from a "Court of Law" perspective our Bible insists that—unlike the Code of Hammurabi, for example—children are not to be penalized for their parent's transgressions: "Fathers shall not be put to death through sons, and sons shall not be put to death through children. Every man shall be put to death through his own sin." [Deut. 24:16]

However, from a psychological and historical point of view, life situations all around us bear testimony to the awesome degree to which children always suffer for the weaknesses and failings of their parents, even to the point of G-d's seemingly "...visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and unto the fourth generation." [Ex. 34:7] After all, the pain of "divorced children" is often far greater than that of divorced parents, children of alcoholics or sexual deviants bear the burden of their parents frailty to their dying day, and—to a lesser degree—many of us carries the scars of a wrong word or deed expressed by a parent at a critical juncture of our lives. Indeed, the Jews in exile were born in a strange land, forced to suffer an alien fate, because their parents and/or grandparents sinned and were worthy of having been cast off from the land of their fathers. "The fathers ate sour grapes and the children's teeth were set on edge."

It appears to me that this is at least one of the messages behind the words of the haggadah. If a child around the seder table declares with a challenge rather than asks with a will to understand, if he/she refers to the ritual as "work" and excludes him/herself from the

congregation of Israel, if—in short—his/her teeth remain sourly set on edge in critique of the entire religious and familial establishment, then you, the parent, must consider the possibility that you were the cause; you must be aware of the possibility that your child's cynicism is a result of the sour grapes that you ate and that you projected. Perhaps you did not listen to your child carefully enough, engage him/her in the religious process often enough, grant him/her time enough. "Even you are responsible for his/her teeth which are set on edge" and so you must find the way to repair the damage and inspire the child to feel once again like a respected and loved inside member of his family and faith community. He must be showered with the kind of love which draws him into the collective single organization of Klal Yisrael, so that he can experience the Egyptian servitude and exodus as having occurred to him/her. In this way all parents will turn towards the children and the hearts of all children to their parents!

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#### **RABBI YAAKOV MENKEN**

### **Project Genesis**

**W**hile reading the Haggadah, we learn from Rabbi Yossi HaGalili (of Galilee) that if the Egyptians faced 10 Plagues in Egypt, then they were struck with 50 at the Reed Sea. Rabbi Eliezer says, furthermore, that in reality the Egyptians were not struck with merely 10 Plagues. Each one consisted of four plagues, and therefore there were 40 Plagues in Egypt, and 200 at the Sea. Rabbi Akiva disagrees, saying that there were 50 in Egypt, and 250 at the Sea.

Perhaps one opinion is right, perhaps the other—perhaps, just as they count the words differently, these great Rabbis might have counted the various sub-elements of each plague differently, and they are both right. But why do we need to know this in the Haggadah? What great impact does this have, such that the Rabbis later decided to include this discussion within the Haggadah itself?

Rabbi Yechezkel Levenstein, spiritual guide of the Mir Yeshiva in Poland before the War, and then in Ponevitzch in Israel, points to the line which follows this discussion: "how many great things did the Holy One bestow upon us." The Haggadah specifies that each favor G-d showed us at that time was wonderful unto itself. Taking us out of Egypt was enough by itself. Judging the Egyptians for years of tremendous cruelty was enough by itself. All the more so, when these favors are all added together, do we recognize HaShem's kindness. And therefore, he says, even though all of the various "plagues within plagues" are not explained separately, we must recognize that each one was a separate act, a separate benefit for us, and even a benefit for the Egyptians themselves—teaching

them their mistake, and that He is King, before they died.

Rabbi Yitzchak Elchanon Waldsheim, hy"D, who was the spiritual guide of the Yeshiva of Baranovitch until he was murdered by the Nazis y"sh, focuses upon Rabbi Eliezer's division of each Plague into four—and he derives a lesson which applies to each of us. One cannot worry too much, he says, about the future.

Worrying about the future, he says, sometimes "merely" causes us not to enjoy what we have. Sometimes, on the other hand, it causes jealousy and arguments, or prevents people from performing a mitzvah (such as tzedakah). Obviously one must take reasonable precautions. Smoking may kill us in forty years, but that makes it a bad idea right now. And one cannot give all his or her money away and then wonder why poverty has come to visit. But this is a far cry from the tendency of people to look for distant possibilities, which will most likely never come to pass.

If we look carefully into the story of the Egyptians, we see that it is this concern which caused Pharaoh's downfall. "Come, let us be wise against [the Israelites], lest they become numerous..." [Ex. 1:10] The Israelites were living in Egypt, and Pharaoh enjoyed good relations with them. One of them had even saved his country from starvation. Was there any cause for concern? Of course not.

Pharaoh needed something to worry about. At the time there was no danger, but he thought about what might happen, and truly went out on a limb to find a distant possibility of trouble. "Perhaps they will become numerous" was the first question—perhaps they would, but perhaps they would not. "And it will be, if a war will happen" was the second—who said there would be a war? "And it [the Nation of Israel] will join our enemies" was the third. "And go up from the land" was the final possibility. None of these were certain—it is as if he said "perhaps they will become numerous, and perhaps a war will occur, and perhaps they will join our enemies, and perhaps they will leave the land!"

Thus worrying about the future, in such an unreasonable fashion, was the first of Pharaoh's sins. The fact that he "did not know of Yosef" was his second—according to some, the same Pharaoh simply acted as if he did not know Yosef, but even according to the others, the new Pharaoh certainly had an obligation to find out before throwing the great help Israel had been back in its face. Then Pharaoh afflicted the Israelites physically, his third sin, and spiritually, by denying them the opportunity to worship G-d, his fourth.

Thus as a result of worrying about four questions within questions, he committed four sins—and thus, concludes Rav Waldsheim, he was repaid with four plagues within each of the ten.

This is but one message of the Haggadah. As it says later on, "not merely one has stood up against us to destroy us." There was Pharaoh. There was Haman. There was Hitler. "In every generation" there are Hitlers waiting to happen, but "G-d saves us from their hands." He is watching, and caring, and helping. Let us do what is right and appropriate today, and G-d will help us to deal with tomorrow—that which we can see and worry about, and even that which we cannot.

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### RABBI YAACOV WASSER

## National Council of Young Israel

**T**he Haftorah for today has been a source of great consolation throughout the many dark and gloomy years of galut, exile. It is from Yechezkel chapter 37 and relates the famous vision of the prophet in which he is shown the resurrection of the "dry bones."

We also read the Megillah, Song of Songs.

There are a number of reasons put forth as to why we read this Haftorah on Shabbos Chol Hamoed Pesach. The Tur states the reason to be that the resurrection of the dead will take place in the month of Nissan. Another reason offered is that according to one view the resurrected bones were those of members of the tribe of Ephraim who miscalculated the end of the exile, left Mitzrayim before the proper time and were massacred by the inhabitants of Gath.

An interesting difference between the brachot made following the Haftoros on Shabbos Chol Hamoed Pesach and Chol Hamoed Succot is that on Succot we conclude m'kadesh haShabbos v'yisrael v'hazmanim, HaShem sanctifies Shabbos, Yisrael, and the holidays, while on Pesach we conclude the bracha with m'kadesh haShabbos, sanctifies Shabbos. The Magen Avraham says this is because there are different korbanot, sacrifices, brought each day of Succot, while on Pesach the same korban is brought each day. The Mateh Ephraim says that the reason is that the maftir each day of Pesach after the first two days is the same, while on Succot it changes each day.

There is a fascinating Gemarah in Sanhedrin 92 that discusses the episode of the dry bones. The Gemarah first discusses the duration of the resurrection. R' Eliezer says the dead arose, said songs of praise to HaShem, and then died. R' Yehuda says emes mashal hayah, which is interpreted by Rashi to mean that even if the event actually took place, the major lesson was as a parable for the future redemption of the Jewish nation from galut. R' Eliezer ben R'Yose Hagglili says that the resurrected arose, made Aliyah, married and had children. R' Yehuda ben Besaira then stated that he was a grandson of one of them and showed his tefillin, which he said were from his grandfather. (The commentaries ask that according

to the view it was only a vision it is difficult to understand how R' Yehuda ben Besaira could have been a descendant. They explain his statement as an exaggeration to prove a point.) Whichever view we follow, this is a clear statement that we will be redeemed from our galut just as the dead were resurrected.

Irving M. Bunim, in his sefer *Ever Since Sinai*, quotes a story about how, in the early years of the British mandate, the British government was debating whether to invest large sums of money to develop the land. The head of the Bank of England, knowing it was a wise move, took out a Bible and read the section of Yechezkel we read today. He said, "There, do you see? G-d promised the Jews they would come out of their graves and rebuild the land. With this investment we shall help them. You need have no fears. Dead and inert as these people may seem, they are rapidly coming to life. It would be a wise investment that we make."

We, at the very least, should share this vision of a British banker who understood the plain meaning of this episode. Mr. Bunim, expounding on the discussion in the Gemarah related above says that the view of R' Eliezer was fulfilled by the many holy Jews throughout the centuries who travelled to Eretz Yisrael in the twilight of their lives to draw close to HaShem. They arose, sang shira, praise, and went to their eternal rest. But the views of R' Eliezer ben R' Yose Hagglili and R' Yehuda be Besaira require for, the total resurrection, commitment to Torah and mesorah as evidenced by the tefillin being passed from one generation to the next. We pray for a total fulfillment of this prophesy.

Rabbi Yaakov Niman in his sefer *Darhei Mussar* asks why our rabbis tell us that, "All songs are holy but Shir Hashirim is the holiest of the holy." Why is it holier than Az Yashir or any other song?

He gives an answer that I believe is the reason for our reading it today. He states that Az Yashir was sung after the Jewish nation witnessed unparalleled miracles. It is easy to sing when you are on a high. It is almost impossible not to. Shir Hashirim though, is a song for galut. It talks about the undying love of HaShem for us throughout the bitter exile. This is a truly holy song. The ability of Jews to march to their death singing Ani Maamin, and for the students of the yeshiva of Kelm to march to their death with sifrei Torah while singing, "How fortunate are we, and how good is our lot" is a testimony of our ability to sing under the most dire of circumstances.

After the first days of Yom Tov we may be a little discouraged. We tell the story of Yetzias Mitzraim and perhaps we feel that our galut will never end. Our rabbis therefore instituted this Haftorah and the reading of Shir Hashirim to drive home the point that no matter how bleak things are, we are still able to sing, because

we know HaShem is with us, even in galut. No matter how far we have sunk, the message of the Haftorah is that HaShem can bring back to life even dry bones. We, who see so many signs of the coming Geulah, should surely sing of hope and thanksgiving.

Let us daven that this be our last year in galut and that HaShem will heed our prayers to speedily bring an end to this bitter galut, and that we all merit the bringing the Korban Pesach together at the rebuilt Bais Hamikdash.

**RABBI MORDECAI KAMENETZSKY**

## Symbolism Over Substance

The entire Seder ceremony is replete with symbolic gestures. We drink four cups of wine to represent four Biblical expressions of redemption. We dip and lean like kings to represent freedom, and eat bitter herbs to remind us about the bitter slavery. We also eat other symbolic foods that portray our Egyptian bondage: salt water to remember tears, and charoses, a mixture of apples, nuts and wine that looks like mortar, to remind us of the laborious years in Egypt.

The service is truly filled with symbolism - some direct, and some seemingly far-fetched - and all the symbols are meant to remind us of the slavery we endured centuries ago. But, why not take a direct approach? There are overt ways to declare our gratitude, and there are more immediate ways to mark the celebration. Why don't we just recite the four expressions of redemption as part of the liturgy instead of drinking four cups of wine to symbolize them? Why don't we actually place mortar on the table (problem of muktzeh not withstanding) instead of making a concoction to represent it? And instead of reminding ourselves of backbreaking work by eating horseradish, why not lift heavy boxes?

A Jewish intellectual in post-war England approached Rabbi Yechezkel Abramsky, who headed the London Beth Din, with a cynical question: "In reviewing our Hagadah service," he sniped, "I was shocked at the insertion of, 'Who Knows One', a childish nursery rhyme, at the end. Why would the sages put a silly rhyme - 'One is Hashem, two are the Tablets, three are the fathers,' and so on, at the end of the solemn, intellectual Seder night service? It is very unbecoming!"

Rabbi Abramsky was not shaken. "If you really want to understand the depth of that song, then you must travel north to the town of Gateshead. There you will find a saintly Jew, Reb Elya Lopian. I want you to discuss the meaning of every aspect of life with him. Ask him what are the meaning of the sea and fish, ask him what is the meaning of the sun and the moon. Then ask him what is the meaning of one, of six, of eleven and so on."

The philosopher was very intrigued. He traveled to Gateshead and located the Yeshiva at which Reb Elya served as the Mashgiach (spiritual advisor). He was led into the room where a saintly looking man greeted him warmly.

"Rabbi, I have many questions," the skeptical philosopher began. "What is the meaning of life?" "What is the essence of the stars?"

Rabbi Lopian dealt with each question with patience, depth, and a remarkable clarity. Then the man threw out the baited question. "What is the meaning of the number one?"

Rabbi Lopian's face brightened, his eyes widened, and a broad smile spread across his face.

"The meaning of one?" he repeated. "You would like to know the meaning of one? One is Hashem in the heaven and the earth!"

The man was shocked. "What about the depth of the numeral five?"

"Five?" repeated the sage. Why five has tremendous symbolism! It represents the foundation of Judaism - the Five Books of Moses!" The rabbi then went on to explain the mystical connotations that are represented by the number five, and exactly how each Book of the Torah symbolizes a component of the sum.

The man left with a new approach and attitude toward the most simple of our rituals.

At the Seder, we train ourselves to find new meaning in the simple things in life. We teach ourselves to view the seemingly mundane with historical and even spiritual significance. We should remember that when Moshe saw a burning yet non-consumed bush, he realized that his nation is similar - constantly persecuted and harassed, yet never consumed. At our Seder, we view horseradish not as a condiment for gefilte fish, but as representative of our suffering. The Matzoh is no longer a low-fat cracker, but symbolizes the hardships of exile and the speed of our redemption. In addition, we finish the Seder with a simple song that reminds everyone at the Seder, next time you ask, "who's number one?" don't accept the answer: the New York Yankees or the Chicago Bulls - think on a higher plane! One is Hashem in the heaven and the earth! © 1997 by Rabbi M. Kamenetzky and Project Genesis, Inc.

#### **RABBI DOVID GREEN**

### **Dvar Torah**

**O**n the first nights of Pesach we have a commandment to retell the story of our exodus from Egypt. The Hagada is made in a special order to facilitate all the observances of the night. One thing which becomes clear from the outset is that we praise and thank G-d many times during the seder. It is an underlying theme throughout the seder to show our thanks to G-d for freeing us from the bondage of

Egypt. Thankfulness is one of the goals of observing the seder.

The book Duties of the Heart (Rabbi Bachya Ibn Pekuda) discusses at length all of the wonderful things which G-d bestows to the human race. He follows that chapter with the discussion of serving G-d. His reasoning for juxtaposing those two chapters is that when someone contemplates the good which he receives, it behooves him to react with recognition and appreciation to the giver. When we realize the extent of what we receive from G-d in its full depth, logic dictates that we serve Him.

The term "bread of shame" is used in the Talmud, and has become a well known term. As we know it is used to depict the feeling one has when receiving something he has not earned. A healthy person wishes to return in some measure the favor he has received. It is human nature. This is why G-d created good and evil in the world, and gave us the opportunity to choose between the two—so we could earn the good which we receive in this world and the next. Interestingly, we can conclude that G-d puts up with all of the things in this world which occur against His will, just so we can work at doing right, and not receive bread of shame.

A student of Torah approaches the Pesach seder with this attitude. We recount the story of our exodus from Egypt and our birth as a nation of servants of G-d. We internalize the teachings of the seder, and we come to a greater clarity and commitment to show G-d our recognition and appreciation in a tangible, ongoing fashion.

During the Seder we sing the Dayenu. In the Dayenu we thank G-D for all he did for us and we say If he only would have ..... (And stopped there, and done nothing else for us) Dayenu, It would have sufficed and we would have great gratitude for what he gave us.

One of the stanzas reads, "If he would have brought us close to Mount Sinai and not have given us the Torah, DAYENU! (It would have been sufficient)

The question here is obvious, what is the purpose of the Jewish nation standing at Mount Sinai other than to receive the Torah?

There are many answers to this question. I will share two answers that I have heard from to great Sages I have been privileged to know.

My Rosh Yeshiva, Rabbi Yaakov Yitzchok Ruderman ZT"L of Ner Yisroel, used to give the following answer. We all know that our forefathers kept all of G-d's commandments even before G-D revealed himself on Mount Sinai and gave the Jews the Torah. The way they were able to keep all of G-D's

commandments was through the great spiritual levels they were able to attain. They attained such a great level of spirituality that they were able to understand exactly what G-d demands from mankind in the form of all of his Mitzvos/commandments.

Rav Ruderman used to explain that when the Jews stood at Mount Sinai and G-D revealed himself to the Jews they also attained the same spiritual level that our forefathers worked so hard, over many years, to attain and they also understood what G-D demands from every person. Therefore, even if we would not have been given the Torah we would have understood all of the laws in the Torah and we would have adhered to them. (He then went on to explain what the great advantage of actually receiving the Torah was. In short it was a new special relationship between G-D and the Jews in the form of his requiring THEM to keep his laws. A special bond of love and commitment was created by the giving of the Torah and the Jew's acceptance of it.)

Another answer I heard was from Rabbi Eliezer Kirzner ZT"l who was a Rov in Brooklyn N.Y. for about 50 years.

The Posuk tells us that "The Jews rested under the mountain" The Torah uses the verb VAYICHAN which is a singular form of the verb. Rashi asks why does it not say VAYACHANU And they rested, using a plural form of the verb? Rashi explains that they rested: "As one man, with one heart." i.e. They was a such unity among Klall Yisroel, the Jews that they were as one single entity. With this introduction Rabbi Kirzner used to explain this stanza in the Dayenu. True they was a very high and lofty purpose in coming to Mount Sinai, the giving of the Torah by G-D himself. But, if all the Jews would have merited at Mount Sinai was that unity, That brotherly love that united all the Jews into one nation than that surely would have been sufficient! © 1997 Rabbi D. Siegel & Project Genesis, Inc.

### **RABBI YAAKOV HABER**

## **Thought for the Week**

**T**he recital of the Haggadah opens with the words: "This is the bread of affliction which our fathers ate in the land of Egypt. Let all who are hungry enter and eat, and all who are needy come and celebrate the Passover."

This declaration is, in fact, in accordance with a law in the Shulchan Aruch, that we should be willing to share all our festive meals with the hungry. The invitation is even made in Aramaic, the spoken language at the time of the composition of the Haggadah, so that a hungry person passing by could understand it.

But there is a problem with this explanation: why do we make such an invitation only at Pesach, and

not at the other festivals, when there is the same obligation of hospitality?

In order to try and answer this, I would like to quote from the Gra (Vilna Gaon). In his book "Aderes Eliahu" he lists the three greatest events in world history: the Creation of the World, the Redemption from Egypt, and the Giving of the Torah. Why these events? Not necessarily because they were the most spectacular as miracles, but because, firstly, each of these is an ongoing processes, and secondly, we are partners in this process! Let us explain this by considering each in turn.

First, the Creation. G-d is continually active in the Creative process. Furthermore, whenever we have children in fulfilment of the Biblical commandment to "be fruitful and multiply", or whenever (for example) we plant trees, we are ourselves involved in this process.

Consider, next, the Giving of the Torah. This is also a continuing process. Moreover, whenever we learn, or teach, Torah, or find chidushim (new insights), we are involving ourselves in the Giving of the Torah.

Finally, let us consider the Redemption. This is also a continuing process, starting with the Redemption from Egypt, and culminating in the coming of the Messiah. Here too we have our part to play. How do we do this? It need not be on a grand scale. Think about the other two events. With Creation, we are not required to populate half the earth! We fulfil our part by having our own children. Similarly, we don't have to plant forests everywhere. It's enough to plant trees in our own backyards, or in the JFK Forest in Israel. As far as the Giving of the Torah is concerned, we cannot spread it to everyone. We do what we can, on a personal level. So it is with Redemption. Every time we redeem a single person, we are involved with Redemption. If you know someone who is hungry, feed him! If you know someone who needs a sympathetic ear, listen to his problems! If you know someone who needs a job, get on the phone and find one for him! In this way, you do your share in the continuing process of Redemption.

Now let us return to the question: If it is always a mitzvah to invite the hungry to our table, why is this only stated explicitly at the Pesach Seder? We can now give an answer. Feeding the hungry is, as I have said, the part we play in Redemption, and Pesach is the one festival where Redemption is the central theme.

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