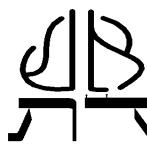


# Toras Aish



## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI DOV KRAMER**

### Taking a Closer Look

Just a few short days ago, we recounted our exodus from Egypt, including the "mighty hand" of G-d that smote the Egyptians that had enslaved us. The Ramban (Beraishis 15:14) discusses why the Egyptians deserved to be punished if G-d had already decreed that Avraham's descendants would be "strangers in a land that is not theirs, and they (the host nation) will enslave them and make them suffer, [for] 400 years" (15:13). If it had already been determined that the Children of Israel must be slaves- and endure suffering- why would Paro (Pharaoh) and his people be held accountable when it actually occurred?

(As the Ramban himself points out, this issue is only relevant where there is an explicit decree that something must happen. There is no question that, absent such a decree, one who causes damage is liable for it- despite G-d's attribute of justice demanding that any "victim" warrant- on some level- the consequences of another's choice.)

Tosfos deals with a similar question. The Talmud (Shabbos 10b) says that Ya'akov's favoritism towards Yosef led to our ancestors going down to Egypt. Tosfos (*ibid*) wonders how Ya'akov's actions can be seen as a cause for the enslavement and ensuing suffering if that predicament had already been decreed. Whereas the Ramban answers that the Egyptians went further than G-d's decree had intended, and were being punished for the "extra suffering" that they caused, since Tosfos is dealing with going down to Egypt in the first place (and not what happened once they got there), this approach doesn't apply to Tosfos' question.

The answer Tosfos gives, though, may or may not be that different. "Perhaps it [otherwise] would not have been decreed upon them [to endure] as much suffering; after all, the 400 years [indicated in the decree] started earlier [then their actual descent to Egypt]." The Maharam and the Shelah understand Tosfos to mean that instead of the actual time spent in Egypt being 210 years, it would have been less; Ya'akov's favoritism hastened their descent, and therefore increased the length of time that they were enslaved. However, Tosfos doesn't say that they wouldn't have suffered "as long" as they did, but "as much" as they did, implying that the level of suffering was greater, not the length of time they suffered.

Additionally, Tosfos uses the term "suffering," not "enslaved." If the point was that the length of time was increased, this would more directly affect the nation being "enslaved;" any additional suffering would only be a result of the longer enslavement.

Perhaps Tosfos' intent was not that the length of time was increased, but that the actual suffering became worse. The decree had several components; it would apply to Avraham's descendants (and therefore couldn't start until Yitzchok was born), these descendants would not be in their own land, they would have to become slaves to their host nation, who would make them suffer, and the length of the decree would be 400 years. Since the nation was only in Egypt for 210 years, Tosfos proves that the 400 years doesn't apply to each and every component of the decree. Because they would have to serve another nation, even before descending to Egypt they knew that they were not "home," even when they were in what would eventually become the Land of Israel. They therefore spent 400 years living in places that were not theirs. The "slave" part and the "suffering" part, though, did not have to last for 400 years. Tosfos is suggesting that perhaps it didn't have to last for 210 either (Actually, since the 210 years started from the brothers' initial descent to purchase food/search for Yosef, it was even less than that.)

The Children of Israel didn't become slaves overnight. It was a gradual process from being employees to becoming subservient. In today's business climate we can well relate to a boss requiring more and more from a worker, sometimes in exchange for even less and less (remuneration). It is not hard to imagine, then, that just as the transition from worker to slave progressed as time progressed, once they had become slaves there was still a continual "tightening of the screws." Each year that passed added another degree of suffering, so that after many years there was that much more suffering. Not just because they were slaves for longer, but because the longer they were slaves, the more the Egyptians increased the suffering- step by step. Because Ya'akov's favoritism hastened the descent into Egypt (and they therefore spent more time there), it also increased the amount of suffering endured by the nation exponentially. It is the "suffering" that Tosfos focuses on (not the "enslavement"), and the level of suffering, not just the length of time (although the level was affected by the length of time).

Turning our attention back to the Ramban's issue, the Egyptians had the opportunity to affect both

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the length of time and the level of suffering. As soon as Moshe came to them with the message that the time had come for the enslavement to end, the Egyptians should have let His people go. But besides that, they should not have constantly increased the level of hardship, as the decree was being fulfilled with an earlier level of suffering. Each subsequent level of suffering went beyond that, and for that they were punished. © 2004 Rabbi D. Kramer

#### **RABBI AVI WEISS**

## **Shabbat Forshpeis**

**T**he only events in Jewish history that are powerfully remembered are those which have become part of Jewish ritual. Consider the Exodus from Egypt. It is remembered precisely because of the Seder ritual, which serves as a paradigm for the effectiveness of ritual.

During the Seder, we say that in every generation there is an obligation to see oneself (*lirot et atsmo*) as if one is leaving Egypt. *Lirot* comes from the root *ra-ah*, to see. But *ra-ah* in the Torah goes well beyond ocular ability. Rather it deals with empathizing and feeling emotionally attached to that which is being thought about.

This first step of feeling the Egypt experience leads to a second stage which is the mandate to tell the story of the Exodus to one's children and grandchildren-*ve-hegadeta levincha*. (Exodus 13:8) The feeling of the evening becomes expressed through the spoken word by actually verbalizing what occurred.

This two step process of feeling and verbalizing the Exodus event is not unique to Passover. Every morning and night we are mandated in our prayers to recall the experience in Egypt. At the Seder, however, we take those dimensions to a third level, that of re-experiencing in the spirit of *zachor et hayom hazeh*

("Remember this day in which you came out of Egypt." - Exodus 13:30).

Just as the term *zachor* of Shabbat (Exodus 20:8) means re-enacting God's resting on Shabbat, so does the term *zachor* of Egypt mean re-enacting the Egypt experience. Hence, at the Seder, we relive those moments in the past when our mothers and fathers were slaves and were ultimately freed. We eat matzah and bitter herbs representing servitude while, at the same time, we consume wine and recline, representing freedom.

These three steps, feeling, speaking and acting are all crucial ingredients in the way ritual observance achieves its goal-to help us intensely connect and remember the past.

It is during the time of year where ritual abounds-the springtime holiday of Pesach that one should especially note the dearth of ritual concerning perhaps the major calamity to have befallen our people-the Holocaust. It is my belief that, despite all our efforts to keep the memory of the six million alive, the Holocaust will not be remembered because, unlike the Egypt story, it has not been ritualized.

At our Synagogue, the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale, we have made modest strides in the ritualization of the Shoah. We have produced a "Haggadah for the Yom HaShoah Seder" which is used on Holocaust Memorial Day. Every Shabbat before the reading of the "Av HaRachamim," the prayer commemorating the victims of the Crusades, a congregant reads a short vignette about a European shtetl that was destroyed by the Nazis. Only when our community makes a commitment to ritualize the Shoah, will the Shoah be etched in Jewish memory forever. If we fail in this endeavor, the Shoah, I fear, will one day be relegated to a mere footnote in Jewish history. We dare not let that happen. © 2002 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA

#### **RABBI YAakov Menken**

## **Project Genesis**

**T**he Shem MiShmuel, a Chassidic Rebbe and scholar, offers a beautiful insight into an apparent contradiction in the Haggadah. The Haggadah says, "Had the Holy One, Blessed be He, not taken our forefathers out of Egypt, then we and our children and our children's children would remain subservient to Pharaoh in Egypt."

First of all, the Pharaohs are long gone, so it is unlikely that the Jewish people would have remained as servants in Egypt even had the Exodus never occurred. But in addition, if we do not wish to set this passage aside as simple hyperbole, then it appears to contradict a central element of traditional Jewish thought: that the entire world was created for Torah, to permit us to pursue spirituality and to come close to G-d.

## Toras Aish

Without Torah, the world would lack all purpose. So according to the Midrash, G-d created the world with a condition in mind: "if Israel does not accept my Torah, then I will return [all of creation] to 'tohu vavohu,'" referring to the initial state ("without form and void") mentioned at the beginning of Genesis. So had He never removed us from Egypt, then the Torah would never have been given, and the world would have quite literally come to an end! If so, then both Pharaoh and Egypt would have ceased to exist, along with the Jews.

So the Shem MiShmuel offers an answer based (quite appropriately) on Chassidic thought. He explains that 'tohu vavohu' is not simply the absence of anything, but is rather a creation of its own, a pre-developed state. Had Israel not accepted the Torah, then the world would have returned to 'tohu vavohu' in order to emerge again, but not as a place for Torah.

That world, explains the Shem MiShmuel, would be a "bad" world, as it were, dominated by the physical, without opportunities for spiritual development, or approaches to the ultimate good found in G-d and Torah. So although human souls would exist in that world, they would have no opportunity for growth or self-perfection.

This is precisely the environment that Pharaoh sought to create for the Jews in Egypt, oppressing them with physical work and leaving them no time for other pursuits. So although those forces might appear in different garb, they would still dominate the Jews today had we not left Egypt. This is what the Haggadah means, that "we and our children and our children's children would remain subservient to Pharaoh in Egypt."

Besides the fascinating outlook on the Haggadah and our world, the Shem MiShmuel's explanation should help us to appreciate and focus upon the opportunities that we have. We do not live in a "bad world," so overwhelmed with physical work that we have no time for the spiritual. We can and must find opportunities to pursue the eternal, even in our busy lives.

Pesach is an especially good time for growth and change. "In each generation, every person is obligated to see himself as if he went out from Egypt, as it says [in the Torah], 'you shall tell it to your sons on that day, saying "because of what HaShem did for me during my departure from Egypt.'" Not only our forefathers did the Holy One, Blessed be He, redeem us from Egypt, but even us He redeemed with them." Our Sages taught: Pesach offers us the opportunity to break free of whatever bonds have held us until now, and to grow beyond all limitations. © 2004 Rabbi Y. Menkenl & torah.org

**RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY**

## Down and Dirty

**O**f all the complex and esoteric services done throughout the day by the kohanim who serve in

the Bais HaMikdash, the one that starts the day is perhaps the most mundane. It is called terumas hadeshen, removal of the ash and tidying the altar. At first it was a volunteer job-anyone who wanted to participate in this seemingly meaningful task could do so-but as the requests grew, a lottery was formed, each of the kohanim vying for the coveted task. In fact, according to the Tosefot (Yoma 20a) even the Kohen Gadol, the High Priest, would sweep the ashes at midnight of Yom Kippur. Why does the foremost mitzvah for the kohen entail sweeping ash? Why shouldn't the day begin with a holier act? Why can't sweeping ashes take place at the end of the day?

Reb Aryeh Levin, whose compassion for Jews was as passionate as his piety, was concerned with a merchant whose store was open on Shabbos. One Friday, Reb Aryeh went to the man and was about to tell him about the beauty of Shabbos and its sanctity, but as he neared the store, he hesitated. He decided to come back on Shabbos itself. The next day, immediately following the morning prayers and a quick meal, Reb Aryeh went to the store but did not step inside. Instead, he sat outside the store the entire day and just watched the customers come in and out. He stood inconspicuously until closing, when suddenly the owner realized that the famous Tzadik of Jerusalem had been observing his business for almost seven hours.

"Rabbi," cried the man, "why do you stand here? Perhaps I can get you something to eat. Anyway, why would you come near my store on Shabbos? You know I keep it open on Shabbos." Reb Aryeh stood with the man and just kept quiet. After a few moments he spoke.

"Honestly, I came yesterday to implore you about the sanctity of Shabbos. Then I realized that it would not be fair for me to talk to you about the Shabbos unless I understood how much business you conduct on Shabbos. All day I am involved in Torah and mitzvos. I don't deal in business, and in order for me to tell you about the Shabbos I had to relate to you, the difficulties you endure during your business day, and the price you would be paying to become a Shomer Shabbos. Only after I watched the myriad customers enter and exit your store over the past Shabbos did I realize how difficult it is for you to keep the Shabbos."

"Now that I understand your difficulty, now that I experienced your doubts, I will begin to explain why Shabbos observance is so important. Coming from your perspective, I will now explain how much more valuable is the observance of Shabbos than the work you do on that day."

With that introduction, Rav Aryeh's ensuing words made an amazing impact on the man. He was so impressed with Reb Aryeh's sincerity that he committed himself to close his store on Shabbos.

Rav Simcha Bunim of P'shischa explains that the first order of the kohen's day is to depart from the assumed holy rituals of the Bais HaMikdash and delve

into the ash. In order to raise the level of the nation they were meant to serve, the kohanim had to stoop to the level of the simplest worker and clean the altar, a seemingly menial task, that encompassed a variety of spiritual ramifications. Because in order to reach the level of high and holy, one must start out down and dirty.

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### MACHON ZOMET

## Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak

**O**n Shabbat of Chol Hamoed in the holidays of Pesach and Succot, the Torah reading is from the portion of Ki Tissa, starting with the words, "See, you have said to me, lift up this nation" [Shemot 33:12]. The passage about the holidays appears in Chapter 34, verses 18-26. However, this is problematic, in that it is almost an exact duplicate of what is written in the portion of Mishpatim (23:12-19). Various commentators have proposed explanations for this duplication (for example, see the Rambam's son Avraham and Chizkuni).

Comparing the differences between the two passages might clarify the different ways that Pesach appears in them. In Mishpatim, Shabbat is mentioned first -- "For six days shall you perform your labors, and on the seventh day you shall stop, so that your ox and your donkey will rest, and the son of your maidservant will rest, together with the stranger" [Shemot 23:12]. After this, the three pilgrimage holidays are mentioned, following an introduction, "Celebrate three holidays for me during the year" [23:14]. They are then listed individually: "Observe the holiday of matzot; for seven days, eat matzot as I have commanded you, at the time of the month of spring, for then you left Egypt, and do not come to see me empty-handed. And the holiday of the harvest, the time of the first fruits that you have planted in the field, and the holiday of the gathering, at the end of the year, when you gather your produce from the field." [23:15-16].

On the other hand, the passage in Ki Tissa which we read on Chol Hamoed begins without any introduction, "Observe the holiday of matzot. Eat matzot for seven days, as I commanded you, at the time of the month of spring. For in the month of spring you left Egypt." [Shemot 34:18]. This is followed by a passage related to firstborns. "Every birth that opens the womb belongs to me, and you shall dedicate all of your cattle... The firstborn of a donkey shall be redeemed with a sheep, and if it is not redeemed, it shall be beheaded." [34:19-20]. What follows is a verse about Shabbat, "Work for six days and rest on the seventh day" [34:21]. Only after all this are the other two holidays mentioned: "Make a holiday of Shavuot for you, related to the first fruits of the wheat, and the festival of gathering, at the end of the year" [34:22]. Why is the sequence different in the two passages?

Evidently in Mishpatim the three holidays are discussed together, based on a common theme of their agricultural aspect. The spring festival signifies the beginning of the crop. "The produce is filled and ripe. Another possibility is that the word 'aviv' is related to father, 'av,' that is, the first fruits that start to ripen." [Rashi]. The holiday of the harvest is related to the harvest of oats, and the festival of gathering signifies the joy of the end of the agricultural season. At each of these three stages, man has been commanded to give thanks to G-d for the good that He has given us.

On the other hand, in Ki Tissa the holiday of Pesach is separated from the other festivals, in order to emphasize the other aspect of the holiday, which is explicitly noted in the passage. This is the fact that the holiday celebrates the Exodus from Egypt, giving the holiday a special character, and it is related to additional mitzvot connected to redemption, such as the sanctity of the firstborns and observing Shabbat. In Mishpatim, Shabbat is mentioned before the holidays, and the reason for observing it is explicitly stated—"so that your ox and your donkey will rest, and the son of your maidservant will rest." In Ki Tissa, on the other hand, this reason is not mentioned, and it is likely that the most important reason at this point in time, after the redemption, is what is noted in the Ten Commandments in Va'etchanan, "Remember that you were slaves in Egypt... Therefore, G-d has commanded you to create the Shabbat" [Devarim 5:15].

Thus, the two different passages show two views of the holiday: the agricultural aspect of the festival of springtime, and the historical holiday of the matzot.

### The Frog of Redemption

by Rabbi Yisrael Rozen

"And the Nile will burst forth with frogs, and they will rise up and come into your house and your bedroom, on your bed and in the homes of your slaves and servants, within your nation, in your ovens and your kneading troughs. In you, and in your nation, and in all your servants, will the frogs rise up." [Shemot 7:28-29].

The frogs were one of the Ten Plagues in Egypt, as were lice and wild beasts. The effect of their plague was to be a terrible nuisance, as described in the above verse. "They will come into your house and your bedroom, on your bed and in the homes of your slaves and servants, within your nation, in your ovens and your kneading troughs." It may well be that the idiom "to swallow a frog" stems from these last two elements, referring to a person who is forced against his will to accept the consequences of his actions.

Because of these two elements, the "oven" and the "kneading trough," the frogs were given an honorable status by our sages. These jumping creatures represent the ultimate sacrifice for G-d. Generations of people who sanctified the Almighty's name, passing through water and fire, took their cue from the frogs of Egypt.

"What convinced Chanania, Mishael, and Azaria to enter into a fiery furnace in order to sanctify G-d's name? They made a logical inference from the frogs. Even though the frogs were not commanded to observe the mitzva of sanctifying the holy name, it is written, 'they will come into... your ovens and your kneading troughs.' When are the troughs close to the ovens, if not when they are hot? So much more so must we be commanded to sanctify the holy name." [Pesachim 53b].

Evidently these frogs were flame resistant, and they survived the heat, to continue to annoy the Egyptians even after their stint in the hot ovens. We are reminded of the description in the Talmud, about the salamander, which is not overpowered by fire: "Torah scholars are not overpowered by the flames in hell, as can be inferred from the salamander. A salamander is the product of a flame, but somebody who anoints himself with its blood is protected from heat. So much more must this be true of a wise man, whose entire body is fire, as is written, 'Behold, my word is like a flame, G-d says' [Yirmiyahu 23:29]." [Chagiga 27a].

(Note: here is a challenge for the scientists. Find this creature and use its blood to manufacture a fire resistant material. If we could find the snail from which to make the dye for techelet, we should be able to find the correct salamander.)

Even if biologists do not consider salamanders and frogs to be of the same species, I will take it upon myself to make an association between the two. What they have in common is that "the heat of a flame does not overpower them."

The legendary salamander was discussed twice by Rashi, giving two different explanations of the process by which this unusual creature is formed. "Salamander—an animal created from heat, when a flame burns in one place for seven years continuously" [Chagiga 27a]. "Salamander—a reptile created from heat and myrtle branches by magic. One who anoints himself with its blood is not overpowered by fire" [Chulin 127a].

Rabbi A.Y. Kook noted that there are two types of Torah scholars (as noted above, they are compared to a salamander). One "burns" himself in the flame of Torah for seven years, while the other is formed "by magic." This is a person of phenomenal talent who achieves a high status without any need for "seven years" of effort. The two types of scholars correspond to the well known classification: "Sinai" is one whose study depends on strenuous effort, and "a mover of mountains" is sharp and brilliant, almost as if by magic.

If we would like to, we can incorporate this duality of the salamander in two different opinions about the plague of the frogs. "And the frog rose up, and it covered the land of Egypt" [Shemot 8:2]. Rabbi Akiva says, there was one frog, and it filled the entire land. (Rashi explains that the people would strike it and it would cast off swarms of smaller frogs.) So Rabbi Elazar Ben Azaria said to him:

Akiva, what do you have to do with the legends of the Aggada? Stop talking, and return to the subjects of blemishes and tents (ritual impurity). One frog rose up and whistled for the others, and they came." [Sanhedrin 67b].

Rabbi Akiva, who spent twenty-four years within the flame of Torah study, supports the picture of a salamander being formed in a seven-year flame. "They would strike it, and it cast off swarms of smaller frogs." Rabbi Elazar Ben Azaria, who at the age of eighteen was already at a stage of wisdom of a man "seventy years old" (see the Hagada), is better suited to the magical salamander: "it whistled for the others, and they came."

"As in the days of your Exodus from Egypt, I will show you wonders" [Micha 7:15]. The redemption from Egypt is the archetype of all redemptions, providing a root and a base for all later cases, including the processes and their intricacies. Expanding on the approach we started above, we can say that there are two types of redemption. One is "magic," a fiery miracle, where the Almighty appears in mighty pillars of fire and clouds. This is "it'aruta d'le'eila," an awakening from above. There is another type of redemption, consisting of seven years of a fiery furnace, of "blemishes and tents," a time of difficult effort. This is "it'aruta d'letata," awakening from below. Which whistling cry of the frog did the prophet refer to when he predicted the future redemption?

"I will whistle to them and gather them, for I have redeemed them, and they will increase in numbers as they have increased in the past... And I will bring them back from Egypt and gather them from Ashur, and I will take them to the land of Gilad and Levanon, and there will not be enough room for them." [Zecharia 10:8,10].

#### 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 childrens 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! © 1999 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

#### THE AISHDAS SOCIETY

## Aspaqlaria

by Micha Berger

The Haggadah tells us that the Torah addresses the question of telling the Passover story to our children by referring to four different kinds of children. One is wise, one is evil, one is uncomplicated, and the last doesn't know to ask questions. Each son asks a question, even if the last does so in his silence. We can see from the question what they are looking to take from the seder experience. I believe these four approaches follow through in how we react to tragedy as well. Given the dismal state of current events, perhaps this is worth some exploration.

R' Joseph Ber Soloveitchik zt"l ("the Rav") addresses the question posed by the Holocaust in his seminal work on religious Zionism, "Kol Dodi Dofek". His position is that the question of why is there human suffering can't be answered. Any attempt to address theodicy is going to insult the intellect or the emotions, and quite likely both. But "Why?" isn't the Jewish question. Judaism, with its focus on halachah, on deed, asks, "What shall I do about it?"

The Rav continues by quoting the Talmudic principle, "Just as we bless [G-d] for the good, so we bless [Him] for the evil." Just as we dedicate all the good that comes are way to be tools in our avodas Hashem, we also dedicate ourselves through our responses to suffering.

This is the wise son's reaction. "Who is wise? He who learns from every person." The wise son is one who turns everything into a learning experience. His response to the seder is "What are the testimonial acts, the dictates, the laws, which Hashem your G-d commanded you?" How does G-d teach us to react to the events of Egypt and freedom? How am I supposed to react to tragedy?

When G-d presents tragedy to the wise son, they are called nisyonos- challenges or tests. Like the Akeidah, a learning experience for Abraham, to get him to fully realize his potential.

The second son, the wicked son, needs a wake up call. What the gemarah refers to as "yisurim". In the weekday prayer "Tachanun" we ask G-d to forgive our sins "but not through yisurim or bad illness".

The evil son of the Hagadah doesn't respond to this wakeup call. He asks, -- no, he says rhetorically, "What [good] is this job to you?" Our response is to blunt his teeth and point out that had he been there, he wouldn't have been amongst those to merit the Exodus. We tell him that it's not the tragedy that is leading him to rejecting G-d-it's his rejection of G-d that lead him to the tragedy. I like to imagine he accepts this answer in the silence after the paragraph.

There is a second kind of yissurim, yissurim shel ahavah-tribulations of love. This is not where the person is being evil, but he's not living up to his full potential. He too is in a rut, and G-d calls to him to break out of it and improve. G-d calls him to ahavah, to greater love and closeness to G-d.

This is the uncomplicated son, the one who believes with simple and pure faith. He asks "What is this?" and we answer with the Pesach story, with all that G-d did for us. Unlike the wise son, who wants to know all the laws of the day, all the nuances of how to react, the uncomplicated son is given motivation to cling to the A-lmighty.

Then there are times where the thing we want is a greater nisayon, a greater challenge, than the ones we don't. And if we are not up to the challenge, if it's a test that we couldn't pass, G-d doesn't make us face it.

There is a story told (Taanis 24b) of R' Chanina ben Dosa, a man so holy that the Talmud tells numerous stories of miracles that occurred to him. And yet one so poor that a heavenly Voice commented that the whole world was supported by R' Chanina's merit, but he himself lived off a small measure of carob from one Friday to the next.

Eventually his wife just couldn't handle the abject poverty any longer. He agreed to her request that he pray for wealth. A heavenly hand came down and handed them a huge golden table leg. Certainly worth a fortune.

That night, R' Chanina's wife had a dream. They were in heaven, and all the other couples were sitting at three legged tables. Except for them. Their table only had two legs, it couldn't stand.

Realizing that the third leg of their table was the gift they had received, she asked her husband to pray for it to be taken back. And it was.

R' Chaim Vilozhiner associates the three legs of the table in this story with the mishnah (Avos 1:2) about the three pillars of the world: Torah, Divine service, and acts of charity. The Voice said, after all, that R' Chanina supported the world.

The golden leg they received was the one of kindness. Until now, they had reason not to give more charity-they had nothing more to give. The story as R' Chaim understands it (I wouldn't say this about R' Chanina ben Dosa on my own), suggests that R' Chanina would have been unable to practice charity as he was worthy to had he had the opportunity.

So, R' Chanina ben Dosa was poor.

Similarly, the person who is medically needy because that keeps him close to G-d. The person who, had he been healthy, would have been more distracted by the physical opportunities afforded him.

This is the son who doesn't know how to ask. Unlike the wise son, who asks "How shall I respond?" or the son of uncomplicated, pure and simple faith, who asks "G-d, G-d, why have you forsaken me?" (Tehillim 22:1) this son isn't asking anything. He isn't capable of grappling with this issue- be it a tragedy, or be it the Exodus.

"You shall start for him." Our response must be to help them grow.

Of course, these four sons are archetypes. Real people are wise on some issues, determined to be wrong about others. We have a simple straight to the point perspectives on yet other things, and there are those issues we aren't prepared or ready to face. But it is only through growth that we can reach our goals as individuals and as a people. © 2002 M. Berger and The AishDas Society

#### RABBI JASON ELBAUM

## What is Freedom

**T**he last time we had a full-fledged holiday (from the Torah) was Shmini Atzeres, nearly six months ago.

Then, we stood at the last holiday of the yearly cycle. We celebrated G-d's protection of us to give us the strength necessary to carry us through the dark winter of Exile, and the two post-exilic holidays, Chanukah and Purim. Now we begin anew in the spring, in the month of Nissan. Nissan: the month of miracles, "nissim;" the month of birth, "naissance." As Hashem told Moses, "Hachodesh hazeh lachem rosh chodashim . . .", "This month shall be for you the first of the months." In Nissan, in the events of the Exodus, we come in contact with the foundations of Judaism.

In the Pesach davening, we speak of "Zman Cheiruteinu", "the time of our freedom." We are reminded of G-d's famous words to Moses: Go tell Pharaoh, "Shlach et ami," "Let my people go!" This

conception of freedom has become the basis for our world today. The French proclaimed their freedom in the Declaration of the Rights of Man. The United States embodied the principles of freedom in the Bill of Rights. Such great documents for such a great ideal. But what do we see in the freedom of the Jews? What is G-d's grand proclamation to herald the new freedom? "Take a sheep!" Take a sheep, watch it carefully, slaughter it, sprinkle its blood on your doorposts, eat it roasted—not raw or boiled—along with matzah and maror, burn the leftovers. Then . . . I'll kill all the firstborn, but if you have done as I say, I'll pass over your house and you'll be protected.

This is the greatness of freedom? Is this the purpose of "Let my people go?"

But it is.

After all, the complete pasuk is "Shlach et ami vayaavduni," "Let my people go that they may serve me." The Jewish view of freedom seems to be very different from the one we are used to.

Since G-d began with the commandment of mezuzah, of putting the blood on the doorpost, let us also begin there. What is the point of mezuzah? We may be surprised to discover that mezuzah was probably the first recorded act of civil disobedience. The Egyptians, like many pagan peoples, worshipped gods they saw in nature. They held certain animals sacred, for example. Among these was the sheep. To slaughter a sheep was not an action to be taken lightly. It was the ultimate affront to Egyptian sensibilities. To then proclaim it publicly, on the doorposts, to say, "I despise your gods and all you believe in," this took tremendous courage and self-confidence. Through the commandment of mezuzah, G-d required a Jew to stand up for his beliefs. To be redeemed, to be fit for redemption, one had to be able to say, "I'm a Jew, I'm confident of my beliefs, and I'll act as a Jew should act, even if it means putting myself on the line."

Now, let's take a look at matzah. Why eat matzah? Why are we commanded to destroy all leavening? The sayings of the sages bring out several themes in the idea of matzah. A return to matzah is a return to simplicity. We are to eliminate all the leavening which complicates life, which clouds the truth and hides the truly important. Matzah is called "lechem oni," humble bread. How is this? Leavening is compared to gaavah, hautiness. It makes something look bigger than it really is, it exaggerates its importance. Matzah counteracts this with humility: remember your humble beginnings, as you were a servant of the Egyptians. The Midrash says that the Jews ate matzah throughout their stay in Egypt, as this was the diet of slaves. Matzah tells us to ignore all we feel we have accomplished in our lives, and instead to remember that we were once servants of the Egyptians, eating matzah because we had no choice. Now, in contrast, we have freedom. What freedom is this? The freedom of will, the freedom to decide that I will eat matzah, not because I am forced

to as a servant of the Egyptians, but because I am proud to as a servant of G-d.

This pride in serving G-d is the message of mezuzah. The mezuzah marks our confidence that G-d will see it and watch over us. In fact, Pesach night is called "leil shimurim", the night of protection. G-d will redeem us from exile. He governs history and everything that happens to us. This is why the First Commandment is written as it is:

"Anochi Hashem Elokecha asher hotzeiticha meeretz mitzrayim mibeit avadim," "I am the L-rd your G-d who brought you out of Egypt from the house of slavery." In other words, I am the G-d of history, who is always concerned with your welfare. This is the fundamental pronouncement of Judaism. Not the rights to life, liberty and property. Not the freedoms of speech, assembly and the press. We have not the Ten Amendments of the Bill of Rights, but the Ten Commandments of Mount Sinai. The freedom we earned in Yetziat Mitzrayim is the freedom of mezuzah. It's the freedom of matzah. It's the freedom of will, to recognize G-d's great gifts to us and decide to do the right thing. G-d cares about our physical welfare and our spiritual welfare. He wants us to show our dedication through mezuzah and matzah. He cares about what we do, what we say, what we think. All we have we owe to Him: our food, our health, our very existence. In our immeasurable gratitude, we rush to follow his wishes, as we later say at Sinai: Na'aseh v'Nishma. We will do what is right because it is right, regardless of what it may be.

Our commitment to doing what is right began with mezuzah, but it certainly does not end there. It does not even end with the 613 mitzvot. Rather, every action we make should be done with the recognition that G-d is watching and cares about us. It is interesting to note that Biblical Hebrew has no word for the concept of religion. Judaism cannot conceive of compartmentalizing our lives, devoting only part of our attentions to G-d, and what is termed as religion. Our commitment to Torah must be recognizable in all our actions at all times. We do not have one standard for the synagogue, one for the office, one for the home, and one for the golf course. Everything about us - how we dress, how we talk, how we work, how we deal with our friends and colleagues, how we use our time, how we eat our meals - everything should say, "I'm Jewish, and I love G-d, and I am doing my best to serve Him in all aspects of my life."

