

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI DOV KRAMER**

### Taking a Closer Look

**W**ith no Shabbos Chol haMoed this year, we will be reading the Megillah of Shir haShirim on the 7th day of Pesach (Passover), as it is also Shabbos. While the connection between Megillas Esther and Purim is obvious, as well as that between Megillas Eichah and Tisha beAv, the reading of Megillas Shir haShirim on Pesach is much less obvious.

As the "love" portrayed in this "Song of Songs" is an analogy for the relationship between G-d and the Nation of Israel, many understand the connection to simply be that the "inaugurating experience" that made the "Children of Israel" into the "Nation of Israel" was the Exodus from Egypt. It would therefore seem appropriate to read the Megillah that poetically describes this relationship during our celebration of the beginning of this relationship.

At one point in Shir haShirim (3:11), Shelomo refers to "the day of His wedding" and "the day of His heart's happiness." Our sages have given numerous explanations for which "days" Shelomo is referring to. The Talmud (Taanis 26b) says that the "wedding" is the giving of the Torah and the "happiness" refers to the Temple being consecrated. The midrashim (e.g. Shemos Rabbah 52:5) add additional possibilities, such as Sinai/Jerusalem (which may refer to the same things as the Talmud), the sea/the Tent of Meeting, and the Mishkan/the Temple. Other combinations are also given (see Vayikra Rabbah 20:10 and Bamidbar Rabbah 2:26 and 12:8), where Sinai is alternatively paired with the Tent of Meeting, with the giving of the Torah (which is interesting in that it makes "Sinai" an occasion in and of itself - besides receiving the Torah there), and with "Words of Torah" (which may be the same as the "giving" of the Torah, but may refer to teaching and learning Torah - that G-d's "day of happiness" is any and every day that we learn His Torah). None of these are comparing the exodus from Egypt to either the "wedding day" or to the "day of happiness" though.

**Wishing a refuah shelaimah to  
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Nevertheless, the exodus can be considered the "day of engagement," and it would therefore be appropriate to read about the "love story" on the "anniversary" of the "engagement." However, with the splitting of the sea occurring on the 7th day of Passover, and the Mishkan being consecrated in Nissan - and both of these being compared to either the "wedding day" or the "day of happiness" - these milestones in the relationship may also be part of the reason why we read Shir haShirim on Passover.

Tosfos says that the reason we read Shir haShirim on Pesach is because it has 117 verses, corresponding to the 117 times that the exodus from Egypt is mentioned in the Torah, and the 117 years from the time that Levi died - when the oppression started - until they left Egypt.

In his introduction to Shir haShirim, Rashi says that "Shelomo, through divine inspiration, saw that Israel would eventually experience exile after exile, destruction after destruction. In this exile, they would mourn for their original honor and remember the earlier affection when they were [G-d's] treasured nation. They would [then] say 'I will go and return to my first husband (i.e. G-d) for things were better than they are now,' and they will remember His kindness [to them] and how they had acted treacherously towards Him, and [remember] all of the good things that He had promised to give them at the end of time."

Rashi continues by saying that this "love story" has a happy ending, as the husband (G-d) still loves the bride even after she was sent away (i.e. suffers in exile), and was awaiting her return to him (i.e. Him, through repentance) when they would resume their relationship.

In this context, it is rather easy to understand why Shir haShirim is read on Pesach. After spending the first night(s) reliving the exodus, and discussing - at length - all of the miracles that G-d performed to personally (not through a messenger) take us out of Egypt and under his wings, we are hit with the cold reality that we don't enjoy that relationship anymore. The contrast is much more stark than any other time of the year, so our sages told us to read Shir haShirim in order to console us, to help us realize that even if G-d is only watching us from a distance (see 2:9), the relationship still has hope. We may no longer enjoy the same relationship we once had - and relived just a few nights ago - but we can, and we will.

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Just as Koheles is read on Succos after the completion of the harvest season to remind us that physical plenty has no intrinsic value (if it is not used for a higher purpose), Shir haShirim is read on Pesach to counter the possible despondency of realizing how far our relationship (as a nation) with G-d has fallen.

As this month of Nissan comes to a close, let's hope - and pray - that the ultimate redemption is close at hand, and try to do everything we can to restore our relationship to its former glory. © 2005 Rabbi D. Kramer

#### **RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

## **Shabbat Shalom**

**“T**he Lord will do battle for you and you shall be silent" (Exodus 14:14).

The last day of the festival of Passover is dedicated to the splitting of the Reeds Sea, one of the most dramatic and cataclysmic events in Biblical history. The Israelites have left Egypt and believe they are "home-free"; however, the Egyptian hordes change their mind and begin to chase after the newly formed free men. The Israelites, faced by the Egyptians behind them and the Reed Sea in front of them, panic-and in their fear they cry out to Moses, "Are there then no graves in Egypt that you have taken us out to die in the desert?!" (Exodus 14:11). Moses attempts to comfort his people, exhorting them not to fear but rather to watch for Divine salvation "The Lord will do battle for you and you shall be silent" (Exodus 14:14).

But is this indeed the religious message of the Exodus? Does the Almighty expect us to stand quietly by in times of danger and challenge, simply waiting for the Almighty to emerge as a *deus ex machina* plucking us out from the fires of our enemies? Is such silence on our part consistent with Jewish History, and especially with these last six decades following the Holocaust? Where would the Jewish people be today had we not

attempted to take our destiny into our own hands and fought battle after battle for the Jewish State?

Indeed, the classical Hassidic interpreters have turned the verse we've just cited on its head by providing an alternate literal interpretation:

"The Lord will provide you with bread (the Hebrew *yilakhem* can mean to do battle but can also mean to provide bread from the Hebrew *lekhem*; most wars are after all fought after bread or material gain) but you must plow (the Hebrew *heresh* can either mean to be silent or to plow)." (Exodus 14:14) And although this reading of the verse would seem to be the very antithesis of its meaning in context, it is nevertheless the true meaning of this most dramatic miracle. Yes, Moses expected G-d to act and counsel the Israelites to silently await G-d's miracle. But that is not the message that G-d conveys to Moses in the very next verse of the text: "And G-d said to Moses, 'Why are you crying out to me? Speak to the children of Israel and let them move forward.'" (Exodus 14:15). G-d is ready to effectuate a miracle, but not before the Israelites prove themselves by putting their lives on the line. Before G-d does anything, the Israelites must jump into the raging sea and attempt as best as possible to get away from the Egyptians. It is only after the children of Israel have entered into the midst of the sea-despite its inherent dangers-that the waters will miraculously part and the Israelites will find themselves "on dry land." (Exodus 14:16). Rashi even goes as far as saying in G-d's name, "This is not the time to engage in lengthy prayer when the Israelites are in such deep trouble." When the going gets tough, tough people get going; from G-d's point of view, prayer must be coupled with action. From this perspective, the Hassidim may be literally wrong but conceptually right.

I believe there is yet a second interpretation of Moses' statement to the Israelites that G-d will do battle and they remain silent. Perhaps Moses understood very well that although the ultimate victor in Israel's battles is the Almighty Himself-"The Lord is a Being of battle, the Lord is His name" (Exodus 15:3) -- nevertheless, G-d does not fight alone. He battles alongside of the Israelites, but the Israelites themselves must wage the war. They were frightened to take on the seven indigenous nations inhabiting Canaan during their first forty years in the desert, so G-d did not make war either. It was only in the case of Amalek and then later in the time of Joshua that Israel fought-and then G-d fought with them and led them to victory.

However, every war is a tragedy because the fallout of every war is the cruel and untimely death of the best and brightest of our people. Yes, we won the wars against Amalek, just as we won the wars in conquest of Israel four thousand years ago; we also won our recent wars of self defense enabling us to come home after 2,000 years of exile and establish Jewish Sovereignty in Jerusalem. But despite these miraculous victories, we suffered unspeakable losses of

so many of our best and brightest and bravest and most committed.

In 1952 I was privileged to pray in the Beth Moses hospital, which had been taken over by the Klozenberger Hassidim who had survived the European Holocaust. That particular Sabbath was the first Sabbath circumcision the Hassidim had experienced since leaving Europe. The Rebbe, who himself suffered the loss of his wife and 13 children, rose to speak—"And I see that you are rooted in your blood (damayikh) and I say to you, by your blood shall you live, by your blood shall you live." This verse of the Prophet Ezekiel is intoned at every Jewish circumcision, explaining to us that the price for our eternity is the necessity that we shed blood on behalf of our G-d, our faith and our ideals. However, I would give the verse an alternate interpretation. The Hebrew word dam is usually translated as blood; but the root d-m can also mean silence, as in "vayidom Aharon," and Aaron was silent, when his two righteous sons died a tragic and untimely death. I believe the prophet Ezekiel was telling us that when Jews suffer, and even seem to suffer needlessly, tragically and absurdly, but still remain silent and refuse to cry out against G-d, we express with that silence the profound inner strength which justifies our eternal life. "I see that you are rooted in your silence and I say to you that because of that silence do you live." Perhaps this is what Moses was saying to the Jewish people: yes, the Lord will wage battle for you, and some very good Israelites will tragically die in battle, but you must still remain silent in terms of your relationship to G-d. It is by the faith of that silence that you will live eternally and ultimately redeem the world. © 2005 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

#### **RABBI MAYER TWERSKY**

### **TorahWeb**

**T**he yom tov of Pesach has two foci: emunah and masorah. The belief and knowledge of Hakadosh Baruch Hu is predicated upon our experience of yetzias Mitzrayim. "I am Hashem, your God, who has taken you out of the land of Mitzrayim, from the house of slavery" (Shemos 20:2). "The basic principle of all principles and the pillar of all sciences is to realize that there is a First Being who brought every existing thing into being... To know this truth is a mitzvas aseh, as it is said, 'I am Hashem your God,...'" (Rambam Yesodei HaTorah 1:1,6.) In Mitzrayim, we witnessed Hashem's providence over the world, and were taught about reward and punishment.

When we fulfill the daily mitzvah of zechiras yetzias Mitzrayim we remind ourselves of the lessons of faith, and re-affirm our faith (Vide Ramban, end of parshas Bo). And on Pesach when we re-experience yetzias Mitzrayim, we relive these vivid lessons of faith. Thus we are privileged to have the mitzvah of achilas matzah, in the oft quoted words of the Zohar Hakadosh,

bread of faith. As such, the yom tov of Pesach is a time especially conducive to cultivating and deepening our emunah in Hashem.

The second focus of Pesach is masorah, transmitting and teaching our emunah. "And you shall tell your son on that day saying, 'it is because of this that Hashem acted on my behalf when I left Mitzrayim' "(Shemos 13:8). "The Torah speaks with reference to four sons..."

In truth, these two foci are inextricably linked; shteyim she'hein achas. The symbiotic relationship between emunah and masroah can and should be understood on different levels. The most basic level is this. Parents (and educators) want to give their children the absolute best. They want to equip their children for the future, for life. They want to give their children what is most important, most precious. Accordingly, a genuine ma'amin strives to transmit his emunah to his children/disciples. Emunah is the lens through which life should be viewed, understood and experienced. Emunah provides an unfailing guide to how life should be lived.

But the symbiotic relationship between emunah and masroah, anochi and v'higadeta l'bincha reaches deeper. Emunah provides an all-encompassing vision of the past, present, and future. The world was created for Torah, for the Jewish people who accepted and live Torah. Life does not merely muddle along. Life-existence-is purposeful, and the ultimate purpose is "I'sakein olam b'malchus shakai".

For this reason masorah is a pivotal, indispensable component of emunah. In transmitting our faith to future generations, we sow the seeds of geulah, "I'sakein olam b'malchus shakai". One who experiences "anochi Hashem Elokecha" must translate and channel that experience into "v'higadeta l'bincha".

Ramban, in his hasagosto Rambam's Sefer HaMitzvos, emphasizes this link between emunah and masorah. It is, writes the Ramban, a mitzvas lo sa'aseh to never forget ma'amad Har Sinai which is the basis of our emunah in Torah. This mitzvah, according to Ramban, also entails transmitting that memory and concomitant belief to future generations. Emunah and masorah are inseparable.

Avraham Avinu was a paragon, and hence is a paradigm, of faith. He triumphed, Chazal teach us, over ten nisyonos. His life was an odyssey of emunah. And yet, the Torah chooses one particular moment to describe him as a ma'amin. The Torah records Avraham Avinu's reaction to Hashem's promise that he, despite being barren and already at an advanced age, will yet father a child who will inherit his legacy. Avraham Avinu's reaction: "v'he'emin b'Hashem- and he believed in Hashem". It is only at this juncture when Hashem promises him a child that Avraham Avinu is given the opportunity to manifest complete emunah-emunah with a vision for the future.

A Jew is called upon to live a life of emunah, anchored in the past of "asher hotzeiticha mai'Eretz Mitzrayim" and confident of a future of "I'sakein olam b'malchus shakai". © 2005 Rabbi M. Twersky & TorahWeb.org

### **MACHON ZOMET**

## **Shabbat B'Shabbato**

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak

In several places in the Torah, we are told to eat matza for seven days during Pesach. In the portion of Bo, it is written, "For seven days, you shall eat matzot" [Shemot 12:15]. In the passage describing the holidays in the portion of Emor, the same thing is repeated, "For seven days, you shall eat matzot" [Vayikra 23:6]. And similarly, in Re'eih, "For seven days, eat matzot with it" [Devarim 16:3]. However, one time there is an exception to this pattern. In the continuation of the passage in Devarim, it is written, "For six days you shall eat matzot, and on the seventh day there shall be a pause dedicated to your G-d, do not do any work" [16:8]. This verse seems to imply that eating matza on the seventh day is not an observance of a mitzva (as opposed to the first six days, when there is no obligation to eat matza, although it does involve the observance of a mitzva, according to the opinion of the GRA and others). How can we reconcile what seems to be a contradiction between the different verses about the status of the seventh day of the holiday?

This question is even more powerful when we take into account other verses that are worded in a way very similar to the last verse above. For example, see the command about the manna: "Gather it for six days, and on the seventh day it will not appear" [Shemot 16:26]. Another example is the prohibition of working on Shabbat: "Do your activities for six days, and on the seventh day you shall rest" [23:12]. These and other verses clearly imply that this sentence structure denotes a contrast between the first six days and the seventh day which follows.

Evidently the second verse in the portion of Re'eih is related to a unique aspect of the seventh day of Pesach. This is the only verse which calls this day "atzeret"-a pause. This name is applied in other verses in the Torah only to the eighth day of Succot. Examples are, "The eighth day will be called holy by you, and you shall offer a sacrifice to G-d, it is an 'atzeret'" [Vayikra 23:36], and "The eighth day will be an 'atzeret' for you" [Bamidbar 29:35]. There is a difference between Shemini Atzeret, at the end of Succot, and the seventh day of Pesach. The mitzvot of Succot are not observed at all on Shemini Atzeret, mitzvot such as dwelling in a Succah and taking hold of the four species. And this explains the significance of the day as "a pause"- it is a day that signifies the end of the holiday while it is not an integral part of it. "I have kept you with me, like a king who invited his sons to a festive banquet for a number

of days. When the time came for them to leave, he said, my sons, I beg of you, remain with me for one more day, to separate is hard for me." [Rashi, Vayikra 23:36].

Thus, we can see that the seventh day of Pesach is significant in two ways. The first approach, the one most common in the Torah, sees this day as an integral part of the holiday, with the first and seventh days serving as the limits of the holiday: "You shall eat matzot for seven days... and on the first day you shall declare it holy, and on the seventh day you shall declare it holy" [Shemot 12:15-16]. On the other hand, the second verse in Devarim is from a different viewpoint, looking at the seventh day of Pesach as a pause. Even if there would be no mitzva to eat matza on this day, just as the mitzvot of Succot are no longer valid on Shemini Atzeret, the day would still have a unique significance, as the "atzeret" of the holiday of Pesach. In this way, the Torah takes note of the two aspects of the last day of the holiday.

### **"Then Moshe Will Sing"**

by Gael Grunewald, World Secretary of Bnei Akiva

Shirat Hayam, the epic poem on the shores of the Red Sea, opens with the words, "Then Moshe and Bnei Yisrael will sing..." [Shemot 15:1]. Rabbi Zevin, in his book "On the Torah and the Holidays," discusses the meaning of the word "az"-then. Moshe seemed to fail after his first meeting with Pharaoh, when the king commanded, "Do not give the nation any more straw in order to make bricks as you did yesterday and the day before" [Shemot 5:7]. It is not hard to imagine the crisis felt by the leader of the nation in view of the tragic results of his mission and in light of the reaction by the people. Therefore, he turned to G-d, saying, "U'mei'az-From the time I came to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he made things worse for this nation" [5:23].

The Midrash compares the two uses of the word "az," when Moshe began his mission and later on at the Red Sea. It would seem that Moshe was wrong not to take the long range view, and that he found it difficult to internalize the fact that the process of redemption included suffering and oppression. The epic poem of Shirat Hayam serves as a way to mend the fault of Moshe's inability to bridge the two periods, the oppression and the redemption.

The Talmud notes, "It is not written 'he sang' but 'he will sing'-this is a proof of resurrection in the Torah" [Sanhedring 91b]. Anybody who has a complete vision of history as a single unified process ("Haro'eh"-see the last chapter of Berachot, currently studied in the Daf Yomi) should be able to link the different links in the process into a single chain.

The obligation to give thanks to G-d in our generation stems not only from the anticipation of what will happen in the future, as is written, "the people lost in the land of Ashur and the downtrodden in the land of Egypt will come and bow down to G-d on the holy mountain, in Jerusalem" [Yeshayahu 27:13]. Rather, our

appreciation is related to the good that we have received in our generation, in spite of the accompanying difficulties, both internal and external. The process of the return to Zion has brought tens of thousands of Jews back to our land and to our traditions, and it is hard to imagine what the spiritual situation of the nation would be if not for the return of the people to the promised land. As one example, the tragedy of assimilation that is so widespread-almost as if "there is no house that does not have a dead person" [Shemot 12:30] -- would be much more serious if not for the existence of the State of Israel.

Let us hope and pray that we will be privileged to adopt the words of Rabbi A.Y. Kook, "There is no reason to be sorry at all or to despair because of the spirit of nationalism which is steadily growing. Even the faults that it causes along its path will eventually become part of renewed construction and mending of the path." [Orot Hatechiya].

#### **RABBI NOSSON CHAYIM LEFF**

### **Sfas Emes**

**T**he Sfas Emes on Pesach is very rich: 69 double-columned pages in small Rashi script. The Sfas Emes has so much to say on Pesach that my best effort to transmit here is like taking a spoonful of water from the ocean.

Why do I mention how much more Sfas Emes is available? Because being aware of how much more Sfas Emes is out there, some members of this Chabura may realize that the time has come to purchase their own set of Sfas Emes. I suggest that you view this purchase as an investment in mind-stretching Divrei Torah- an afikoman present for the entire family. Owning your own copy of the Sfas Emes will increase your access to his ideas. And better access to the ideas of the Sfas Emes will help you (and your family) avoid a malady to which observant Jews are all too susceptible-religious stagnation.

Before we begin this ma'amar, it helps to have an idea of what to expect. The ma'amar is crafted along three themes: past and present; the individual and the klal (the collectivity); emes (provable truth) and emuna (unprovable truth). These three themes weave in and out of the ma'amar, giving it a rare beauty. Finally, toward the end of the ma'amar, expect an extraordinary khap- intellectual coup-such that only the Sfas Emes could deliver.

In his very first ma'amar on Pesach, the Sfas Emes quotes a text from the Haggada: "Bechol dor vador chayav (!) ahdam lir'os es atzmo ke'ilu HU yatza miMitzrayim." That is, in each generation, a person must (!) view himself as having personally experienced the Redemption from Egypt. The Sfas Emes takes this mandate seriously., This leads to a basic question: what should a person do to reach this esired-more accurately: mandated-goal? The Sfas Emes answers

that a two-step process is involved. The first step is to realize that, in reality, every generation experiences its own version of the Redemption from Egypt. With that belief under our belt., the Sfas Emes tells us, we can in fact relive the original, prototypical ge'ula as a personal experience.

The Sfas Emes now elaborates on this idea: i.e., that we are enjoined to relive the experience of our Liberation from Egypt. That Liberation involved much more than escape from physical and political subordination to the Egyptians. Redemption also included escape from the tum'a of Egyptian culture and intellectual life.

Continuing with this theme of experiencing Redemption, the Sfas Emes quotes a statement of the Maharal. The Maharal tells us that "bevadai" ("certainly") we all participated in the experience of the Redemption from Egypt as a klal (i.e., the Jewish People as a collectivity). But the Haggada is telling us more than the fact that we experienced Redemption as a collectivity. In mandating: "ke'ilu HU yatzami Mitzrayim", the Haggada is telling us that we must also experience Liberation on an individual, personal level.

How does a person achieve that much more difficult goal of reliving the Redemption from Egypt at an individual, personal level? The Sfas Emes answers: by joining the collectivity. (Note: The idea that an individual can achieve personal religious fulfillment by joining the collectivity is a startling paradox. Anyone but the Sfas Emes would steer clear of such an apparent internal contradiction. By contrast, the Sfas Emes explicitly recognizes the seeming inconsistencies that HaShem built into the world. In fact, he gives them center stage.)

How does an individual become part of the collectivity? With emuna! by truly believing that we were redeemed from the galus of Mitzrayim, we can re-live the actual experience. Once we affirm our membership in the collectivity, we can access this experience on an individual basis. A fair question here is: how does this process work (in the real world)? That is, how does having emuna enable an individual to become part of a collectivity?

I suggest the following explanation. By definition, emuna involves affirmation of ideas that cannot be proven. Hence, choosing to accept a given set of ideas sets a person apart from people who do not give credence to those ideas. By the same token, choosing to accept those ideas puts the person together with people who affirm the same thoughts as he. Thus, affirming a set of unprovable ideas-i.e., emuna-enables an individual to join the collectivity of klal Yisroel. (Notice how commonsensical are these ideas of the Sfas Emes once we make the effort to take them seriously.)

The Sfas Emes has articulated two conditions for experiencing personal liberation. He makes it clear that both conditions involve emuna; i.e. affirmation of an unprovable truth. Note that mesora (father to

offspring tradition) is not enough for the Sfas Emes. As he sees the world, emuna is necessary to arrive at the emes. What are the two conditions for which- in this context-emuna is required? A person must view himself as having participated (past tense) in the Redemption. And he/she must have the emuna to recognize that, were it not for the Redemption, he/she would not have a relationship with HaShem. With these two emuna conditions satisfied, a person will realize that indeed he is (present tense) being liberated.

We can now sum up on this line of analysis. The Sfas Emes has told us that every generation has its 'Yetzi'as Mitzrayim' (Exodus from Egypt). The Redemption varies with the specific situation and needs of the generation. (Note: Redemption implies prior enslavement. What do you see as the nature of enslavement of the present generation?) Further, the Sfas Emes has told us that, to the degree that a person has emuna that he experienced (past tense) the Liberation from Egypt, so too, can he feel (present tense) the Redemption of his own generation. And so, too, can each individual experience Liberation from his own personal constraints.

"Constraints"? How did "constraints" get into this discussion? The answer stretches one's mind, for it is a typical Sfas Emes chidush. To understand the answer, we must go back to basics. The word "Mitzrayim:" is usually translated as "Egypt." But with ko'ach ha'chidush such as only the Sfas Emes can deploy, he reads the word "Mitzrayim" in a totally innovative way. The Hebrew word "meitzar" means "constraint" or "limit". The Sfas Emes is reading "Mitzrayim" as being the plural of of the word "metizar". Thus, "yetzi'as mitzrayim" has become: "liberation from one's constraints". The Sfas Emes does not spell out what he has specifically in mind when he refers to personal constraints that Pesach teaches us can be overcome. I suggest that he is referring to long-standing attitudes, ingrained assumptions, and habits that too often constrain a person's growth.

A final question. Viewing Pesach as a time for Liberation from one's personal constraints is fine and good if the constraints are in fact loosened. But does it make sense to talk of "Liberation" in a case where the constraints are NOT loosened? For example, consider a case in which the constraint derives- cholilo (God forbid) -- from an incurable medical handicap. Does the Sfas Emes's perspective on Pesach as a time for Liberation from a person's individual constraints apply there too?

I believe the answer is: yes! How so? A major theme in the Sfas Emes's Torah is the need to pierce the Hester with which HaShem cloaks Himself. Piercing the Hester enables a person to view reality accurately. A prominent case in which the Sfas Emes applies this insight is in the context of seeing the hand of HaShem where an untutored eye would see only Nature (teva).

This observation implies that the Sfas Emes's perspective certainly does apply to the case of the person afflicted with an incurable handicap. Knowledge that his condition comes from HaShem (rather than from mindless Nature) implies that his condition is purposeful. This awareness gives meaning to what the person is undergoing. It transforms his experience, and makes it a wholly different condition. Thus, getting the metaphysics of the situation right provides Liberation in its own special way.

This Sfas Emes is rich-in fact, so rich that one cannot hold on to it. One way to handle this situation of overflowing insights is to focus on some thoughts that speak to one with special force. Tastes, interests, and background vary, so there is no single list of Sfas Emes thoughts that will serve for everyone. But to stimulate your own thinking about "take home" Sfas Emes thoughts, here are two suggestions. One unique and powerful Sfas Emes idea is the notion that every generation experiences its own enslavement and Redemption. Another powerful new idea is the thought that Pesach is a time for individuals to break out of their personal constraints and grow. © 2005 Rabbi N. C. Leff & torah.org

**RABBI PESACH LERNER**

## **National Council of Young Israel**

**T**he Talmud (Tractate Sanhedrin 91A) relates that when Alexander the Great conquered the land of Israel, the Egyptians came to Alexander and lodged a long standing complaint against the Jews. It is written in the Torah, they declared, that when the Israelites left Egypt they borrowed gold and silver vessels from our ancestors; so far these items have not been returned. We now demand that this debt be repaid.

One of the Sages of Israel, Gabiha ben Pessissa, undertook the defense of its countrymen before Alexander the Great. It is true, he said, that this debt is still outstanding but we have a counter claim. The Torah says 'and the sojourn of the Jewish people in Egypt lasted 430 years (Exodus 12:40-41). 600,000 Jews worked for the Egyptians for 430 years and received no wages. Settle this account, said Gabiha ben Pessissa, and we will return the gold and silver our ancestors borrowed. The enormous sum demanded by the Jews deterred the Egyptians from pressing their claim (in fact, the Talmud explains that, due to the counter-claim, the Egyptians fled their homes and left their full fields and vineyards to their Jewish neighbors).

In connection with this episode discussed in the Talmud, Rabbi Shmuel Ideles (often referred to as the MaHarsha) poses a difficult question. How could Gabiha ben Pessissa suggest that the Jewish People were entitled to the wages of 600,000 workers for a

period of 430 years? In truth, the Jews did not remain in Egypt for more than 210 years and the actual period of slave labor was only for 86 years. Was Gabiha ben Pessissa not concerned to be challenged and have his counter-claim dismissed?

Rabbi Dr. Marcus Lehmann of Mainz, Germany (circa 1850) answers the MaHarshas question as follows: The Torah tells us (Exodus 13:18), and the Children of Israel went up 'Chamushim- armed- out of the land of Egypt. The great commentator, Rashi, provides another explanation to the word 'Chamushim- a fifth. Only a fifth, 20%, of the Jewish people left Egypt whereas four-fifth of them died and were buried, in Egypt, during the three days of darkness. Therefore, since the number of the Jewish people that left Egypt included 600,000 working males, there must have been five times that amount- 3 million- during the years of Egyptian bondage. Thus 3 million Jewish male workers served the Egyptian nation for the 86 years of actual servitude. It all equals out; whether 600,000 worked for 430 years or 3 million worked for 86 years, Gabiha ben Pessissa had no reason to fear a challenge by the Egyptians. Had they countered his claim by contending that the Jews had labored for only 86 years, his reply would have been obvious.

Rabbi Dr. Lehmann adds a beautiful addition to his answer of the MaHarshas question. The custom, at the Pesach Seder, is to drink four cups of wine in commemoration of the four expressions of freedom and deliverance the Jewish nation experienced, and I will bring you out... and I will deliver you... and I will redeem you... and I will take you to Me as a people...(Exodus 6:6-7).

Another reason for four cups of wine, explains Rabbi Dr. Lehmann, is as follows: The servitude of the Jewish people was originally intended to last 430 years, five times the actual 86 years. There were four periods of 86 years that we did not work. We raise our cups of wine once for each one of those periods of 86 years. We praise the Al-Mighty for His deliverance of four sets of 86 years each time with a Kos, a cup of wine. The Gematria, the numerical value of the word Kos is 86. With our Kos of 86 we thank Hashem for His deliverance of an 86 year period.

Not Just How, But When

The Wise Son- what does he say? When your son asks you on the morrow, saying, what are the testimonies, statutes and ordinances that HaShem, our G-d, has commanded you. (Deuteronomy 6:20)

The Wicked Son- what does he say? What is this service for you? (Exodus 12:26)

What is the difference between the Wise Son and the Wicked Son? Both address the question- what are the testimonies, this service- using the second person pronoun you, seemingly excluding themselves.

The answer commonly given is that the difference is not indicated by the second person pronoun but by the fact that the Wise Son said

HaShem, our G-d. The Wise Son clearly accepts that HaShem is his G-d. The Wicked Son, on the other hand, leaves G-d out of his discussion. Another interpretation, perhaps, lies in not only how the question is asked but also when the question is asked.

It is the Wise Son who inquires into the nature of the various commandments. The Wise Son participates in the Pesach Seder. He has joined in the eating of Matzoh and Maror. He was part of the discussion of the Hagada and the miracles that occurred to the Jewish People. His inquiry into the reasons of the Commandments follows his involvement- when your son asks you on the morrow... Please explain to me that which we have already performed. The Wise Son believes in the Torah and our traditions. The Wise Sons lack of understanding does not prevent him from his performance of the Mitzvot. The Wicked Son, on the other hand, poses his challenge to this service before the Pesach Seder has even begun. To the Wicked Son, our traditions are foreign unless he fully understands and agrees with their importance and relevance to his lifestyle. For the Wicked Son, there is no acceptance or trust; to him the Torah responds had he been in Egypt he would not have been redeemed.

In Judaism, we are taught to question and challenge- but only once we have accepted the premise. We say at the end of davening every Shabbos and Yom Tov, Ain Kelokainu, ain Kadoneinu- there is none like our G-d, there is none like our Master. It would be more logical to first ask Me KeloKainu, me Kadoneinu- who is like our G-d? Who is like our Master?- and then respond. However, in Judaism, we must first accept G-ds sovereignty as our foundation and then, as the Wise Son did, ask all our questions.

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### RABBI AVI WEISS

## Shabbat Forshpeis

**T**he reading of Shir Ha-Shirim (The Song of Songs) at the end of Passover points to an interesting phenomena. The seder actually has many beginnings and also many endings. In fact, its final conclusion may not be reached until days later in the reading of the Shir Ha-Shirim. Let me explain.

The seder is fundamentally made up of eating, telling the Exodus story and praising God. In each section there are many starts.

We wash our hands but do not fully do so as we recite no blessing. We break the matzah but alas do not follow through with eating. We partake of the karpas, a kind of hors d'oeuvre but do not continue eating the meal.

The same holds true in the story telling section of the seder. We hear the Four Questions only to break before another set of questions are asked by the four children. We begin to tell the story of the Exodus with

the paragraph, "we were slaves in Egypt" (avadim ha-yinu) only to halt by beginning a second telling of the story with "in the beginning, we were idol worshippers" (mi-tehillah).

Similarly, we begin praising God by reciting the first two paragraphs of Hallel. The end of the Hallel, however, is not recited until after the actual seder meal.

Rabbi Dr. Samuel Belkin, former president of Yeshiva University, whose 25th Yahrzeit is being celebrated this year (*this dvar torah is from 2001-ed.*), once observed that the famous phrase "all beginnings are difficult" (kol hathalot kashot) is in the plural. He notes that the statement may refer to one single venture that may require many different beginnings in order to succeed. So, the great rabbi told me, when I expressed to him my struggles in the beginning of my rabbinic career. "Have patience," he said, "when beginning any enterprise there are invariably stumbling blocks, but this should be no cause for undue pessimism."

As there are many starts in the seder, so are there many conclusions. It is difficult to say goodbye to an experience of great meaning. Thus, the seder comes to its official conclusion after we complete the Great Hallel. But, in subsequent centuries, prayers and songs were added.

In fact, some recite the Shir Ha-Shirim after the Haggadah is completed. Reading this love letter between God and the Jewish people is yet another example of our hesitant feeling in parting after the intense experience of the seder. This resistance to separation is expressed even stronger in the fact that the reading of Shir Ha-Shirim is most commonly recited days after the seder night. Its recitation finally completes the seder experience.

As there are many beginnings in life experiences, so too are there many ends. It is also so difficult to say goodbye. Like the individual I spoke to recently who told me of the great difficulty sitting down for the seder during this, the first year of mourning for a parent. Truth be told, that first year includes many goodbyes; the ending of Shiva, the first Shabbat or the first Passover night without ones beloved. The process of goodbye continues into future years as we say goodbye over and over when reciting Yizkor or on the anniversary of death (Yahrzeit).

It reminds me of the deep struggle my family faced many years ago when we lost an infant child. I'll never forget the empathy of Dr. Belkin, and the deep meaning of his seemingly simple words: "I know, saying goodbye is difficult." For me, Dr. Belkin was a rebbe displaying deep feeling for his student. His words keep resonating as I grow older. When a child is lost, one doesn't only mourn what was, but every day one mourns what could have been.

For the good and for the bad, that's the way it is in life. Beginnings and ends don't always come in neat, clean packages. Often we start only to start all over

and sometimes we end, only to end again and again.

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**RABBI ARI WEISS**

## Where's Moshe?

**T**his year, like every year, as we read through the Hagaddah, we wonder why Moshe is not mentioned. One would think that Moshe, through whom all of the plagues were brought, and whom Hashem commanded to lead us out of Egypt would be the central character at our seder. Wasn't it through him that our redemption occurred? Yet, we find no trace of Moshe's name anywhere.

In order to understand why Moshe is in the background during our seder, we must examine the content of maggid. Maggid outlines the story of our redemption and actually retells the story of every exile we've gone through and will go through. In maggid we read of the prototypical exile and redemption that generalizes all of our exiles and redemptions. The Baal Hagadah presents this in the form of four P'sukim which are expounded upon during maggid. The first verse describes our descent into exile, and how it was intended for but a short time. The second verse describes how the Egyptians oppressed and afflicted us. The third verse describes how we finally called out to Hashem to help us, and the final verse describes our redemption.

These four verses can therefore be seen as the outline of golus and geula. We first go into exile, are oppressed, cry out to Hashem for help, and he answers by saving us. This is the model for all redemptions, including our final one (IY"H). But what happened to Moshe - the Moshiach? The Gemara at the end of Sanhedrin underscores the importance and requirement of Moshiach in our redemption. Yet the Baal Hagadah neglects to mention Moshiach as one of the elements of Golus and Geula.

It is very possible, then, that the Baal Hagadah is focusing on our role in the Geula and how we can help to bring it about. We read, therefore, in the maggid how Hashem listened to our calls, saw our afflictions, our toils, and our troubles. It wasn't until we cried out to Hashem in tefillah that we were saved. We finally realized that we couldn't do it ourselves and could only be saved through Hashem's intervention. But the Baal Hagadah goes on to explain that the Passuk also refers to the children. Hashem came to redeem us because of our tefillos and because of the Jewish identity instilled in the children.

So why isn't Moshe mentioned? Because Moshiach is Hashem's "job." Ours, as is recalled in the Hagaddah, is Tefillah and the home. When we uphold our end, Hashem will bring about the Geula in whatever way He sees fit.