

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

JEWISH WORLD REVIEW

Fast-food at the Seder?

by Rabbi Harvey Belovski

<http://www.JewishWorldReview.com>

And now the fifth question - when do we eat? This question, a joke of course, should actually help us to focus on a vital Passover theme: the extent of our ability to delay gratification for a higher purpose.

More than just a commemoration, every festival is intended to help us recapture a major event of Jewish history and internalise its message. As the Exodus was the moment of the founding of the Jewish people, Passover is an opportunity to consider what it means to be a member of the Jewish nation. What character traits are we to inculcate and which areas of personal growth are we to spotlight at this time of year? What will we have gained from all the intense preparations, from the Seders, the vast expense and effort? If all we will be left with after Passover is exhaustion and a few extra pounds to shed, will it be worthwhile?

The ability to delay gratification is a key determinant of adult human behaviour; it distinguishes us from everything else in the world. Animals are driven by irrepressible needs; hunger, fear, the urge to reproduce. Once a need arises, its fulfilment becomes paramount; all energies are channelled into its realisation. Babies are scarcely different; when little Jimmy is hungry, tired, cold or has a dirty diaper, nothing will divert him from screaming until he gets what he wants.

In contrast, adults have a sense of higher meaning and value, which can often be strong enough to enable us to delay realising our immediate personal needs in lieu of achieving something of greater overall significance. There are dozens of examples of this phenomenon, ranging from the simple decision not to eat another piece of chocolate, to complex life-choices in which personal needs are completely marginalised in favour of national or even world improvement. This is, of course, a function of the struggle between the physical and spiritual drives; while Judaism prioritises the harmonisation of the two, there are occasions in life when the higher, spiritual yearnings must overcome and sublimate the lower, physical needs. The extent to which we are capable of doing this determines just how successful we really are as human beings.

As popular psychologist M. Scott Peck puts it. 'Delaying gratification is a process of scheduling the pain and pleasure of life in such a way as to enhance the pleasure by meeting and experiencing the pain first and getting it over with.' (The Road Less Traveled) I think that Jewish sources would view it quite differently. While initially there may be a sense that one is scheduling the pain before the pleasure, the capacity to do so is one of the most profound human achievements, one that transforms the 'pain' into purpose and possibly a higher form of pleasure itself.

While central to meaningful human experience, the ability to delay gratification doesn't come easily. We don't naturally graduate from childhood into mature and disciplined altruists. What we gain at adulthood is the capacity to control ourselves, but development in this area is a lifetime's work. One need look only at advertising and the media to see that immediate gratification with no consideration for the consequences is very much in vogue. High-risk sports, sexual exploration and many other activities that focus solely on immediate gratification are as popular as ever. The descent into instant fun and the consequential move away from the development of quintessential human sensitivities is all too easy. And we have all experienced people consumed with physical needs of one sort or another - they are unstoppable until they have what they want. In position as major leaders, such people can quite literally destroy the world; they nearly have on a number of occasions.

The Jewish people are expected to be the world experts in the field of delaying gratification, when necessary, to achieve higher goals. All humanity was originally destined to be proficient in this area, as evidenced by the prohibition of eating from the fruit in the Garden of Eden. Seen through Kabbalistic eyes, G-d did not demand that Adam and Eve forever deny themselves the fruit, only that they wait to eat it until after the first Sabbath. Had they demonstrated their ability to postpone their desire to eat it in order to fulfil G-d's will, they could have enjoyed the fruit legitimately. Instead, they were expelled from the Garden, forever changing the course of history.

As the nation of the Torah, the Jewish people are charged with the task of restoring, by example, this capacity to the whole of humanity. This began at the Exodus, the birth of our people. Our ancestors clearly demonstrated the capacity to wait for redemption, to

**TORAS AISH IS A WEEKLY PARSHA
NEWSLETTER DISTRIBUTED VIA EMAIL AND THE
WORLD WIDE WEB AT HTTP://AISHDAS.ORG.
FOR MORE INFO EMAIL YITZ@AISHDAS.ORG**

The material presented in this publication was collected from publicly available electronic mail, computer archives and the UseNet. It is being presented with the permission of the respective authors. Toras Aish is an independent publication, and does not necessarily reflect the views of any given synagogue.

**TO DEDICATE THIS NEWSLETTER PLEASE CALL
973-472-0180 OR EMAIL YITZ@AISHDAS.ORG**

tolerate the backbreaking Egyptian slavery, to put their dearest yearnings for salvation on hold until the right moment. Some members of the tribe of Ephraim had not been able to wait and had escaped before the appointed time; the Talmud records that they sadly died in the desert. Even when the time for deliverance seemed to be at hand, the Israelites' ability to wait enslaved until G-d was ready for them was tested to the limits. No sooner had Moshe introduced himself to Pharaoh than the slavery deepened; the Jews were no longer given straw, yet were expected to maintain the same level of brick production. Just when they thought the end of the slavery was in sight, they discovered that they had to wait a little longer. When the Exodus finally occurred, the nascent Jewish people were already well-trained in the art of waiting.

Each Passover, and especially on Seder night, we are afforded a unique opportunity to relive those crucial final moments in Egypt. The lessons learned there were so central to our national and personal mission that we must revisit them every year to ensure that we are attuned to our key Jewish responsibilities.

This message is most obviously expressed in the structure of the Seder. We begin the evening in much the same way that we would commence any Sabbath or Yom Tov. Kiddush is followed by hand-washing, in preparation for the meal. But instead of eating the matzah and commencing the delicious Yom Tov feast, there is disappointment in store. Each person gets a small piece of vegetable dipped in salt-water (known as Karpas), then the matzah is broken, as if to eat it, but then hidden away and the plate containing the Seder foods is removed from the table, to be replaced with story books! We are tempted into thinking that the meal is coming (the fifth question - when do we eat?); we are taken to the point when the food is almost in our mouths and then told that we will have to read the story of our ancestors' miraculous escape from Egypt before we can actually have the meal. The Karpas makes matters worse, for it is a salty hors d'oeuvres; not only do we prepare for the meal and then take the food away before eating it, but we make the participants extra-hungry before doing so!

This is all part of a genius plan to ensure that the annual re-enactment of our redemption inculcates within us the same sense of priorities as the original

Exodus experience. We have waited all day to start the Seder, we are hungry, delicious food odours are wafting from the kitchen and all the 'let's eat now' switches have been thrown (Kiddush, hand-washing, hors d'oeuvres, breaking matzah). Pavlov would have been proud. Yet something much more important than food must happen first - recounting the story of the Exodus. Understanding our roots, the very fibre of our national being, the unfolding Divine plan for Mankind, G-d's miraculous intervention in human history and the very concept of purposeful freedom - all of these must be achieved before we may begin our meal.

On Seder night, we sacrifice our need for immediate gratification (having rather cruelly stimulated it) to the noblest ideal; transmitting the wonders of Jewish history and our unique relationship with G-d to the next generation. This should inform our sense of priority in all our endeavours, throughout the year. We have seen that developing the capacity to delay gratification is central to the Jewish understanding of real achievement, defines us as a nation and contributes to rectifying the primeval sin of the Garden of Eden. If we finish this Passover having learned, even a little, to delay our immediate needs long enough to pursue some of the majestic goals of Judaism, then it will all have been worthwhile.

Have a kosher, joyful Yom Tov and meaningful and uplifting Seders. © 2006 Rabbi H. Belovski & Jewish World Review

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

There are two main verses which exhort us to remember the exodus from Egypt: "Remember this day when you went out from Egypt, from the house of bondage; leavening shall not be eaten" (Exodus 13:3) and "You shall not eat leavening with (the Pascal Sacrifice) for seven days... in order that you may remember the day of your exodus from Egypt all the days of your life" (Deut 16:3). The first verse clearly relates to the night of the seder, and Maimonides defines the command "Remember" (Heb Zakhor with the Kametz vowel under the Zayin) to mean to retell, in the sense of to re-enact, the slavery as well as the redemption on the mystical, magical evening of the fifteenth of Nisan.

The second verse commands us to "remember" (Heb. Tizkor) "all the days of your life," which implies a level of cognitive awareness 365 days a year. In the words of the Passover haggadah, "R. Elazar b Azaryah says, 'behold, I am like seventy years old (although he was only seventeen years of age, his hair became white overnight when he was appointed Prince of the Sanhedrin High Court) and I never merited to have recited the mention of the exodus from Egypt at night, until Ben Zoma expressed the verse 'in order that you may remember the day of your exodus

from Egypt all the days of your life' - the days of your life refers to the daytime, all the days of your life refers to the night-times. And the Sages maintain: "the days of your life refers to this world, all the days of your life refers to the bringing of the days of the Messiah."

Apparently these words from the haggadah are taken from the Mishnah in Berakhot and refer to the reference in the third paragraph of the Shema, recited by the observant Jew every morning and every evening, "I am the Lord your G-d who took you out of the Land of Egypt) in order to be for you." But there are three problems which emanate from this teaching. First of all, if this verse is not specific to the Seder evening - since it applies to the Shema which is to be recited every evening of the year - what is the paragraph which deals with it doing in our haggadah for the Passover seder? Secondly, the formulation of the words of the Sages is difficult to understand. If "the days of your life" refers to this world, "all the days of your life" ought refer to the world to come (olam hazeh and olam haba in Hebrew); why utilize the more unusual phrase "to bring in the days of the Messiah"? And finally, it is interesting to note that Maimonides does not include the commandment to remember (and recite) the exodus from Egypt by day and by night as one of the 613 commandments. Why not? After all, it is fairly apparent that the Sages are adding to - and not disagreeing with - the position of R. Elazar ben Azaryah?!

In order to answer these questions, we must first ponder another curious event recorded in the haggadah. The paragraph which precedes - and thereby introduces - Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah's principle of remembering the exodus from Egypt in the morning and in the evening every day, recounts how R. Eliezer, R. Elazar ben Azaryah, R. Yehoshua and R. Tarfon went to Rabbi Akiva's seder in Bnei B'rak, where they spoke of the exodus the entire night, until their students told them it was time to recite the morning shema (Mishnah Berakhot 1,5). Now R. Eliezer teaches that it is forbidden for an individual to leave his home on the festival even to visit his Master (Rebee), since the Bible commands that "you rejoice on the festival, you and your home," you in your home with your family. And R. Akiva was not even R. Eliezer's teacher; much to the contrary, he was R. Eliezer's disciple! So how could R. Eliezer go against his own teaching and spend the seder away from G-d, where he and his family dwelled, and travel to B'nei B'rak, where R. Akiva dwelled?!

The Talmud at the conclusion of the Tractate Makkot records how five rabbis, almost the very same five mentioned here, passed by the Temple Mount after the destruction, and saw foxes emerging from the ruined Holy of Holies. Four rabbis wept, and R. Akiva laughed. "Why do you laugh?," asked the Sages. Rabbi Akiva explained that since our prophets foretold the destruction of the Second Temple and then

prophesized the eternal building of the Third Temple, now that I see the fulfillment of the former prophecy I can rejoice at the accomplishment of the latter prophecy! R. Akiva was the greatest optimist, the believer in ultimate Jewish national sovereignty in Jerusalem and promulgators of world peace even under the shadow of the destruction of the Second Commonwealth. R. Eliezer apparently felt that the only place he would truly be able to celebrate our exodus from Egypt, to believe in G-d the redeemer, was in the presence of this most charismatic leader, R. Akiva.

What were these five rabbis doing all that night? Perhaps they were regaling each other with interpretations and miracle stories - and perhaps they were planning the Bar Kochba rebellion, instigated by, and certainly supported and supplied with soldier - students by, R. Akiva. Hence Rabbi Elazar b. Azaryah - one of the five in attendance at that very special all night - long seder - declares how this was the first time he was privileged to recite and plan for - extrication from painful (Roman) enslavement at night, during the bleak, black period post the destruction of the Temple. He is echoing the legalism which prescribes the remembrance and recitation of the exodus at night and is emphasizing the symbolism richly imbedded in the legalism; never give up on our national dream of redemption.

The Sages go one step further. It is not sufficient to merely remain faithful; it is necessary to actively pursue bringing about the Messianic Age, which was precisely what R. Akiva and his colleagues were attempting to do in B'nei B'rak.

We are now able to resolve the difficulties we raised at the beginning of our commentary. The principle enunciated by R. Elazar b. Azaryah in the name of Ben Zoma - to declare the going out of Egypt at night as well as by day - receives heightened significance on the seder night of Passover, when we must optimistically remain faithful to our vision of redemption even in our darkest periods. And it is not only the retention of our faith in redemption; we must actively pursue redemption, we must "bring about the days of the Messiah" by our planting and our building, by our military might and political ingenuity. And no wonder Maimonides does not list a separate commandment to recite the redemption from Egypt every evening in the third paragraph of the Shema; this recitation is the fundamental meaning of the basic words of the Shema, words expressing our expectation of ultimate world redemption: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord who is now our G-d will eventually become the One (G-d of justice, compassion and peace recognized by every nation in the universe)." And R. Akiva remained optimistic until his very last breath. The Bar Kochba rebellion tragically failed, and R. Akiva was tortured to death during the Hadrianic persecutions. He called out to his disciples, "Hear O Israel the Lord our G-d, the

Lord (will yet be) One" - and his soul expired with the word one (Ehad). (B.T. Berakhot 61b) © 2006 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

At the very beginning of Magid, the part of the Hagadah when we tell over the story of our nation's exodus from Egypt, we lift up the matzos and declare "this is the bread of affliction which our forefathers ate in the land of Egypt; whomever is hungry should come and eat, whomever needs to should come and do the Passover offering." This piece is not said in Hebrew, but in Aramaic, as (according to many) it was added in Babylonia. In order for the people being addressed to understand what was being said, it was stated in their language.

However, it seems kind of awkward to first "invite" anybody to a meal after it has already begun. We've made Kiddush, the first of the four cups of wine, had our Karpas, divided the middle matzo, and are about to start the main part of the Hagadah. This is when we announce that anybody who wants or needs to join us should do so? Who are we announcing it to? Anybody at the Seder table who can actually hear the invitation had already been invited (and evidently accepted)! Why is this invitation made now?

Additionally, the invitation for others to partake of the Passover offering wouldn't work. "Others can be added or withdrawn [from the Chaburah (group) sharing the Passover offering] up until it has been slaughtered" (Pesachim 89a); after that, it is too late. How can we first invite anybody to join us in eating from the already-slaughtered Korban Pesach at the Seder itself?

Several Rishonim answer the second question by suggesting that the invitation to partake in the "Pesach" doesn't refer to the Korban Pesach, but to other parts of the Seder (such as the matzo, the marror and the wine). However, the term usually refers to the Passover offering itself, not the other aspects of the Seder. Besides, if it meant the Seder and not necessarily the Passover offering, why is this invitation being extended after the first cup of wine, and after three other parts of the Seder? Additionally, saying "this is the bread of affliction; whomever is hungry can have some" is an invitation for the matzo, while (according to this approach) "whomever needs to make a Seder" refers to the other things. Since the matzo itself is an integral part of the Seder, why have two separate invitations - one for the matzo and one for everything else? Shouldn't they be combined into one invitation to join the Seder? In fact, because there is no Korban Pesach if it can't be brought on the Temple Mount, some Rishonim take this line out of their Hagados! Although we still say it, it behooves us to understand how (and/or what) we are saying when we invite those

already at the table to have some of our Korban Pesach.

A number of Rishonim quote Rav Matisya, who said that at one time in our history, we did literally open up our doors to invite any Jews that had no Seder to go to (and couldn't make one themselves). Even though we now give "maos chitin" ahead of time instead to ensure that all can have a Seder (as publicly announced invitations became impractical as the makeup of the population changed - see Taanis 20b), this part of our tradition - extending an invitation - remained part of it. While it's very nice to continue a tradition of generosity, we still have to explain why this "traditional" invitation is made after everyone has already sat down at the table and began part of the Seder.

Some of the Baalay Tosfos suggest that the "hungry" people we are talking to are all at the table, since on the day of the Seder we are not allowed to eat from the afternoon, in order to ensure that we are hungry when eating the matzo. If we were full from an earlier snack, we would have to force ourselves to eat the matzo, and therefore not be fulfilling the mitzvah to "eat" it. If anything, though, this seems to be a bit of a tease, as in essence we are telling them that they can finally eat "this bread of affliction" which they have been waiting for all day, but instead we start the "Magid" part of the Hagadah, which usually take a while!

Other Baalay Tosfos suggest that we are recreating the conversations that occurred in Egypt during the actual exodus. They broke their matzos in half to offer it to others that didn't have any, and had invited others to be counted in their "group" for the Korban Pesach. This can be extended to be a recreation of the invitations that happened in Yerushalayim before the animal was slaughtered.

The Rokayach explains the invitation to join in the Passover offering as an offer to explain what is going on at the Seder to those less knowledgeable. To ease any concern that they would be left out, the host would reassure them that all are welcome. This can be extended the other way, with the host reassuring his guests that they should eat as much as they want without worrying that there won't be enough.

Using some of these approaches, we can try to understand why these invitations became part of the Hagadah, and are still relevant today.

Originally, invitations such as these were offered before the Seder began (not in the middle of the Seder), especially the invitations to the poor to join an already established "group" that already had an animal that they were about to slaughter for their Korban Pesach. As the changing circumstances negated the possibility of such open generosity, the scholars in Babylonia wanted to make sure it remained part of the Passover tradition. They therefore instituted it at the place in the Seder where we start envisioning

ourselves as being slaves about to leave Egypt. "This is the bread of affliction that our ancestors ate. They generously shared theirs, and we are willing to share ours as well. They invited others to join their Passover Chaburah, and we are opening our homes to those that need a place for the Seder." True, the language implies the actual offering, but used in a context that refers to it, it can be also be used for the Seder as a whole. We are willing to open our homes to those that need it, and want to make those that have joined us feel comfortable enough to eat what they want and be a part of the Seder. As we recreate the past, we look forward to the future, when we will once again be able to offer those that need a Chaburah to join to be a part of ours. Leshana Haba'ah beYerushalayim. © 2006 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

Perhaps the most famous song in the haggadah is Dayenu. What is its meaning? Note that the song begins with the words kamah ma'alot tovot-how many good favors has G-d bestowed upon us. The song then lists fifteen generous gifts that G-d has given us. But the word ma'a lot may not only mean "good favor," but may also mean "ascent," referring to the fifteen shirei ha-ma'alot-songs of ascent found in Psalms. Ma'alot also means "steps," referring to the fifteen steps in the area of the Holy Temple.

These views have one point in common. Both teach that Dayenu alludes to the ultimate redemption when Psalms will be recited in the rebuilt Temple. While Passover is the holiday that celebrates our freedom from Egypt-and, indeed, the section prior to Dayenu (Arami oved avi) focuses on that exodus-Dayenu reminds us that full redemption means incorporating the spirit of the Psalms and the Temple into our lives. Dayenu includes another message. Many feel that redemption requires complete change. The Dayenu reminds us that redemption or self improvement is a process. Each line of the Dayenu makes this very point. For example, we say had G-d taken us out of Egypt and not executed judgement upon the Egyptians, Dayenu-it would have been enough. One should be perpetually moving towards self improvement. The process is sometimes more valuable than the end result.

One final thought. I remember in some of the most difficult times of the Soviet Jewry Movement, standing outside Soviet government buildings and chanting G-dayenu. Our message was clear. We were declaring, enough of the suffering that our sisters and brothers in the Soviet Union were experiencing. We would spell out what we meant using the structure of the Dayenu itself. "Had only the Soviets prevented the baking of matzot, and not imprisoned Sharansky it would have been enough...."

But in reality, Dayenu teaches the opposite message. It tells us that had G-d only done one favor for us, it would have been enough. Dayenu is not a song of complaint; it is rather a song of thanksgiving to G-d. Dayenu is a perfect way to bring the learning in the magid section to a higher level. Once recounting the story of the Exodus, we cannot contain ourselves as we declare-thank you, oh G-d for allowing us to ascend and come one step closer to full redemption.

© 2000 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale.

RABBI JEFF KIRSHBLUM

The Jewish Home – More Than Brick & Mortar

“Every man shall take for themselves a lamb for their father's house, a lamb for each house. And if there are too few in the house to (consume) the lamb (in its entirety, he shall join with his neighbor that is near to his house...)” (12:3-4).

The Torah tells us that if a family has too few members to eat the entire Paschal lamb, they should find a neighbor to join their Seder to help them finish the meal. Obviously such a neighbor must be someone who does not have his own Paschal lamb. Possibly it is someone who is poor and cannot afford one or it is someone who lives alone and can not consume an entire lamb. If so, why didn't the Torah write "If you do not have a Paschal lamb, find a family who has an extra portion and join with them." Why did the Torah place the onus on the one who has the extra portion and not on the one who needs it?

The Torah teaches us a most valuable Jewish lesson. Hashem chose to put the obligation on the giver rather than the receiver. Hashem commanded the people to open their homes to the lonely, the poor and the needy. The people of means should not partake of their Pesach Seder until they have seen to it that their underprivileged neighbors are included. One of the most important aspects of the Pesach meal is for families to share in the educational experience of the Exodus. Parents are encouraged to involve their children. Children are encouraged to ask questions. Even the most scholarly sage is obligated tell over the story of our redemption. Yet with all the emphasis the Torah puts on the family unit, it makes certain that no one is alone. Compassion for the poor and lonely is also part of the education that we must teach our children. Parents are to serve as role models for their children, so that the next generation will emulate them. It was on this day, the 15th day of Nissan, that Klal Yisrael consecrated the foundation of the Jewish home. Not the brick and mortar, but the essential Jewish

values of compassion and charity on which a Jewish home should be founded.

"However, on the previous day you shall destroy leaven from your houses, for all who eat leavened bread, that soul shall be cut off from Israel..." (12:15). The festival of Pesach has many mitzvos and many prohibitions connected to it. None is more stringent than the prohibition of eating leaven. One who does not eat matzah or marror, or does not tell over the story of the Exodus at the Seder meal has neglected to perform a mitzvah but incurs no punishment. However, one who eats chametz during the seven days of Pesach is liable for kares, excommunication of the soul in the future world. What accounts for this great stringency with regards to "chametz?"

The Children of Israel departed from Egypt with such haste that they had no time to bake bread. Bread dough takes time to rise. It takes about 18 minutes for the dough to begin rising. The miraculous Exodus occurred within 18 minutes. Why was it necessary for the departure to happen so quickly? Would it have been so terrible if they left after 19 minutes?

The great Kabbalist, the Ari Hakodesh, pointed out that the Israelites were enslaved for over 200 years in Egypt. They were held captive by a society that was steeped in degenerate immorality and deceptive idolatry. With each passing decade, the negative effects of Egyptian culture were being transposed to the Israelites. With each passing year, the impurities of their spiritually polluted environment were wearing away at the Jewish soul. It was becoming increasingly more difficult to distinguish between Jew and Egyptian.

On the night of the plague of the death of the First-born, G-d Himself passed through the streets of Egypt; only G-d could distinguish between Jew and Gentile. That was the great lesson of requiring the Jews to smear the blood of the Paschal sacrifice on the doorposts of the Jewish homes. The Jews, in a fleeting moment of haughtiness, must have thought that there were great differences and distinctions between them and their lowly Egyptian neighbors. G-d told them that they must mark their doorposts because that was the only way one could distinguish between Jew and Egyptian.

When the fateful moment for the Exodus arrived, the souls of the Children of Israel were in great danger. One can only be exposed to so much negativity before the soul becomes eternally condemned. It was only a matter of moments before the point of no return would be reached. G-d had to take them out of Egypt with great haste in order to save His children.

The strict prohibition against eating chametz, and its consequences for disobeying it, shows the crucial importance of the haste in which the Jews left Egypt. After all the years of the Egyptian enslavement, the Jews had sunk to a dangerous level of spiritual contamination. They were so absorbed in the

degenerate lifestyle of Egypt that had they remained just a little while longer, they would have been cut off from their destiny. They would have suffered the same fate as their Egyptian slave-masters.

We can see that between holiness and impurity, between eternity and spiritual oblivion, there can be a span of only a minute or two. The whole difference between chametz-annihilation, and matzah-salvation, was only 18 minutes.

The strict laws pertaining to the mitzvah of chametz teach us quit a bit about life. How often does a mitzvah present itself, yet if we wait a second or two the opportunity can be lost forever. The mitzvah of chametz instructs us to seize every opportunity swiftly. © 2004 Rabbi J. Kirshblum & t orah.org

RABBI NOSSON CHAYIM LEFF

Sfas Emes

The 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 the idea 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 relive 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? First, a person must view himself as having participated (past tense) in the Redemption. And, second, 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 Sfas Emes kindly supplies an answer to this question. The thought that he presents is a typical Sfas Emes chidush. That is, it starts with an idea that the Sfas Emes had from the Chidushei HaRim. The Sfas Emes then develops the thought into a mind-stretching non-pshat that can change our understanding of reality.. To understand what is going on here, we must go back to basics.

The word "Mitzrayim:" is conventionally translated-with no questions asked-as "Egypt"-the country in which we were enslaved. But with ko'ach ha'chidush such as only the Sfas Emes and the Chidushei HaRim can deploy, they read 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 the word "metizar". Thus, "yetzi'as mitzrayim" has become: "liberation from one's constraints".

What are the constraints that the Sfas Emes has in mind when he tells us that Pesach can teach us about the possibility of personal liberation? He does not spell out what he has specifically in mind. I suggest that he is referring to long-standing attitudes, ingrained assumptions, and unquestioned 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 (G-d 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 its own Redemption. Another powerful new idea is the thought that Pesach is a time for individuals to break out of their personal constraints and grow. © 2006 Rabbi N.C. Leff & torah.org

RABBI TZVI KLUGERMAN

Baruch Hamakom

As we enter deeper into the recitation of the Passover saga, we recite Baruch Hamakom, Baruch Hu, Blessed is the Omnipresent. This paragraph concludes with Baruch Shenatan Torah L'Amo Yisrael, Blessed be the One who gave Torah to His nation Israel. This blessing is unique, as it is said without Shem u' Malchut, the Divine Name and Royal Appellation. A blessing usually signifies the liturgical division of a prayer service. This blessing, albeit without the Divine Name, sanctifies what may be the actual start of the Passover seder, the commandment to relate the Exodus from Egypt.

This possible beginning of the seder, is marked by the section of the four sons. Why would the seder begin with the four sons? Why not begin immediately with the passage from the Midrash Mechilta "Yachol M'Rosh Chodesh, You might suppose that we should begin from the beginning of the month"?

If the motif of the seder is Chinuch Hayeladim, instruction of the children, then we have to establish pedagogical guidelines. We bring the example of the wise son, the Chacham, to reaffirm our obligation. Even

if our children are more learned than us, we still have an obligation to transmit our heritage. The Rasha, evil son, reminds us not to discount the rebellious child without trying. The harsh response offered to this son is another attempt to show him the folly of his attitude. As we learn in the Torah, the Ben Sorer u'Moreh, rebellious son, was declared rebellious only after repeated attempts were made to teach him. The Tam, simple son, receives the simple answer. We are encouraged to be persistent in our attempts to teach him, even if he doesn't understand after the first time. The Sh'eino Yodea Lish'ol, one who doesn't even know to ask, reminds us not to disregard the quiet student, and not to assume that everyone present understands what is being said and done.

Yet, perhaps there is another meaning behind the placement of the four sons at this juncture. The saga of the Redemption of the Israelites as G-d's people, was an epic event that had many different facets. Witnessing the Otot u'Mo'ot, G-d's wonders and signs that were visited upon the Egyptians and retelling the Exodus can have profound reactions in the same person.

After learning about the Exodus, we should be able to see The Divine and search out G-d in the events. This spiritual revelation may overwhelm us, even inspire us to new heights, but even the sky is a limit. We must remember the seemingly inappropriate answer given to the Chacham, "Ein Maftirim Achar Hapesach Afikoman, nothing is to be eaten after the Afikomen". Regardless of the spiritual revelation achieved, the primacy of Halacha remains supreme.

Similarly, we may at times deny the Divine in the events of the Redemption saga. Like the Rasha, we might try not to see the hand of G-d in the events. The answer given to the wicked son makes us aware that had we denied the Divine during the actual plagues and not heeded Moshe's warnings to place the blood upon the doorposts, we would not have been saved.

However, there are times that we look at G-d's divine providence with some hesitation. Did He have to do it that way?, we might ask. The answer given to the Tam instructs us to look at the wonders and signs of The Almighty with Temimut, full acceptance. This is the approach of Nachum Ish Gamzu, who regularly stated "Gamzu L'Tova, this too is for the best". That is the approach of the Tam. Acceptance of G-d's will with Emunah She'leimah - complete belief.

Yet, there may be events of the Redemption that overpower us and our response is one of silence. We are too overwhelmed to respond. "At Petach Lo, you open for him", is the response to the Sheino Yodea Lish'ol. The learning process must never cease.

At the beginning of our Kiyum Hamitzvah, the discharge of the commandment, of telling the Exodus saga, we need to be aware of others' and our own reactions. © 1999 Rabbi T. Klugerman