

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

Last week I quoted a Midrash Hagadol (Shemos 10:28-29) regarding the plagues that G-d sent against the Egyptians at the Sea of Reeds, and used it to explain a Targum Yonasan. G-d had told Avraham that "the nation that they shall serve will I judge, and after that they will leave with a great amount of possessions" (Beraishis 15:14). This "judgment" (according to Yonasan ben Uziel) refers to the 250 plagues by the sea, even though they had already "left" with the expensive vessels requested from the Egyptians and had been given their full freedom prior to these plagues (and therefore prior to the "judgment"). The Midrash Hagadol says that the plagues that occurred by the sea were really supposed to occur in Egypt, but because Moshe had told Paro that he was correct when he said that he wouldn't see his face again, G-d delayed these plagues until the crossing/splitting of the sea. Based on this, I suggested that G-d could have been telling Avraham what the original plan was, i.e. that the judgment of the 250 plagues was going to occur before the exodus, even if it ended up happening after it.

A very basic question could be asked on this approach. If the "judgment" occurred by the sea, it should follow that the last part of the prophecy should be delayed as well. Instead of the "great amount of possessions" being what was borrowed from the Egyptians, it should have now been the riches gleaned from the spoils at the sea instead! After all, there was a lot more value in these spoils than in the borrowed utensils. Yet, right after the conversation Moshe had with Paro that caused this change in plans, G-d told Moshe to ask the Children of Israel to borrow gold and silver vessels in order to fulfill the "leaving with a great amount of possessions" (see Rashi on Shemos 11:2). Why would G-d ask that they take these vessels once it had already been determined that the 250 plagues wouldn't occur until a week after they left Egypt, when they would get many more and much greater "possessions?"

However, I'm going to turn the question around. When Rashi told us that G-d begged Moshe to have the nation borrow these vessels, the rationale seems a bit odd. "I beg of you to get them to do this (request the gold and silver vessels from the Egyptians) so that the

righteous one, Avraham, shouldn't say that [the harsh part of the prophecy, i.e.] 'and they will serve them and oppress them' He fulfilled [but the good part of the prophecy, namely] 'and afterwards they will leave with a great amount of possessions' He didn't fulfill." Why is G-d more concerned with what Avraham might think than with doing the right thing? He should want them to borrow the utensils in order to fulfill His promise, not because Avraham will accuse him of not fulfilling it! Why is the emphasis on Avraham's perception?

If the plans hadn't changed, and all the plagues would have been brought before the exodus, then we can understand why the "great amount of possessions" had to be the borrowed vessels; it was only because the plagues were delayed that the spoils at the sea qualified as fulfilling this part of the prophecy. But how would Avraham know that the plans had changed? He could have known that there were 10 plagues in Egypt and thought that they were the "judgment" G-d had referred to (as Rashi understood them to actually be). Even though G-d knew that His promise would be fulfilled later, Avraham may have thought that the "judgment" had already taken place, as did the "leaving," so where are the "possessions?" Therefore, in order to make sure Avraham wouldn't think, even for a moment, that G-d had neglected that part of his promise, He begged Moshe to have the nation borrow expensive items (in essence "borrowing" them until the real wealth was gained at the sea, when "returning" them became impossible). It was precisely because of Avraham's perception that G-d wanted them to borrow them, not because He had to keep His word; His promise was going to be fulfilled even if they had never borrowed a thing.

The Vilna Gaon has a similar approach, explaining that the full and complete redemption was not achieved until after the crossing of the sea when the chasing Egyptians were all dead on the shore after having drowned at sea. The original decree that Avraham's descendants would "suffer and be subjugated" (Beraishis 15:13) was surpassed when Egypt had decreed to "toss every son into the Nile" (Shemos 1:22), so they were punished by being thrown into the no-longer-split sea. Only after the complete redemption and the completion of the "judging of the (Egyptian) nation" did the promise of having "a great amount of possessions" fulfilled. Since Avraham may not have realized that the redemption and the judgment

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were not yet complete, he might have wondered why the promise wasn't (yet) kept, so G-d asked Moshe to have the nation borrow items from the Egyptians so that they would leave with expensive "possessions," even if they were much less than the actual "great amount of possessions" collected from the soils at the sea.

The Midrash Hagadol seems to be taking it a step further, as the judgment would have been completed in Egypt, but, because Moshe had agreed that he wouldn't see Paro's face anymore, G-d delayed it until the plagues by the sea. With it, getting the "great amount of possessions" was delayed as well, leaving the reason to borrow gold and silver vessels from the Egyptians being to prevent Avraham from wondering what had happened to G-d's promise.

Aside from explaining why the "borrowing" had more to do with Avraham's perception than with actually fulfilling the promise, moving the fulfillment of "leaving with great possessions" from Egypt to the spoils at the sea adds another dimension as well. Had it ended up referring to the borrowing of possessions, then there either may not have been spoils to collect by the sea, or, there would have been no "mitzvah" for the nation to take it. However, since the spoils at the sea were the "great amount of possessions," and, because they had been asked to do G-d a favor by borrowing the vessels, the act of collecting the spoils was now more than just pure greed. They knew that by taking the spoils they were fulfilling G-d's will too. © 2007 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

Everyone around the seder table enjoys a spirited singing of Dayenu, the quintessential thanksgiving to G-d for every step that He guided us to take on the road to redemption. Had He taken us out of Egypt and not wrought so many judgments against the Egyptians, it would have been sufficient (dayenu)... had He given us their money but had not split for us the sea, it would have been sufficient (dayenu)". However there is one line in this song of praise which has always been difficult for me to understand: "Had He brought us in front of Mount Sinai and not given us the Torah, it would have been sufficient (dayenu)" How would it

have been enough? What value could there have been for G-d to have taken us close to the mountain without revealing to us His laws of humanity and morality?!

The second question which perplexes me during the seder - but I usually forget to delve into it after having drunk my fifth cup of wine - is with regard to the "four questions" themselves: "In every other night we do not dip even once and on this night of Passover we dip twice." This particular question is never really answered within the Maggid portion of the seder. The fact that we do have "dips" as a kind of 'forshpeis' to our seder meal is certainly in keeping with the Passover feast, but why our specific dips of Karpas (green vegetable) in Haroset; (Haroset was used by the Rambam, Yemenite community and many other communities as well) and then the Bitter Herbs in Haroset.

The fact is that the entire drama of the servitude and exodus from Egypt began with an act of 'dipping' and concluded with an act of 'dipping'. The Israelites initially found their way into Egypt when Joseph the son of Jacob, was sold into Egyptian servitude by his brothers. Since the brothers had to explain in some way Joseph's mysterious disappearance, they dipped the special coat of striped colors which his father had given him (the very word karpas is used in the Scroll of Esther 1:6 to describe such a fancy cloth and is probably the initial derivation of the Biblical Hebrew passim) in the blood of a slain goat. When Father Jacob saw the bloodied garment of his beloved son, he assumed that Joseph had been torn apart by a wild beast. Our Sages teach us that it was the sin of the brotherly strife and hatred which was responsible for the enslavement of the Israelites in Egypt (B.T. Shabbat 10 A). Hence, our dipping of the karpas in the red haroset, which according to the Jerusalem Talmud symbolizes blood, would express the tragedy of Jewish internal hatred which is the root cause of our exiles and prosecutions.

The second dipping took place at the end of the Egyptian enslavement, the beginning of the Hebrew emancipation, when each Hebrew family slaughtered a lamb in preparation for their exodus "You will then take a bunch of hyssop and dip it into the blood (of the lamb) which will be placed in a basin. Place some blood on the beam over the door and the two door posts after you have dipped your finger in some of the blood in the basin. Not a single Israelite may go out of the door of his house until morning." (Exodus 12:22) The blood of the lamb represented the willingness of the Israelites to sacrifice an Egyptian G-d (for such was the lamb) to their higher belief in the Lord of redemption and freedom. They effectuated this pascal sacrifice during the time of the killing of the first born of the Egyptians - a plague from which the Hebrews were saved by the blood that was on their doorposts. The Israelites were all united in their commitment to the Almighty and

fulfillment of this command, including their all remaining in their homes despite the fact that the Egyptian streets were ripe for looting in the frenzy hysteria which most certainly accompanied the death of the Egyptian first born. The second act of dipping served as a tikkun or repairmen - of the first; the sin of brotherly strife found its repentance in the form of brotherly unity, by which merit we were redeemed from Egypt.

This explains both dippings at the seder and intensifies the fact that if only we as a nation could be united together, no force on earth would be able to harm us.

When the Bible describes the momentous Revelation at Sinai, we are told, "They had departed from Rephidim and had arrived at the Sinai desert, where they (the Israelites, in the plural) encamped in the desert; and Israel encamped there (in the singular) opposite the mountain" (Exodus 19:2). The change from plural to singular within one phrase is quite remarkable. The classical commentary Rashi comments, "As if they were all one individual with one heart". It was their very unity of purpose and commitment - their togetherness as a nation which enabled them to merit the Revelation. This I believe is the meaning of the Dayenu song: Had the Almighty merely brought us in front of Mount Sinai with singleness of goal and united in spirit, even without His having given us the Torah that unity would have been sufficient! © 2007 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak, Yeshivat Har Etzion

At first glance, the answer of the Hagadda to the above question is almost obvious: The reason for the matza is that the dough used by our ancestors did not have the time to become chametz, as is written, "And they baked the dough that they took out of Egypt as cakes of matza but not chametz, for they were chased out of Egypt and they could not delay. And they had also not prepared food for themselves." [Shemot 12:39]. However, a deeper look at the entire passage raises doubts as to whether this reason is right. After all, the command to eat matza on the night when they left Egypt was already given in the beginning of this chapter, "Let them eat the flesh this night broiled, they shall eat it together with matzot and bitter herbs" [12:8]. This is many verses before we are told that the dough of Bnei Yisrael did not have time to become chametz! In addition, the command for all later generations? "for seven days shall you eat matzot" [12:15]? also appears before the matter of the dough. The sequence of the verses seems to imply that the command to eat matza is not connected at all to the matza of the night of the Exodus.

Rabbi David Abudraham (fourteenth century Spain), in his commentary on the Hagadda, quotes the

explanation of Rabbi Yosef Kimchi (the RADAK's father): "Perhaps the fact that the command was given earlier is related to future events, since G-d who knows the future was aware that they would leave Egypt in haste, so that even if they had wanted to they would not have had time for the dough to become chametz. He therefore commanded them to eat the Pesach sacrifice with matza and bitter herbs, and to eat matza for seven days." However, this explanation is difficult to accept, because it implies that on the night of the Exodus the people ate matza because of what would happen in the future even though there was no symbolic reason to do so. And the basis for their action was not explained to them at the time.

It is thus reasonable to add another independent explanation for eating matza. The eating of the meat on the Seder night can be compared to a sacrifice. Thus, the combination of meat and matza is reminiscent of a similar combination in the realm of sacrifices: "If it will be brought as a Todah sacrifice, he shall bring with the sacrifice loaves that are not chametz, mixed with oil" [Vayikra 7:12]. This leads to the conclusion that from one point of view the Pesach sacrifice is a form of Todah, brought as a token of thanks to G-d. Like the Todah, the Pesach is eaten by the owner of the sacrifice. In fact, there are other similarities between the Pesach and the Todah. With respect to the Pesach, it is written, "Do not leave any of it until the morning" [Shemot 12:10], and the same is true for the Todah: "As to the flesh of the Todah, let it be eaten on the day of the sacrifice, he shall not leave it until the morning" [Vayikra 7:15]. Both sacrifices are linked to a prohibition of eating under certain circumstances, punishable by "karet"? being cut off from Bnei Yisrael. With respect to the Pesach, it is written, "For anybody who eats chametz will be cut off from Yisrael" [Shemot 12:15]. With respect to other sacrifices, it is written, "For if anybody eats the fat of an animal from which a sacrifice may be brought, that person will be cut off from his nation" [Vayikra 7:25].

In summary, we can say that the eating of matzot on Pesach has meaning on two levels. The primary significance is that of a sacrifice of thanksgiving to the Almighty, for taking Bnei Yisrael out of Egypt. A secondary meaning is in memory of the hasty Exodus from Egypt, since there was no time for the dough to become chametz.

The Secret of Love

by Dr. Batia Tabechnik, Principal of Midreshet Emunah, Jerusalem

It is traditional to read Shir Hashirim on Shabbat during Chol Hamoed of Pesach. Just at this time of year, with all the blossoms and new buds, when "the blossoms can be seen in the land" [Shir Hashirim 2:12], we read the most praiseworthy of poems, which represents the existential spring of mankind. "All the

writings are holy, while this one is Holy of Holies" [Shir Hashirim Rabba 1].

The entire Torah was written in the language of human beings, but our great challenge is to reveal the supreme and exalted dimension that is hidden within this book. The words are only a cover, and we must discover the internal meaning that is hidden within them.

Shir Hashirim is an expression of the eternal love between the lover and his companion. The sages saw in these passages a symbol of the love between the Almighty and the community of Yisrael. Only one who is fully aware of the feelings of love between man and wife, one who feels the power of living with a companion and who also has the proper responsibility and spiritual energy, can truly love G-d in a complete way. It is not a random requirement that the High Priest, who enters the Holy of Holies in the Temple on Yom Kippur, must be married. It is not by chance that the wise men of the Kabbala decreed that Shir Hashirim should be read on the eve of Shabbat, that they included the poem "Lecha Dodi"? welcoming Shabbat as a bride-in the Friday night prayers, and that it was decided that the passage "Eishet Chayil"? praising the Jewish woman-should be recited before Kiddush.

The unity of a married couple is called "knowledge" in the Torah? "yedia." In Chassidut, the power of this relationship is called the property of the "internal"? "penimiyut." In his books, Rabbi Yitzchak Ginsburg refers to the element of "knowledge" which provides a close link. His approach is that the highest level of "knowledge" is the true unity achieved by a man and a woman, their ability to become "as one flesh" [Bereishit 2:24]. When the Tree of Knowledge is combined with the Tree of Life, one achieves the state of living with "the woman that you love" [Kohellet 9:9].

In the Zohar it is written, "Knowledge is revealed in the mouth of mankind." By using speech it is possible to relate, to get to know one another, and to become joined together. When the stage of marriage is reached, and the level of sanctity is increased, a "relationship of kissing" is achieved. The Zohar calls a kiss "the attachment of two spirits." This is the beginning of the close approach between two people.

The verse, "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth" [Shir Hashirim 1:2], is an expression of the yearning of the community of Yisrael to become refined and to be completely attached to the Almighty. "Let him kiss me" means that He will purify me. This is the dream! Rashi comments, "As a groom to a bride, mouth to mouth." The secret of Yisrael's love for the word of the Almighty is buried within the feeling of joy at becoming intimately close.

Shabbat of Chol Hamoed Pesach provides the basis for renewing the strong yearning between man

and wife, and also the desire between the Almighty and the community of Yisrael.

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 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 generaneration. (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 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 (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 Redemption. Another powerful new idea is the thought that Pesach is a time for individuals to break out of their personal constraints and grow. © 2007 Rabbi N.C. Leff & torah.org

DR. AVIGDOR BONCHEK

What's Bothering Rashi?

At the Seder table we read the Haggada Shel Pesach. A central verse in the Haggada is from Exodus 13:8. It is the Biblical source for our custom to recite the Haggada to our children on the first night of Pesach: "And you shall tell (Hebrew: "V'Higaddita") your son on that day 'Because (Hebrew: Ba'avur") of this Hashem did for me when I went out of Egypt."

The verse is unclear. Because of what? To what does the word "this" refer?

"Because (Ba'avur) of this"-Rashi: "So that I should fulfill the commandments such as this Pesach offering, this Matzah and these bitter herbs."

Rashi tells us that "this" refers to the Mitzvot of Pesach (i.e. the Passover offering), Matza and Murror (bitter herbs).

But this is certainly strange because it says in effect, "G-d did this (the Exodus and its attendant miracles) so that we should offer the Pesach sacrifice, eat Matzot and bitter herbs!" But this seems like circular reasoning. Logic would dictate that we eat these foods because we were taken out of Egypt-not that we were taken out of Egypt in order to eat them! The Matzot, bitter herbs and Pascal sacrifice symbolize events that occurred during the enslavement in Egypt. How can Rashi say that the enslavement and redemption happened so that we should eat unleavened bread and bitter herbs? You see the difficulty, of course.

Hint: Read the complete Rashi comment.

An Answer: Rashi is sensitive to the word "ba'avur," which literally means "for the sake of." It does not mean "because" in the sense of "a previous cause." So Rashi is forced to explain the verse not as telling us the reason (the cause) for the Pesach ceremony (which would be "because G-d took us out of Egypt"). Rather, it is telling us that the reason (purpose) we were taken out of Egypt was in order that we keep the mitzvot. "For the sake of this (keeping these Mitzvot) I was taken out of Egypt."

The Ramban argues with Rashi. He does take the word ba'avur to mean "because." He therefore has to make slight changes in the wording of the verse. He reads the verse this way: "This (the Pesach ceremony)

is because of what G-d did for me when I went out of Egypt."

As we said, Rashi takes "ba'avur" in its more usual sense ("in order to"). The Ramban does not. Therefore Rashi does not have to amend the verse as the Ramban did, in order to have it make sense, although we still have not addressed the deeper meaning of Rashi's explanation: The implication of Rashi's position is a profound one for our understanding of the purpose of Mitzvot in general. We ordinarily see the Pesach Mitzvot as a means of recalling the years of slavery and miraculous exodus from Egypt. But Rashi says something radically different from that. He says we were redeemed from Egypt in order to keep these commandments. In other words, the Mitzvot are important in their own right, and not just as a reminder of our history. Fulfilling them needs no rationalization, no justification, no explanation other than that G-d asked us to do them.

Rashi expands this idea to include all Mitzvot, by adding one word in his comment. Which word did he add?

An Answer: Rashi says "so that I should fulfill His commands SUCH AS Pesach, Matzah and bitter herbs." By adding "SUCH AS" he makes it clear that these Mitzvot mentioned here are just examples of the all the Mitzvot in the Torah. All of them should be done for their own sake. The ultimate meaning for the Mitzvot is that they were commanded to us by G-d. That is justification enough. © 2007 Dr. A. Bonchek & aish.org

RABBI ZVI MILLER

The Salant Foundation

Concerning the significance of Matzah, the Hagadah says: "Matzah-why do we eat unleavened bread? Because the dough of our fathers did not have time to leaven.as it says: They baked the dough which they had brought out of Egypt into unleavened bread, for it had not leavened because they were driven out of Egypt and could not delay."

After two hundred of ten years in Egypt, HaShem performed great miracles and brought us out of the land of Egypt. Yet, at the time of our redemption, the Egyptians drove us out of their land. Why-when we were at the height of power and prestige-were we forced out of Egypt so quickly that we didn't have time for our dough to rise? Doesn't this expulsion dampen the glory of our dramatic liberation?

Since Egypt was a place of spiritual defilement, the Shechinah (i.e., the Divine Presence) could not be revealed in such an impure environment. Nevertheless, HaShem had a strong desire to reveal the Shechinah to Klal Yisrael. Therefore, as soon as the moment of redemption arrived, HaShem brought them out of Egypt in great haste, so that He could illuminate the light of the Shechinah upon Klal Yisrael.

Therefore, when we eat Matzah on Passover, we remember how much HaShem loves us and desires to be close to us. Like a man impatiently waiting to give a precious gift to his beloved, so too, HaShem longed and yearned to shower us with pleasure, goodness, light, holiness, and peace.

Likewise now, as we wait for the final redemption let us remember that HaShem has not forsaken us. Conversely, He longs to be reunited with His people; He yearns to bestow His light on every Jewish soul. Therefore, when the redemption comes HaShem will reveal His universal love for us.

The Shechinah will dwell amongst the Klal Yisrael and "Our mouths will be filled with laughter and our tongues with joyous song (Tehillim 126:2)." [Based on the Ma'aseh Nisim commentary to the Hagadah]

Today: Know that HaShem loves you and longs to dwell amongst us. © 2007 Rabbi Z. Miller & The Salant Foundation

RABBI OSHER CHAIM LEVENE

Once Upon a Time...

There is a mitzvah for a father to relate to his children on the Seder night all the wondrous miracles that transpired at the Exodus; how G-d struck the Egyptians with the Ten Plagues and split the Reed Sea to liberate the Children of Israel from their oppression as they dramatically experienced salvation (Exodus 13:8).

Faith in the exodus from Egypt is a cornerstone of Judaism. Reference to yetzias Mitzrayim, the departure from Egypt, is found no less than 50 occasions in the Torah. Nor is one hard pressed to find one of a plethora of commandments related to recalling the miraculous redemption from slavery. Take tefillin and tzitzis as two examples.

All this points to how this is more than just "another" historic event in the annals of Jewish history. That it is to be recalled and replayed out, again and again, for time immemorial throughout Jewish history illuminates how it takes on a pivotal role in answering the question "who" and "what" is a Jew?

But what is the significance of this event? And just why is it such an integral part of the Seder night tradition and the transmission down the generations on the- such that "one who expands relating about the Exodus, that person is praiseworthy"?

Pesach "the festival of our freedom" commemorates the liberation from slavery, their release from harsh oppression and from the depravity influence of Egyptian culture. It is on this monumental date that the Jewish people came into being.

However the Jewish people's formation was not the end goal. True, salvation from Pharaoh after 210 years was most welcome. But the achievement of nationhood was not to be taken and evaluated in isolation.

Instead, the significance of the Exodus and its indelible imprint upon the Jewish psyche is "because of what this historic event set into motion". The holiday of Pesach - and its dazzling miracles - is to be seen in a wider context - in conjunction with the festival of Shavuot 50 days afterwards.

The creation of this people was to attain their special status as "chosen nation" by accepting the Torah. Only upon freeing the Jewish people, granting them liberty from their oppressors and Egyptian masters, were they then on track to accept the Divine Law at Sinai from the Master of the Universe.

On the Seder night, in particular, the detail of our salvation and the supernatural interference by G-d in the history of the world, is related and colorfully conveyed from one generation to the next. A pillar of our faith, Pesach celebrates the miraculous redemption that set the scene for the eventual acceptance of Torah and mitzvos into the world.

The endpoint to the redemption of Pesach was Shavuot. What makes us into the Jewish nation is our Torah observance. Torah is what defines and vitalizes the Jewish people (Rav Saadiah Gaon). Hence the first of the Ten Commandments is directly attributed to the Exodus: "I am Hashem Your G-d Who took you out of the Land of Egypt, the house of slavery" (Exodus 20:2). And no doubt the 50 citing of the Exodus allude to the 50 days from their salvation through seven weeks until their acceptance of Torah on Shavuot.

Pesach was when we became the "Jewish nation". And on Shavuot we sealed our status as the "chosen nation". Accordingly, just as there is a mitzvah to study and transmit Torah to one's children (Deuteronomy 6:7) there is a corresponding commandment to convey the story of our liberation onto our children. It is this faith that has and continues to be lovingly related by father to son, from generation to generation, at the Seder night. © 2006 Rabbi O.C. Levene & torah.org

RABBI YAAKOV HABER

Shabbat Shalom Weekly

Before we say Yizkor, I want to share a thought with you that I read in the journal, "Dos Yiddische Vort". It was an article by Rabbi Moshe Sherer, the head of the Agudas Yisrael in America. He describes how he was travelling by plane, together with Rabbi Yaacov Kaminetzky of blessed memory, to New York, back from a world gathering of Agudas Yisrael in Jerusalem. The seating arrangement was such that R. Sherer was sitting in the row behind R. Kaminetzky, and, as it happened, next to R. Kaminetzky was sitting Yeruham Meshel, the General Secretary of the Histadrut, the Israeli Labor Federation.

Mr. Meshel and R. Kaminetzky had a conversation during the trip, which R. Sherer could overhear. Mr. Meshel, who is far from a religious Jew,

was asking R. Kaminetzky many questions about Judaism, all of which R. Kaminetzky answered.

Finally, as the plane landed in New York, R. Kaminetzky asked Mr. Meshel: "Is there anything I have said to you in the course of our whole conversation which might cause you to change your way of life to be an observant Jew?"

"No," Mr. Meshel answered, "there is nothing in what you said that might cause me to change my lifestyle. However there is something you did not say which might make me change my mind—explain how it is that your son behaves as he does!"

Indeed, for most of the trip, R. Kaminetzky's son, R. Shmuel Kaminetzky, instead of sitting down in his own seat, had been standing in the aisle next to his father, making sure he was comfortable, rearranging his cushions, bringing him something to drink, and so on. "I wouldn't dream of asking my children to do anything for me. What is there in Judaism that gets your son to behave in this way?"

"It's very simple", replied the Rabbi, "and I can explain it to you briefly. In your outlook, the emphasis is on human progress, human improvement. This means that you look on your grandparents as primitive, as living in the dark ages, and your parents also, to a lesser extent. But it also means that your children, in turn, look on you as backward. So why should they show you honor? In our outlook, it is the opposite. Each generation that is born is one step further removed from the Revelation at Sinai, and so the light of Revelation gets progressively dimmer. This means that each person honors his parents as being one generation closer to Sinai."

The article does not record how this changed Mr. Meshel's outlook or lifestyle, if at all.

This is an important point for all of us to ponder, as those of us who have lost parents say Yizkor. The value of honoring one's parents, or their memories, is not simply a matter of nostalgia for the past, for quaint traditions and customs. Nor is it a matter of reckoning: "They paid for my food and education, so now I must pay for their needs." It is a matter of realizing that one's parents are one generation closer to Sinai, closer to the truth. © 1995 Rabbi Y. Haber

RABBI GAVRIEL PRERO

Exodus & the Four Sons

“Ha Lachma Anya... This is the bread of affliction that our forefathers ate in the land of Egypt. All that are wanting should come and eat, all that are needy should come and join in the Pesach offering. Now we are here, next year we should be in the land of Israel. Now we are slaves, next year we should be free men."

So begins the portion of the Seder known as Maggid, the section in which we relate the story of our

enslavement to and exodus from Egypt. We begin our Seder with an invitation and a wish: we invite those who are in need to come celebrate with us, and we wish that next year we should be free to serve G-d in the land of Israel. Rav Baruch Frankel in *Margenisa D'Rav* writes that the link between the invitation and the wish is actually a cause and effect relationship. The Talmud (Baba Basra 10a) states that "Charity is great, as it brings closer the redemption." By extending our charitable hand to those who lack the bare necessities to make a proper Pesach celebration, we are bringing close to actualization our living in the land of Israel as free men.

However, giving charity is not an activity confined to the Pesach season. If we are charitable year round, we continuously bring ourselves closer to the end of our exile. Yet, this message has been given a prominent place in the Pesach celebration; it is recited as the very first passage in the Maggid liturgy. The reason for the conspicuous placement of this message is provided by Talmud as well. In further describing attributes of charity, the Talmud states that "all who neglect the commandment of giving charity, it is as if they themselves have worshiped idols." Benevolence is to be part and parcel of our personalities. Just as G-d is benevolent and giving, so are we to be. If we, instead, are miserly, or merely fail to make an effort to be charitable, it is as if we have denied G-d's very existence by worshiping idols.

On Pesach, we recall how the nation of Israel, when in Egypt, was commanded to take a sheep to use for the Paschal offering. The sheep was the G-d of Egypt, an animal that they revered and deified. This action was a clear rejection of the idolatrous practices the nation witnessed during their servitude in Egypt. We were given the commandment to have a Paschal offering every year, to recall our embracing of G-d as the One and Only, and our rejection of idolatry. If, on Pesach, we fail to be charitable, we are in essence regressing to the very state that we rejected while in Egypt. It would be hypocritical to, at one moment, eat a Korbon Pesach or recall one during the recitation of the Hagadah, while simultaneously be a person who neglects his needy brothers and sisters. Either we recall and embrace the rejection of idolatry the Korbon Pesach commemorates and act charitably, or we act without compassion for those in need and reject all that the Korbon Pesach stands for. Because we cannot begin to recite the Hagadah without clearly indicating that we have accepted the dominion of G-d, we must begin by affirmatively demonstrating that we are indeed concerned with the needs of the poor and needy, thereby demonstrating that we have spurned the idolatry that Egypt epitomized. Hence, Ha Lachma Anya needs to be at the beginning of the Maggid liturgy. © 2001 Rabbi G. Prero & Project Genesis, Inc.