

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

Although most will probably be reading this after it is already Pesach, this year we have the relatively rare opportunity to say Birchas Hachamah, a blessing made once every 28 years (although the blessing itself is said on other things much more often). The Hebrew term for the equinox, when the earth reaches a point in its yearly revolution when the sun shines directly on the equator, is "tekufah." There are two equinoxes, one that begins the spring (from which point the sun's rays start shining more directly to the north) and the other that begins autumn (when the direct rays move below the equator). The spring equinox is called "Tekufas Nisan" while the autumn equinox is called "Tekufas Tishray." The sun was created on the fourth day (Beraishis 1:14-19), which, because a Jewish day begins at night, means it was created when Tuesday became Tuesday night (and our Wednesday). At the equinox, when daytime is the same length as nighttime, this would occur at 6pm, and whenever "Tekufas Nisan" occurs at that same time (6pm as Tuesday becomes Wednesday), when the sun is in the same position as when it was created, at the same time of the week, we recite Birchas Hachamah the next morning. This year (cycle) we recite this blessing on the morning before Pesach begins.

Several complex issues are raised regarding how Halachah (Jewish law) views and treats the equinoxes, as well as issues that pertain specifically to Birchas Hachamah. One of these issues is why we make Birchas Hachamah when Tekufas Nisan occurs as Tuesday turns into Wednesday, and not when Tekufas Tishray does. There is a discussion (Rosh Hashanah 10b) whether the world was created in Tishray or in Nisan, and we follow the opinion that it was created in Tishray (as indicated in our Rosh Hashanah prayers). If the world, including the sun, was created in Tishray, why are we making Birchas Hachamah in Nisan instead?

Numerous answers are given, often revolving around the idea that both are true, such as G-d deciding to create the world in Tishray but actually creating it in Nisan, or creating the spiritual world in Tishray and the physical world in Nisan. The Ben Ish Chai (Rabbi Yosef Chaim), in his commentary on the Aggadic portions of the Talmud (Ben Yehoyada, Rosh

Hashanah 10b) quotes the Ari z"l, who compared creation to childbirth, with the world being conceived in Tishray and born in Nisan. It is for this reason that the wording of the Musaf prayers on Rosh Hashanah (after we blow the shofar) is "hayom haras olam, " today was the conception of the world (as opposed to creation or birth). I would like to expand upon this approach.

Much has been written regarding the (perceived) discrepancy between how old scientists say the world is and how old our tradition says it is. As I noted several years ago (www.aishdas.org/ta/5767/beraishis.pdf), the tradition is based on the number of years since Adam was created. Since he was created on the sixth day, the question becomes how long those first six days really took. Did they take only 6 "earth" days (24 earth hours), with G-d creating an adult world during that short time-span that gives the appearance of being billions of years old? Or was it really billions of years, with the term "day" not to be taken literally, or time being measured from a different perspective those first six days, with six days from a universal perspective taking billions of years from the perspective of the newly-forming earth. Although it makes no practical difference (since either way the world was ready for Adam when he was created), if the variation in how fast time passes (as has been shown to occur even on commercial airline flights) is the key to explaining how it is now 5769 (and a half?) years since Adam was created while also being about 15 billion years from the moment of the "big bang," we can understand the Ari z"l's words on a much deeper level.

The world was conceived in Tishray, when the big bang occurred at the start of the first day. As the primordial matter expanded, and the world starting to take form, years and years passed (although only a few days from the universal, or G-d's, perspective). Our solar system was born about 10 billion years after its conception. The sun was fully developed enough to give light (it had to ignite first) and the length of days (from earth's perspective), years and seasons were what they are today (24 hours, almost 365.25 days, four seasons per year) on the fourth of G-d's days (many "local" years after the earth had formed). So we have at least two "clocks," and two calendars. Everything started in Tishray. On G-d's calendar it was the fourth of Tishray that the sun was in its proper place (etc.), while on the "local" calendars (including earth's), many Tishrays had passed. Which month was it on the

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earth's calendar when our solar system was "born?" There were many events involved in this "birth," but, continuing with the conception/birth analogy, they could be compared to a developing fetus still in its mother's womb. It makes sense to consider the "birth" to be when everything had developed to the stage where it would be when man enters the scene; 24 hours in a day, 365.25 days per year, etc. Since this correlated to G-d's fourth day, this was considered the day that our world was "born," with our sages telling us that this was in Nisan.

This might explain why we say "Birchas Hachamah" in Nisan, but it brings up another issue, which is part of a larger issue when it comes to marking the "tekufos." If we are using two different calendars, and the sun was "created" on G-d's fourth day, who says it was the fourth day of an earth week? It may have been Nisan on "our" calendar, and Wednesday on G-d's, but if the "birth" signifies time (days/years) starting to pass normally, how can that day be called the fourth day of the week? The truth is, though, that we designate the "tekufos" based on years that are 365.25 days, even though they are slightly less. This is not the venue to get into specifics, but we do follow the "true" equinox for setting our leap years (the 19 year cycle); it is only when it comes to saying Birchas Hachamah and when to start praying for rain (outside of Israel) that we use the simpler formula of 365.25 days per year. The point of Birchas Hachamah is to thank/praise G-d for creation, and we do so this year on April 8th even though the real equinox occurred on March 20th. It is therefore not that big a deal to use the day of the week the sun was "born" on G-d's calendar and the month it was born on ours.

There is one more thought I'd like to share. Much has been made about the possibility of Birchas Hachamah falling on Erev Pesach the year we came out of Egypt and the year we were saved from Haman's decree. However, if you do the math (Birchas Hachamah occurring every 28 years, with the first one coming in year one and the second in year 29), there was no Birchas Hachamah in 2448 (it would have been in 2437 and then in 2465), nor in the year of the Purim story. However, these calculations are based on Shemuel's opinion that we estimate the length of the year (as opposed to Rav Ada bar Ahava, who gives a

much more accurate length, and whose opinion we follow regarding leap years), and we didn't "paskin" like Shemuel until Talmudic times (at the earliest). The ancient Egyptians were said to have a pretty decent knowledge of astronomy, and when you consider the traditions Moshe had that came from the patriarchs, it is theoretically possible that 2448 was in fact a year of Birchas Hachamah (especially since the start of the "cycle" was not really year 1 of the earth's years, but about 4 billion years earlier).

Purim happened way before we "paskened" like Shemuel as well, but there we have another major issue: the supposed "lost" years of Jewish history (see www.aishdas.org/ta/5768/tzav.pdf). Unless there were 168 lost years (a multiple of 28, and most scholars put the number between 166 and 168), if there really are, say, 166 years of history that are unaccounted for, our numbers are off. Not a problem as far as making the beracha, as we "paskin" that this year is 5769, and we "paskin" that we say Birchas Hachamah every year that, after subtracting 1, is divisible by 28. But it's yet another factor to take into consideration when discussing whether or not the year of Purim could have been a year that Birchas Hachamah was said.

So much is packed into this seemingly simple blessing. Science and Torah, the Halachic process, the missing years, gender equality, human mortality; all issues that come to bear. And through it all, the ultimate message is that we turn to G-d and praise Him for creating us! © 2009 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

This Wednesday morning, we celebrate the ritual of Birkat Hachamah. Once every twenty-eight years, the sun rises on the same day of the week and in the very same spot it appeared when it was first created. The occasion is marked by reciting the blessing "oseh ma'aseh Bereishit - who makes the wonder of creation," along with other pertinent prayers.

The explanations most often associated with the blessing over the sun range from the traditionalist approach, which sees the ritual as a time to acknowledge G-d's ultimate control over the world, to the more liberal stance that Birkat Hachamah reminds us of the importance of the sun and the need to be attentive to the environment and issues such as global warming.

I'd like to offer several other conceptual frameworks. Twenty-eight years is a significant span; we live just so many of these chunks of time. Thus, Birkat Hachamah may give us reason to pause and wonder, where we will be - if we will be - twenty-eight years from now. As such, it teaches us that time moves on, and we ought use every moment wisely.

Not only does Birkat Hachamah encourage us to look forward, but it also tells us to look backwards.

Where were we twenty-eight years ago, in 1981, when Birkat Hachamah was last celebrated? Many of our loved ones - in my case, my mother - are no longer alive, and yet others have been born.

Yes, it's a time to think about change. Changes as the world has modernized. Changes in our personal lives, in the life of our people and the life of the world. Changes in ourselves as we've all grown older. Some of us are slower, more wrinkled, more tentative, and now, we make way for others who have grown into adulthood, poised to become the movers and shakers of our communities.

And yet, as much as Birkat Hachamah inspires contemplation about change, its fundamental message is the very opposite - it's about sameness. It is on this day that we go back in time and celebrate the first arrival of the sun; the first celebration of "Here Comes the Sun."

In Jewish thought, the moon represents change. It's in constant motion, as it wanes, waxes, and wanes again. But the sun is constant. In the words of Ecclesiastes, "The sun rises and the sun sets, and glides back to where it rises....Whatever has been is what will be, and whatever has been done is what will be done. There is nothing new beneath the sun." (Ecclesiastes 1:5,9)

This is an important Jewish idea. As much as people seek openness and creativity, in Jewish thinking and action there is an instinctive reach for the roots, for the foundation, for the basics. It's much like baseball, whose season starts this week - we begin at home, but no matter how far one wanders, no matter how far one strays, one can only score when coming back home to where it all started in the first place.

So, too, with regard to the larger world. There is a relentless push for innovation and novelty. Sometimes we move at such a quick pace that we miss the beauty of the scenery that passes us by. We miss the basic values of humanness, so crucial for our emotional well being. This is especially true in the computer age. While undoubtedly shrinking the world, the Internet has too often forced us to sacrifice intimate contact with those who are closest. To use Martin Buber's terms, in improving the realm of I-it, we have sacrificed that which is more important - the realm of I-thou.

As I recite Birkat Hachamah, I'll be thinking of G-d and His beautiful world. And yes, I'll be holding on to the moment, as I think of those who were here twenty-eight years ago, but are no longer here.

But most importantly, I'll be celebrating the miracle of sameness, the miracle of constancy, the miracle that when all is said and done, the sun has returned to the very spot where it first appeared when it was first born. Ecclesiastes said it well, "One generation goes, another comes, but the world remains the same forever." (Ecclesiastes 1:4) © 2009 Hebrew

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RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

Pesach is the holiday of memory and of hope. Memory is really the key to Jewish survival and a meaningful Jewish life. All of the rituals and foods of Pesach, the Seder and all of its customs, are intended to be memory aids. Events that are well over three millennia old are remembered and celebrated.

In this the Jewish people remain completely unique in having a national memory that stretches back over such a length of time. We remember that we left Egypt on a Thursday and that the events of our salvation at Yam Suf are indelibly recorded in our minds and daily prayers.

The sweep of Jewish history from Avraham till today is one long continuum of momentous events, special personages and indescribable perseverance and tenacity. Yet somehow the Jewish people in its collective memory recall all of it and keep it alive from one generation till the next.

That is the secret of the vitality of the Pesach Seder, celebrating events that are over thirty three hundred years old. Those Jews who have lost this sense of memory and live only in the ever-changing present are doomed to angst and doubt. Rootless, they will have to sway in the winds that buffet our world from every direction.

Loss of memory is as tragic for a people as it is for an individual human being. Parents and children succumb to this disease of forgetfulness. The story is told about an absent-minded great professor who upon alighting from his bus stop was so confused that he forgot his home address. Seeing a young boy playing with a ball on the sidewalk he approached and asked him: "Do you know where the great professor lives?" The boy looked up to him in wonder and said; "Abba, don't you recognize me?" Without common and important memory the generations will never be able to recognize each other.

That is the reason that the Pesach Seder and holiday is so vital and has always continued to retain its hold on the Jewish people, even amongst sections of the Jewish people who are not necessarily strictly observant. Everyone deep down in their hearts recognizes and treasures the importance of generational memory and tradition.

And Pesach is probably the strongest memory aid that Judaism possesses. For with every bite of matzo the memories come flooding into our subconscious soul. This is the bread of our forefathers, not only of Egyptian bondage, but of Temple times, of Spanish and French exiles, of Eastern European

greatness and Holocaust, of Israel both ancient and current.

The matzo speaks to us of our past and our journey throughout human history. The prophet's words "you are My witnesses" echo in our minds and hearts and in the crackling sound of the matzo being chewed and digested.

Look where we have been and what we have overcome. Remember the generations that enabled us to reach this day. See the faces of our children and grandchildren at the Seder table. What message shall we leave for them? What is our legacy to them if nothing but this great sense of memory and past?

The other side of the coin of Pesach is hope. The view of a better future no matter what our current difficulties are. Judaism is the faith of hope and optimism. For thousands of years Jews proclaimed at the Pesach Seder "Next year in Jerusalem, rebuilt and populated." This unlikely proclamation has come true in front of our very eyes. Those who deny its importance or resist its message are bereft of hope.

The world is full of seemingly self-important naysayers. But the hope of the ages has nevertheless been vindicated in actual and realistic terms. And we still hope for greater things - for the dry bones of the prophet Yechezkel's great vision to be revived once more, for a time of peace and security and true freedom for all.

We have extraordinary hopes for our future and for the future of humankind generally. We have never lost our hope for better times and improved situations. Pesach comes to reinforce our sense of these hopes and expectations. That our situation lacks current perfection is certainly an understatement. But Pesach reminds us not to despair of our future.

Looking at our past challenges one may gain a sense of renewed confidence regarding our future. Building our families, educating our young and old, striving and working for improvement, both personal and national, is the lesson of Pesach. This tandem of memory and hope assures our eventual survival and triumph. © 2009 Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com/jewishhistory.

RABBI LABEL LAM

Dvar Torah

In each and every generation a person is obligated to see himself as if he went out of Egypt, as it says, "And you should tell your child on that day, 'Because of this HASHEM did for me when I went out of Egypt!' Not our ancestors alone did the Holy One blessed is He redeem but even us he redeemed with them!" (The Haggada)

There's an open contradiction in this statement. I'm not the first one to notice it. On the one hand each individual in every generation has an obligation to see themselves as if they had gone out of Egypt and then immediately the Haggada tells us that we too actually were redeemed when our ancestors exited Egypt 3321 years ago. Which is it? Is it "as if" like some imaginary morality play we perform or is it real and true? The Maharal from Prague offers the answer but it needs a little explaining. The "as if" goes on the individual while the "actual" refers to the group.

I once asked a group of high school students that had just finished a unit in history, "Who's the most important person in human history?" and "What is the most important moment of human history?" After guessing Avraham, Moshe, and Dovid, I finally let them know...it is...Label Lam! They were shocked. Most of them had never heard of me. I told them I would prove it.

There can be no more reliable proof than an open statement from the Sages of the Talmud. When a witness is about to give testimony in a life and death trial he is strongly reminded about the hazardous consequences of his words. They ask him, "Why was "man" created singular?" He could have been created as a couple, or a gaggle, or a corporation. The answer the witness is told is: "A person has an obligation to say, 'the whole world was created for me!'".

When Adam opened his eyes he beheld a universe of trees and breezes and rays of golden light, constructed with precision for his for his benefit. That's not only true of Adam the first man but every individual subsequently has the same obligation to see himself as the centerpiece of human history.

I told those students that if you ask your parents, "Who's the most important person in Jewish history?" and then you tell'm, "Label Lam" then you didn't understand the message. Everyone has to say himself! I am only an actor in your morality play. So what is the most important moment in Jewish history? You guessed it! THIS moment!

This is all included in a statement by Hillel, "If I am not for me who will be for me, and if I am only for myself then what am I and if not now, then when?!" Hillel says that nobody else can play my unique part in history but me and nobody can make me want to realize that role but me. However, if my part is only about me or for my sake then I am no longer suffering an identity crisis, (WHO am I?) but rather, a humanity crisis (WHAT am I?). The reason I'm obligated to develop my SELF is for the good of the aggregate. We need the help of and we have to act on behalf of the entirety of humanity over many the millennium.

How does "if not now, when?!" fit in here? Is it simply a nice rhetorical device? "Seize the day! No time like the present!" Actually, the first two parts tell us that there are no extra actors in the play of history and

everyone fits perfectly into the plot, adding color and texture to the living fabric of life. The third part tells us that there are also no extra or repeat moments. Twice daily we say in our prayers, "He renews with His kindness all day the act of creation." Each moment the world is being recreated and affirmed by The Almighty no less than the first moment of creation.

So too when we are seated around the Pesach Seder, we are obligated to imagine that the entire exodus from Egypt was all because of me. "Because of this HASHEM did all this for me..." He had me in mind at that time that I would be seated here in the 21st century munching Matzos. By imagining it so we weave our way into the fabric of Jewish history and destiny. Ultimately it's about being an important part of the entirety of Israel, from its very beginning and Maxwell House Haggada in hand, good 'till the last drop. © 2009 Rabbi L. Lam and Torah.org.

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

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

“**T**he wicked child asks, 'What is this service to you!' Saying YOU, he excludes himself, and because he excludes himself from the group, he denies a basic principle of our faith.

You, in turn, should set his teeth on edge and say to him: 'Because of what the Eternal did for me when I came forth from Egypt I do this.' For ME and not for HIM; had he been there, he would not have been redeemed." [Passover Haggadah]

One of the more fascinating aspects of the Haggadah is the eternal tale of the Four Children. No matter how often we come across these four archetypes there is always an additional layer of meaning to discover. This year I'd like to analyze the attitude the leader of the Seder is expected to express as a response to the provocative question of the wicked child, quoted above: "You shall set his teeth on edge (hakhai et shinav)," is what the Baal Haggadah is to do to the "wicked" child.

Granted, the words attributed to the wicked child are condescending and exclusionary, setting up a situation in which he - the child- is on the outside, judging, almost mocking those who are on the inside, those who feel connected to the aspirations of the festival. "Why are 'you' going through all of this hard work," the wicked child seems to imply, critical of the entire process. The Biblical texts that accompany the questions of the wicked child's brothers and sisters are part of sections which, for the most part, include the phrase, "...when your child will ask you" (for ex. Deut.6:20, accompanying the wise child's question). But the wicked child's words are preceded with: "When your children say to you; what is this service to you" [Ex. 12:26]. In other words the wise child asks his/her parents, the wicked child tells them!

Nevertheless, the instruction "to set his teeth on edge" still sounds rather harsh, virtually suggesting a form of corporal punishment. If our purpose is to bring someone from the 'outside' closer to the 'inside,' striking or castigating him is hardly the way to accomplish that. The phrase is also a rather difficult one to understand. The Hebrew word "hakei" means to strike or smack, whereas the Hebrew word in the Haggadah - hakhei (with an extra 'h' as part of the verb form)- means to blunt, or soften iron through fire, as it is found in Ecclesiastes 10:10; in the context of the Haggadah, it would seem to me to mean that the leader of the seder must remove this child's sharply expressed self-exclusion by means of the warmth and even passion of familial love and acceptance.

A variation of the word 'hakhei' appears only twice again in the entire Bible, once in Ezekiel and once in Jeremiah; in both instances the meanings are identical. In the context of his vision of ultimate redemption, Jeremiah declares: "In those days they shall say no more: 'The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge' (tik'hena, referring to the kind of sour taste one gets after eating something with too much acidity). But every one shall die for his own iniquity; every man that eats the sour grapes, only his teeth shall be set on edge." [Jeremiah 31:28-29]

In order to understand the significance of this prophetic vision, we must remember that our Bible - different from the Code of Hammurabi insists that children are not to be penalized for their parent's transgressions: "Parents shall not be put to death through children, and children shall not be put to death through parents. Everyone shall be put to death through his own sin." [Deut. 24:16]

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

It seems to me that this is one of the central messages behind the words of the Haggadah. If a child around the Seder table declares with a challenge rather

than asks with a will to understand, if he/she refers to the ritual as "work" and excludes him/herself from the congregation of Israel, if-in effect-his/her teeth remain sourly set on edge in critique of the entire religious and familial establishment, then you, the parents, must consider that it was possibly "you who set his teeth on edge" because of the sour message which you projected as a parent and as a representative of the Jewish chain of being. Perhaps you did not listen to your child carefully enough, engage him/her in the religious process often enough, grant him/her time enough.

Hence as part of your response, you must find the way to repair the damage by inspiring the child to feel once again like a respected and loved member of his family and his faith community. Those whose teeth are sour must be showered with the kind of love which draws them into the collective reality of Klal Yisrael so that they can experience, with the rest of us, the pain of the Egyptian servitude and the freedom of the Exodus as if they had lived through them themselves, intimately linking them to the nation's heart. In this way the hearts of all parents will turn towards their children and the hearts of all children to their parents! © 2009 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

Down and Dirty

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

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

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

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

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

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

Rav Simcha Bunim of P'shischa explains that the first order of the kohen's day is to depart from the assumed holy rituals of the Bais HaMikdash and delve into the ash. In order to raise the level of the nation they were meant to serve, the kohanim had to stoop to the level of the simplest worker and clean the altar, a seemingly menial task, that encompassed a variety of spiritual ramifications. Because in order to reach the level of high and holy, one must start out down and dirty. © 2001 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & torah.org

RABBI ARI WEISS

Where's Moshe?

This 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.

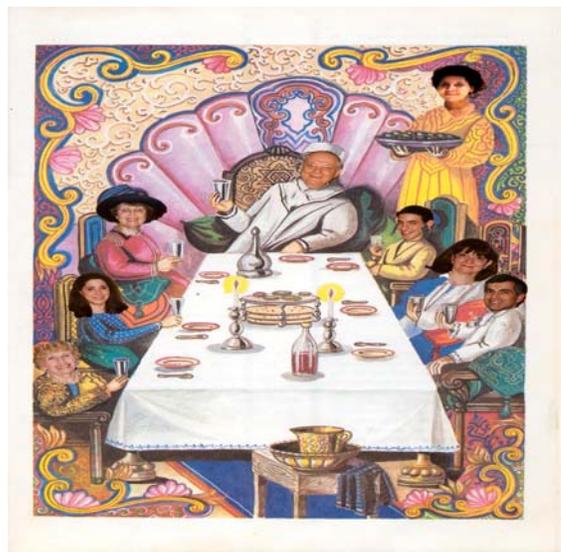
In order to understand why Moshe is in the background during our seder, we must examine the content of maggid. Maggid outlines the story of our redemption and actually retells the story of every exile we've gone through and will go through. In maggid we read of the prototypical exile and redemption that 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.



חג שמח וכשר!