

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI MORDECHAI WEISS

Appreciating the Good

In each of the first two books of the Torah we are introduced to the beginnings of the Jewish people. In the first book of Breishit, the focus is on the family; the three patriarchs and their families- the striving and the bickering within the families. The second book of Shemot begins with the emergence of the Jewish people as an entity, their rise to greatness and their perceived threat and eventual expulsion from the land. It is a story of love and hate, jealousy and adoration. Breishit in essence deals with the beginnings of the family of the Jewish people, while the book of Shmot stresses the initial stages of the formation of the great nation of Israel.

The bridge between both books is the dramatic account of Joseph and his brothers; his rise to power and his innovations in the land of Egypt. Because of his efforts, Shmot begins with the surfacing of the Jewish people as a powerful nation, and finally "there arose a new king of Egypt who did not know of Joseph"-or at least he pretended that he did not know-and the persecuting of the Jews leading to their final ouster from the land.

A dominant theme in the book of Shmot, is the attention to the importance of "Hakarat Hatov, recognizing the good. The Torah references times when Pharaoh did not recognize the good that Joseph had brought upon Egypt, while at the same time spotlighting the sensitivities of our teacher Moses in refusing to punish the Egyptians with the plagues of blood, frogs and lice, for the waters saved his life when he was cast onto the Nile as a baby, and the land rescued him by providing a place to bury the Egyptian that he slew, ultimately saving his life. This theme of "Hakarat Hatov" appears in other instances in this story as well and brings home the lesson of the importance of this attribute in a Jew's daily life.

An added display of the reaction of Almighty G-d when one denies "Hakarat Hatov" can also be seen

This issue of Toras Aish is dedicated
in loving memory of
Esther Nechama Margolese
אסתר נחמה בת שרה לאה ז"ל
by some of her "adopted" kids
We love you and will miss you!

in the way G-d punishes Pharaoh.

Pharaoh denies Joseph's existence. He rejects any good or benefit that the Jews of Egypt have bequeathed his land. He snubs their existence. G-d's response for this obvious lack of "Hakarot Hatov", recognition for the good, is that the land of Egypt would be inundated with plagues, each a symbol of how Egypt would have appeared had Joseph not been there during the famine to save it.

The blood represents the lack of water; this leads to the frogs and amphibians engulfing the land in search for water. As a consequence of the lack of water, lice befell the people. Wild animals then ascended upon the land for there was no food to be found and they had no alternative but to seek their sustenance within the vulnerable population of humans. Further, when there is no food the cattle and livestock die (Dever, Pestilence). All these unsanitary conditions lead to boils (Shichin). Finally the hail and the Locusts destroy all the remaining food leaving the land barren and in darkness, ultimately leading to the death of children, the very future of Egypt's existence.

G-d needed to show Pharaoh how his land would have looked had Joseph and all the Jews not been there. The result was desolation and emptiness; total destruction.

In essence, this is also the cycle of Jewish History throughout the ages. Despite contributions of the Jewish people, and their work to better society, they are often taken for granted and are not given the proper Hakarat Hatov, recognition of the good, that they so deserve.

One has only to look at the amount of discoveries in science and medicine, the Arts and in education to appreciate the vital role that the Jews have played. Yet they are constantly ridiculed and blamed for all of the world's troubles, very often becoming the scapegoats for societies.

This is the story of the book of Exodus. And this story is the basis for all the stories of the Jewish sojourn in world history.

In each land that we visit we grace it with our knowledge and drive. We improve their society. When finally we are chased out, often the land we sojourned in is left void and empty. One need only look at the land of Israel after the destruction of the second Beit Hamikdash. Only the Jews were able to eventually return in the late 1800's and till the soil and make it fruitful and beautiful; a land flowing with milk and honey.

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The message of the importance of Hakarat hatov therefore becomes apparent. Its lack is a plague which also affects Jews as well. It stems from a feeling of entitlement and the wielding of power and influence.

How many of us thank the schools that our children attend and receive such a fine education? How many of us thank their teachers, their Rabbis and the people who work so hard to keep the doors of the Day School or Yeshiva open? How many of us thank our parents for all their love and support? And yes, how many of us thank the simple person who performs menial tasks like cleaning the bathrooms at the airport or in our offices? A simple "thank you" would go a long way!

And a simple "thank you" would bring our redemption that much closer! © 2009 Rabbi M. Weiss
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RABBI YONASON SACKS

TorahWeb

In his commentary on the Hagaddah, the Abarbanel explains that all four questions of the Mah Nishtana revolve around a single idea: the apparent contradiction of symbols on Seder night. On one hand, the consumption of matzah and maror evokes a sense of destitution and subjugation. On the other hand, the dipping and leaning indicate royalty and freedom. By noting all four symbols, the perplexed child really asks: on Seder night, are we slaves or are we free?

The Abarbanel explains that the Seder employs contradictory symbols because Pesach represents an instantaneous transition in which Bnei Yisrael experienced both slavery and freedom on a single night. By acknowledging the dire subjugation, a person comes to truly appreciate the magnitude of the salvation. Hence, the matzah and the maror evoke bitter memories of suffering in order to augment the joy of redemption.

The Beis HaLevi (Parshas Beshalach) highlights this value of contrast in explaining an initially perplexing Midrash: "Amar Moshe b'az' chatasi sheamarti, 'ume'az basi ledaber el Pharaoh heira la'am hazeh', b'az' ani omer shira-Moshe stated: [With the word] 'az' I sinned when I stated 'Since (ume'az) I came

to speak to Pharaoh, he has been evil to this nation;' and with [the word] az, I sing praise (az yashir Moshe).

Moshe Rabbeinu employed the very same term, "az," to describe both the unbearable slavery in Mitzrayim as well as the ineffable joy of the Exodus. This linguistic repetition suggests that Moshe Rabbeinu praised HaKadosh Baruch Hu not only for the eventual salvation, but also for the servitude which preceded the salvation: if not for the prior servitude, no salvation could be possible. The Beis HaLevi adds that this notion also underlies the posuk: "odecha ki anisani vatehi li l'yeshua-I thank You, for You afflicted me, and were for me a salvation" (Tehillim 118). In this posuk, Dovid Hamelech thanks HaKadosh Baruch Hu not only for his salvation, but also for his affliction. Only in the context of the prior affliction can one truly appreciate the salvation.

The Rambam appears to perceive an additional value in recalling the suffering which precedes salvation: beyond stimulating greater appreciation for the salvation itself, our acknowledgment of the prior danger attunes us to the specific reality that HaKadosh Baruch Hu listens to our tefillos and comes to our rescue. In the beginning of his Yad HaChazakah, the Rambam explains that the reason for reading the Megillah-which describes not only the salvation of Klal Yisrael but also the initial danger of Haman's decree- is "keday l'hodia ledoros ha'ba'im she'emmes ma shehivticho baTorah, 'ki mi goy gadol asher lo Elokim krovim elav k'Hashem Elokeinu b'chol koreinu elav-to affirm the fact that HaKadosh Baruch Hu listens and responds to our pleas". Similarly, in the context of Yetziyas Mitzrayim, we not only mention the salvation, but also the initial enslavement, in order to accentuate the fact that HaKadosh Baruch Hu listens to our prayers and comes to our rescue. Perhaps this is the intent of the posuk, when it describes "va'yay'anchu Bnai Yisroel...vayizaku vata'al shavasam el haElokim...vayishma Hashem es na'akasm" immediately after Bnei Yisrael cried out, "Hashem heard their cries."

The value of celebrating both the suffering and the salvation of Pesach night is expressed in other symbols of the Seder as well. The single symbol of matzah represents both "Lechem Oni-poor man's bread," and "Lechem She'Onin Alav D'varim Harbeibread upon which the Hallel and expressions of thanksgiving" (see Rashi Pesachim 36a) are recited. The maror of Seder night also expresses a similar dichotomy. While it certainly evokes bitter memories of slavery and subjugation, the Gemarah also explains that one should eat lettuce-"chasah"-mishum she'chas Rachmana ilavan-because HaKadosh Baruch Hu treated us with mercy". Thus, the single symbol of maror also represents both slavery and salvation.

This duality expresses itself in the Rishonim's understanding of the wording of "Ha Lachma Anya": the Rashbam understands the phrase "di achalu

avahasana b'arah d'Mitzrayim "as a reference to the matzah eaten with the Korban Pesach as Bnei Yisrael emerged as a free nation on the night of Yetziyas Mitzrayim. The Rashbatz, however, identifies the phrase as an allusion to the matzah eaten before the redemption, over the course of the bitter servitude in Mitzrayim. These oppositional interpretations of "Ha Lachma Anya" appear to mirror the dual symbols embedded within matzah itself-slavery and freedom in a single symbol (see also Ramban al HaTorah, Devarim 16:2, who echoes this sentiment as well, suggesting that matzah tirmoz lishnei devarim).

The Rambam's version of "Ha Lachma Anya" may also underscore this duality. In his text of the Hagaddah, the Rambam prefaces "Ha Lachma Anya" with the phrase: "b'vihilu yatzanu miMitzrayim, halacham anya diachalu avahasana b'arah dMitzrayim-with rapidity, we left Egypt. This is the bread of affliction..." The initial part of the phrase evokes our speedy departure from Mitzrayim as a free nation. The second phrase recalls the horrors of our slavery. The juxtaposition of these two elements suggests that from the depths of slavery and exile can spring hope and salvation.

A similar idea is expressed in Rashi's explanation "Baruch shomer havtachaso l'Yisroel baruch Hu-Blessed is He Who keeps His promise to Israel." The Hagaddah does not specify to which promise it refers. The Ritva opines that the Ba'al Hagaddah-refers to the Bris Bein HaBesarim (the Covenant Between the Parts") in which HaKadosh Baruch Hu promised that Avraham Avinu's descendants would be redeemed. Rashi, however, maintains that the promise refers to the servitude itself. According to Rashi's reading, it would appear that the very experience of suffering itself warrants praise and beracha. In this respect, Rashi's understanding of Baruch Shomer Havtachaso may be aptly compared to the Beis HaLevi's understanding of Az Yashir."

Similarly, this lesson is implied in the passage-"yarad l'Mitzrayim anus al pi hadibbur-He [Yaakov Avinu] went down to Egypt, compelled by Devine decree."

Chazal underscore that Yaakov Avinu did not leave Eretz

Yisrael willingly. The Ra'avan writes that in theory, Yaakov Avinu should have been forced down to Mitzrayim in iron chains to fulfill the decree of HaKadosh Baruch Hu, if not for the mercy and compassion which HaKadosh Baruch Hu shows to His loved ones. The Midrash Rabbah (Breishis Rabbah 86) similarly analogizes Yaakov's descent to a cow being forced to the slaughterhouse. Although the cow will initially resist with all of its might, it will ultimately submit if it sees its calf being brought to the slaughterhouse. Similarly, HaKadosh Baruch Hu forced Yaakov Avinu to descend to Mitzrayim by first bringing his beloved son, Yosef, down to Mitzrayim.

The Rashbam infers the compulsory nature of Yaakov Avinu's descent from HaKadosh Baruch Hu's placation of his fears: "al tira meireda Mitzrayma- have no fear of descending to Egypt (Bereishes 46:3)." Through this statement, HaKadosh Baruch Hu assuaged Yaakov's fears by guaranteeing him that everything that He does is for the best, as R' Akiva states in Masseches Berachos (60b): kol d'avid Rachmana 'tav avid.

In a related vein, the Sanzer Rebbe (cited by R' Asher Weiss, Haggadas Minchas Asher, p. 393) cited this theme in explanation of the common practice of covering one's eyes at the beginning of keriyas Shema (see Berachos 13b). In affirming "Hashem Elokeinu Hashem Echad," we note the singularity and absolute unity of HaKadosh Baruch Hu in this world. Although din (strict judgment) and rachamim (paternal compassion) appear as distinct attributes to our imprecise perception, these entities are truly one and the same. We thus cover our eyes to represent the fallibility of our limited vision. As we acknowledge the unity of HaKadosh Baruch Hu, we will not allow ourselves to be "blinded" by the apparent existence of suffering and travail in this world. © 2011 Rabbi Y. Sacks & The TorahWeb Foundation

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

Seder night, we are commanded to tell the story of the Exodus from Egypt. The Mishna tells us that the retelling should be done in response to questions posed by the children. If they have no questions, we teach them the four questions, which form the "Ma Nishtana." Today, at every seder table the questions are asked and the answers discussed. But there is one question which has always disturbed me: "On all other nights we do not dip even once and on this night of Passover we dip twice." This particular question is never 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?

Another question. We all enjoy a spirited singing of "Dayenu," the quintessential thanksgiving to G-d for every step through which He guided us 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 He not split the sea for us, it would have been sufficient - dayenu." However there is one line in this song of praise which has always troubled me: "Had He brought us in front of Mount Sinai and not given us the Torah, it would have been sufficient -

dayenu." In what sense 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?!

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 made their way down to Egypt as a result of the fact that Joseph the son of Jacob, was sold into Egyptian servitude by his brothers. Since the brothers had to offer some explanation for Joseph's mysterious disappearance, they dipped his 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 Jacob saw the bloodied garment of his beloved son, he assumed that Joseph's body 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 10a). Hence, some Jews have the tradition of dipping the karpas not only in salt-water symbolizing the tears that the Jewish people shed but also in the red haroset, which according to the Jerusalem Talmud symbolizes blood, expresses the tragedy of Jewish internal hatred - the root cause of our exiles and persecutions.

The second dipping took place at the end of the Egyptian enslavement, and the beginning of the Hebrew emancipation. At this time, 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 doorposts 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 god (for such was the lamb) to their higher belief in the Lord of redemption and freedom. They performed 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 frenzied hysteria which most certainly accompanied the death of the Egyptian first born. The second act of dipping served as a tikkun, or repair 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. © 2011 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

Pesach is unique among the Jewish holidays in many ways. One of its unique aspects is its structure. Although Succos is also seven days (Vayikra 23:34), only the first of those days is Yom Tov (two days outside Israel), with restrictions similar to Shabbos. There is a separate "eighth day" when those restrictions also apply, but Succos itself is only seven days. Pesach, on the other hand, is the only Yom Tov that lasts seven days and has "intermediary days" that are book-ended by full days of Yom Tov.

The seventh day of Pesach corresponds to "K'riyas Yam Suf," when G-d split the sea, allowing us to walk through on "dry land" (Shemos 14:22) before bring the sea back to normal and drowning the Egyptians in it (see Rashi on 14:5). Although the focus of Pesach is our leaving Egypt on the 15th of Nisan (the first night and day of Pesach), telling over the harshness of our servitude in Egypt and all the miracles G-d did to free us from it, the exodus was not complete until we went through the sea and the Egyptians drowned in it. Pharaoh had never been asked to let the Children of Israel leave Egypt forever, only that they leave for a "three day journey" to worship G-d in the desert (see <http://aishdas.org/ta/5766/beshalach.pdf>). The plagues could have been sent to punish Pharaoh for refusing to do this, and/or to make him change his mind; there was no way to know at the time that they were designed to give the Children of Israel full freedom (see page 3 of <http://aishdas.org/ta/5765/beshalach.pdf>). It was only after the miraculous splitting of the sea that it became evident that G-d wanted to take them out of Egypt completely; our exodus was not complete until the seventh day of Pesach, warranting it being a full day of Yom Tov.

As I discussed in the pieces referenced above, whether G-d would take the Children of Israel out of Egypt at that point, 210 years after "Israel" (Yaakov) moved to Egypt (actually 209, since the 210 years started a year earlier, when his sons went down to Egypt to buy grain), depended on whether the 400 year exile "in a land not theirs" (Berishis 15:13) had started from the birth of Yitzchok (see Rashi). I would like to add another aspect to this discussion, based on a piece Rabbi Avrom Shain, sh"lita wrote on the Hagada (Nachalas Ish, printed in the back of Birkas Ish) that discusses why the "chiefs of Edom became disoriented" (Shemos 15:15) after the splitting of the sea.

After Avraham had returned from Egypt (Beraishis 13:7), there was a dispute between his shepherds and Lot's shepherds. The basis for this dispute was whether the land promised to Avraham was already his, and their cattle could graze anywhere, or

they could only graze on land that was ownerless because it didn't belong to him yet (see Rashi). This dispute was also relevant to when the 400 year exile started. If the land already belonged to Avraham, then he (and his son Yitzchok) were not in a land that "wasn't theirs," and these years couldn't be considered part of the 400 years of exile. Avraham never treated the land as if it were his, never grazing on anyone else's property and paying full price to buy the cave within which his wife was buried.

When Avraham died without ever treating the land as his own, it became apparent that he never benefited from the promise to receive the land. Yet, the Torah says that it was given to our forefathers (Avraham, Yitzchok and Yaakov) themselves, not just to their descendants (Devarim 11:21). This is one of the indications that the dead will be resurrected ("t'chiyas ha'maisim"), as otherwise they would never be able to personally own it. The Talmud (Bava Basra 16b) says that one of the sins Eisav committed on the day Avraham died was denying that the dead would be resurrected. The Midrash (Beraishis Rabbah 63:11) only mentions this sin, connecting it with his denial that there is any reward for doing mitzvos. Although there is an obvious connection between being rewarded for following G-d's will and being resurrected to properly receive that reward, I think the Midrash is highlighting what led Eisav to this denial.

It is obvious that Eisav believed in G-d, and that G-d is the ultimate source of everything, from the level of disappointment he felt when he found out that the blessings for material wealth he so craved were given to Yaakov instead. The concept of reward and punishment is not only relevant if we have free will, and are therefore responsible for the choices we make. They are also a powerful tool to help shape future behavior, both as an incentive to do the "right" thing (and not do what's "wrong"), and as an educational tool to teach what's "right" and what's "wrong." However, reward and punishment given after the soul leaves the body only makes sense if the person was responsible for his actions (and inactions). If there was no real choice in what is done (or not done), and there is no longer any chance to change or means to be educated (or educate others), there is nothing to be rewarded (or punished) for. [That doesn't mean every decision we make is done by exercising "free will." Throughout his writings (or where he is quoted/paraphrased), Rav Eliyahu Dessler, z"l, makes it clear that "bechira chofshis" (free will) only applies when we would consider choosing more than one thing; we have the ability to choose more than one option; and we recognize that the options available have elements of "truth" and "falsehood" (or "right" and "wrong") and are not just a personal preference. Even if most decisions made by most people are not done via "free will," if there was no concept of "free will" at all, a just G-d could not reward or punish any of His creations for what they chose.]

If Eisav wouldn't take responsibility for his actions, thinking that it was just his nature (and he had no real choice in the matter), then any "reward" his grandfather Avraham was promised for doing "good" had to be received in this world. When Avraham died without receiving this "reward," Eisav was faced with two options. He could either change his worldview and realize that we do have "free will," so the promise to Avraham could be fulfilled after he comes back to life, or maintain his denial of personal responsibility, and deny the concepts of "reward and punishment" and "t'chiyas ha'meisim," by insisting that Avraham really got his "reward" of the Promised Land, even if he chose not to "use" his reward. After all, a gift belongs to the person it was given to even if it is put in a closet and never used;

Avraham never benefiting from his "gift" doesn't mean it was never given to him. Chazal are teaching us that Eisav chose (yes, chose, because he did have free will) to continue refusing to accept responsibility for his choices, and therefore maintained that Avraham must have already received the land promised to him, thereby denying the concept of reward and punishment and of "t'chiyas ha'maisem."

If Avraham had received his "reward" while he was alive, the 400 year exile couldn't have started while he (and his sons) were still living in Canaan, as they were in a land that "was theirs." The plagues must have been sent because Pharaoh disobeyed G-d's request to let His nation go on a spiritual retreat, not because G-d wanted them to be free. However, after the splitting of the sea, when it became apparent that G-d took the Children of Israel out of Egypt, it also became apparent that the 400 years had ended, and therefore that the land hadn't yet been given to Avraham. Upon hearing this, the "chiefs of Edom became disoriented," because their whole world view (that they cannot be held accountable for their actions because there is no free will) was being challenged. (It is possible that Lot's descendants maintained the same philosophy, as it would not only absolve them of any responsibility for their actions, but absolve the actions of their forefather and foremothers as well. This could explain why "the powerful ones of Moav were gripped with trembling," and not included with the "withering [spirit] of those who dwelled in Canaan," who were concerned about their land being conquered.)

Although we don't say a "she'he'cheyanu" on the seventh day of Pesach (unlike Sh'mini Atzeres, which is not considered "Succos" and is therefore a new Yom Tov), because it corresponds to the splitting of the sea, which proved that the Promised Land had not yet been given to Avraham and that he would be given an opportunity to live there after it was "his," there is still something "new" gleaned from what happened on the seventh day of Pesach- the concept of "t'chiyas ha'meisim." © 2011 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'alot 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 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 G-d for allowing us to ascend and come one step closer to full redemption. © 2011 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 BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

Pesach has three divisions of time to it. There is the beginning of Pesach that is highlighted by the story of our exodus from Egypt - the Pesach Seder. In its unique fashion it outlines for us the path of the Jewish people throughout the ages. The Seder symbolizes the tenacity of Jewish faith - faith in our G-d and in our future, in our history and in our ancestors.

The Seder in effect reinforces within us the core Jewish belief that our grandfathers were not liars and that the tradition of the ages from Egypt and Sinai is true, valid, relevant and vital in all places and times. The timelessness of the words and rituals of the Seder further strengthen our inner beliefs. It provides us with optimism and hope for our future in spite of all of the dangers and problems that currently confront us.

We have the innate belief that the young ones who sit today at our Seder table will, in their good time, conduct their own Seder table and thereby guarantee the survival and continuity of the Jewish people. Merely bringing Jewish children into this world at birth is already a declaration of faith in our future and confidence in the eternity of the Jewish people.

And, the living memory of an event that occurred to our people 3323 years ago strengthens that confidence and deepens our determination to continue and succeed no matter the difficulties that constantly face us. This above all else is the gift that the Seder table and Pesach night grants us.

The intermediate days of Pesach - chol hamoed - represent the ability of Jews and of the Torah to treat the mundane activities of life and the world with holiness and a special reverence. I remember that one of my daughters once worked as an actuary in the offices of a large American insurance company. The company graciously allowed her to be absent on the Jewish holidays. However she was never able to satisfactorily explain to them why on chol hamoed she was able to appear at the office and accomplish the work that was necessary to be done that day.

The world understands that there can be holy days and that there are days that are not holy. It finds it difficult to comprehend how a day can be holy and somehow less than completely holy at one and the same time. Pesach teaches us that we are to sanctify the mundane and the unholy regular activities of everyday life.

The trips, tours, meals and outings that we embark on during the days of chol hamoed are different in kind and spirit than those that we enjoy during the other days of the year. The fact that we are still eating matzo on those occasions only reinforces for us this uniqueness of the time of chol hamoed. It reminds us of the reason for our exodus from Egypt and the purpose

of our state of freedom - to be a special people, a kingdom of priests, a holy nation.

The final day of Pesach commemorates for us our miraculous deliverance from the army of the Pharaoh at Yam Suf. The times that the Jewish people have been seemingly on the brink of annihilation over our long history are too numerous to be counted accurately. We have suffered partial annihilation, grievous losses but never total defeat and destruction.

From Pharaoh through Amalek, Philistines, Assyrians, Babylonians, Greeks, Romans, Byzantines, Latin Christians, Moslems, Germans, Soviets, Arabs, some present day NGO's and others many have tried to destroy the Jewish people. We are resented for our particularism and when we assimilate we are resented even more. And yet every time that it appears that history's curtain is ready to fall on us something unforeseen occurs and Jewish resilience drives us to survival and renewal.

The drama of Jewish survival at Yam Suf repeats itself in different forms over and over again in the history of civilization. Though many have wondered about this strange and exceptional phenomenon, no logical or completely rational answer to this matter has ever been advanced. The Lord has split many seas for us over the past three millennia of our existence.

Pesach reminds us of this inexplicable historical truism. Somehow merely knowing this fact of history is alone sufficient to enable us to continue to build and achieve no matter what our enemies say and do. The verse "Plot your plots, they will be foiled; speak your words of promise but they will not be fulfilled; for the Lord is with us." Pesach reminds us of all this. © 2011 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

YESHIVAT TORAT SHRAGA

Karpas

by Rabbi Hillel Zinkin

The gemara in Pesachim (65b) describes in a detailed manner the way in which a Jew would carry home his Korban Pesach from the Beis Hamikdash.

"Tanna: Kol echad v'echad nosein pischo b'oro u'mafshil l'achorav". Each person would first skin the Korban Pesach, then he would place the animal into the skin, and then finally he would throw it over his shoulder.

The gemara then adds – " Amar Rav Ilish: B'tayaus". Rashi (ibid.) explains this to mean that according to Rav Ilish, this process of carrying home the Korban was strikingly similar to the manner in which Ishmaelite merchants carry their goods. What is the significance of this description of how the Jews returned home on the eve of Pesach; and more specifically –

what is Rav Ilish telling us by the comparison to the Ishmaelite merchants?

Rav Shlomo Kluger zt"l, in his peirush on the Haggada, "Yerios Shlomo" (found in Rav Yakov Emden's siddur), explains that at our Pesach Seder we talk at great length about the evils of Pharaoh, the hardships forced upon us by the Egyptians, and the glorious redemption by G-d. And although we do review the pre- Mitzrayim history of our people, we never seem to address what was the fundamental cause of our enslavement. Why did Hashem punish us with slavery in Egypt? An honest self analysis brings us to one painful conclusion. We were made slaves because we sold our brother, Yosef, into slavery to the socharim yishmaelim. (See Rabeinu Bachya Parshas Mikeitz 44:17- s.v. alu leshalom el avichem, who takes this approach.) Therefore, when we take our Korban Pesach home from the Beis Hamikdash we are inaugurating the entire Yom Tov of Pesach with a reminder of how it all began. We carry the Korban Pesach in the very same manner as Ishmaelite merchants carry their goods, to trigger the connection to those same Ishmaelite merchantsto whom we sold our brother Yosef. And it is through this method, explains Rav Kluger, that we instill within ourselves a crucial lesson – that as Jews our problems often begin not with the external enemy but rather the internal enemy.

This message is even more essential to emphasize in our period of galus, when we have lost and continue to live without the Beis Hamikdash due to that very same middah of sin'as achim. So what, then, do we have nowadays, in absence of the Korban Pesach, to serve as our reminder and to inaugurate our Yom Tov of Pesach with this important lesson?

Rabeinu Manoach zt"l, in his commentary to the Mishneh Torah of the Rambam, provides us with the answer. In Hilchos Chametz U'matzah (8:2) Rabeinu Manoach writes: " V'anuz nohagin b'karpas zeher l'kesones passim she'asah Yakov Avinu l'Yosef asher b'sibasa nishgalgel hadavar v'yeirdu avoseinu l'mitzrayim". We dip the karpas into salt-water, says Rabeinu Manoach, to remind us of the time when the brothers dipped the kesones passim of Yosef into blood to cover up their treacherous sale of their younger brother.

This is how we begin our Seder. Immediately after Kiddush, we take ourselves back to Act 1 Scene 1, where we dipped the coat into the blood. This, indeed, is our inauguration bizman sh'ein Beis Hamikdash kayam.

It is interesting to note that from an etymological standpoint as well, we find this connection between karpas and the kesones passim. Rashi, in the beginning of Parshas Vayeishev (37:3), comments on the source of the word "passim", in the context of the pasuk "...v'asa lo kesones passim". ("...and [Yakov] made him [Yosef] a fine woolen tunic"). Rashi writes: "lashon kli milas, kemo karpas u'techeiles "; that etymologically,

karpas is actually an expression of fine wool, which was the material from which Yosef's coat was made.

The Ben Ish Chai zt"l, expands on Rabeinu Manoach's idea and writes that in addition to the first dipping representing the start of our galus Mitzrayim, the second dipping of the night is actually representative of the beginning of the geula from Mitzrayim. How so? The first dipping of the night is done in bitter tasting salt-water, a representation of the bitter tears that we shed for the initial cheit of "sinas achim" as well as the perpetuation of that cheit within our own galus. This dipping, says the Ben Ish Chai, corresponds to the pasuk in Parshas Vayeishev (37:31) - "Vayitbilu es hakesones badam" ("They dipped the tunic into blood"). However, the second dipping is done with the maror into the sweet-tasting charoses, which has the ability to sweeten even the most bitter galus experience. This dipping corresponds to the pasuk by Korban Pesach when klal yisrael was on the brink of geula (Parshas Bo 12:22) - "U'lekachtem agudas eizov u'tevaltem hadam asher basaf" ("You shall take a bundle of hyssop and dip it into the blood that is in the basin"). We must take notice that this "tevila" of the "eizov" was to be done specifically with an "agudas eizov" - a complete bundle of hyssop. This serves as a remez that the pre-cursor to geula is klal yisrael joining together as an agudah - as an intertwined unit that remains bound one to the other.

So, in essence, the two tevilos of the night take us through the entire evolution of Klal Yisrael in Mitzrayim - from the very catalyst of galus mitzrayim through the final redemption process of geulas mitzrayim. Let us never forget the sibas hagalus (the initial cause of our exile), and let us speedily experience the sweetness of the ultimate geula. © 2011 Rabbi H. Zinkin and Yeshivat Torat Shraga

RABBI YAAKOV HABER

Shabbat Shalom Weekly

The recital of the Haggadah opens with the words: "This is the bread of affliction which our fathers ate in the land of Egypt. Let all who are hungry enter and eat, and all who are needy come and celebrate the Passover."

This declaration is, in fact, in accordance with a law in the Shulchan Aruch, that we should be willing to share all our festive meals with the hungry. The invitation is even made in Aramaic, the spoken language at the time of the composition of the Haggadah, so that a hungry person passing by could understand it.

But there is a problem with this explanation: why do we make such an invitation only at Pesach, and not at the other festivals, when there is the same obligation of hospitality?

In order to try and answer this, I would like to quote from the Gra (Vilna Gaon). In his book "Aderes Eliahu" he lists the three greatest events in world

history: the Creation of the World, the Redemption from Egypt, and the Giving of the Torah. Why these events? Not necessarily because they were the most spectacular as miracles, but because, firstly, each of these is an ongoing processes, and secondly, we are partners in this process! Let us explain this by considering each in turn.

First, the Creation. G-d is continually active in the Creative process. Furthermore, whenever we have children in fulfillment of the Biblical commandment to "be fruitful and multiply", or whenever (for example) we plant trees, we are ourselves involved in this process.

Consider, next, the Giving of the Torah. This is also a continuing process. Moreover, whenever we learn, or teach, Torah, or find chidushim (new insights), we are involving ourselves in the Giving of the Torah.

Finally, let us consider the Redemption. This is also a continuing process, starting with the Redemption from Egypt, and culminating in the coming of the Messiah. Here too we have our part to play. How do we do this? It need not be on a grand scale. Think about the other two events. With Creation, we are not required to populate half the earth! We fulfil our part by having our own children. Similarly, we don't have to plant forests everywhere. It's enough to plant trees in our own backyards, or in the JFK Forest in Israel. As far as the Giving of the Torah is concerned, we cannot spread it to everyone. We do what we can, on a personal level.

So it is with Redemption. Every time we redeem a single person, we are involved with Redemption. If you know someone who is hungry, feed him! If you know someone who needs a sympathetic ear, listen to his problems! If you know someone who needs a job, get on the phone and find one for him! In this way, you do your share in the continuing process of Redemption.

Now let us return to the question: If it is always a mitzvah to invite the hungry to our table, why is this only stated explicitly at the Pesach Seder? We can now give an answer. Feeding the hungry is, as I have said, the part we play in Redemption, and Pesach is the one festival where Redemption is the central theme. © 1995 Rabbi Y. Haber

