

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

CHIEF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

It is no accident that parshat Bo, the section that deals with the culminating plagues and the exodus, should turn three times to the subject of children and the duty of parents to educate them. As Jews we believe that to defend a country you need an army, but to defend a civilization you need education. Freedom is lost when it is taken for granted. Unless parents hand on their memories and ideals to the next generation - the story of how they won their freedom and the battles they had to fight along the way - the long journey falters and we lose our way.

What is fascinating, though, is the way the Torah emphasizes the fact that children must ask questions. Two of the three passages in our parsha speak of this: And when your children ask you, 'What does this ceremony mean to you?' then tell them, 'It is the Passover sacrifice to the Lord, who passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt and spared our homes when he struck down the Egyptians.'" (Ex. 12: 26-27)

In days to come, when your son asks you, 'What does this mean?' say to him, 'With a mighty hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.' (Ex. 13: 14)

There is another passage later in the Torah that also speaks of question asked by a child: In the future, when your son asks you, "What is the meaning of the stipulations, decrees and laws the Lord our G-d has commanded you?" tell him: "We were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt, but the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand. (Deut. 6: 20-21)

The other passage in today's parsha, the only one that does not mention a question, is: On that day tell your son, 'I do this because of what the Lord did for me when I came out of Egypt.' (Ex. 13: 8)

These four passages have become famous because of their appearance in Haggadah on Pesach. They are the four children: one wise, one wicked or rebellious, one simple and "one who does not know how to ask." Reading them together the sages came to the conclusion that [1] children should ask questions, [2] the Pesach narrative must be constructed in response to, and begin with, questions asked by a child, [3] it is the duty of a parent to encourage his or her children to ask questions, and the child who does not yet know how to ask should be taught to ask.

There is nothing natural about this at all. To the contrary, it goes dramatically against the grain of history. Most traditional cultures see it as the task of a parent or teacher to instruct, guide or command. The task of the child is to obey. "Children should be seen, not heard," goes the old English proverb. "Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord," says a famous Christian text. Socrates, who spent his life teaching people to ask questions, was condemned by the citizens of Athens for corrupting the young. In Judaism the opposite is the case. It is a religious duty to teach our children to ask questions. That is how they grow.

Judaism is the rarest of phenomena: a faith based on asking questions, sometimes deep and difficult ones that seem to shake the very foundations of faith itself. "Shall the Judge of all the earth not do justice?" asked Abraham. "Why, Lord, why have you brought trouble on this people?" asked Moses. "Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why do all the faithless live at ease?" asked Jeremiah. The book of Job is largely constructed out of questions, and G-d's answer consists of four chapters of yet deeper questions: "Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? ... Can you catch Leviathan with a hook? ... Will it make an agreement with you and let you take it as your slave for life?"

In yeshiva the highest accolade is to ask a good question: Du fregst a gutte kashe. Rabbi Abraham Twersky, a deeply religious psychiatrist, tells of how when he was young, his teacher would relish challenges to his arguments. In his broken English, he would say, "You right! You 100 procent right! Now I show you where you wrong."

Isadore Rabi, winner of a Nobel Prize in physics, was once asked why he became a scientist. He replied, "My mother made me a scientist without ever knowing it. Every other child would come back from school and be asked, 'What did you learn today?' But my mother used to ask: 'Izzy, did you ask a good question today?' That made the difference. Asking good questions made me a scientist."

Judaism is not a religion of blind obedience. Indeed, astonishingly in a religion of 613 commandments, there is no Hebrew word that means "to obey." When Hebrew was revived as a living language in the nineteenth century, and there was need for a verb meaning "to obey," it had to be borrowed from the Aramaic: le-tsayet. Instead of a word meaning "to

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obey," the Torah uses the verb shema, untranslatable into English because it means [1] to listen, [2] to hear, [3] to understand, [4] to internalise, and [5] to respond. Written into the very structure of Hebraic consciousness is the idea that our highest duty is to seek to understand the will of G-d, not just to obey blindly. Tennyson's verse, "Theirs not to reason why, theirs but to do or die," is as far from a Jewish mindset as it is possible to be.

Why? Because we believe that intelligence is G-d's greatest gift to humanity. Rashi understands the phrase that G-d made man "in His image, after His likeness," to mean that G-d gave us the ability "to understand and discern." The very first of our requests in the weekday Amidah is for "knowledge, understanding and discernment." One of the most breathtakingly bold of the rabbis' institutions was to coin a blessing to be said on seeing a great non-Jewish scholar. Not only did they see wisdom in cultures other than their own. They thanked G-d for it. How far this is from the narrow-mindedness than has so often demeaned and diminished religions, past and present.

The historian Paul Johnson once wrote that rabbinic Judaism was "an ancient and highly efficient social machine for the production of intellectuals." Much of that had, and still has, to do with the absolute priority Jews have always placed on education, schools, the bet midrash, religious study as an act even higher than prayer, learning as a lifelong engagement, and teaching as the highest vocation of the religious life.

But much too has to do with how one studies and how we teach our children. The Torah indicates this at the most powerful and poignant juncture in Jewish history - just as the Israelites are about to leave Egypt and begin their life as a free people under the sovereignty of G-d. Hand on the memory of this moment to your children, says Moses. But do not do so in an authoritarian way. Encourage your children to ask, question, probe, investigate, analyze, explore. Liberty means freedom of the mind, not just of the body. Those who are confident of their faith need fear no question. It is only those who lack confidence, who have secret and suppressed doubts, who are afraid.

The one essential, though, is to know and to teach this to our children, that not every question has an answer we can immediately understand. There are ideas we will only fully comprehend through age and experience, others that take great intellectual

preparation, yet others that may be beyond our collective comprehension at this stage of the human quest. As I write, we don't yet know whether the Higgs' boson exists. Darwin never knew what a gene was. Even the great Newton, founder of modern science, understood how little he understood, and put it beautifully: "I do not know what I may appear to the world, but to myself I seem to have been only a boy playing on the seashore, and diverting myself in now and then finding a smoother pebble or prettier shell than ordinary, whilst the great ocean of truth lay all undiscovered before me."

In teaching its children to ask and keep asking, Judaism honoured what Maimonides called the "active intellect" and saw it as the gift of G-d. No faith has honoured human intelligence more. © 2011 Chief Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and torah.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“Your children shall ask you, 'What is this service to you?' You must answer 'It is the Passover service to G-d.' (Exodus 12:26, 27)

This week's Biblical portion details the genesis of the first great holiday of the Hebrew calendar as well as of Jewish history, the Festival of Passover. But what is the real nature of our celebration? Is it a national holiday, the commemoration of our birth as a nation, akin to the American Fourth of July? Or is it a religious holiday, the commemoration of our acceptance of fealty to the G-d of Israel and the cosmos, akin to the American thanksgiving? The ramifications of this question are quite far-reaching, both in terms of who should celebrate Passover as well as what ought to be emphasized during our lengthy discussions around the seder table!

The Biblical verses in this week's portion are ambiguous as to what precisely is to be the major message of the seder. The entire Hebrew community in Egypt was commanded (Exodus 12:3-9) to slaughter the Pascal Sacrificial lamb on the afternoon ("between the evenings") of the fourteenth day of Nissan, take the blood from the sacrifice and place it on the door-posts and lintels of their homes, and eat the sacrificial meal with matzot (unleavened bread) and bitter herbs - during that evening (the night of the fifteenth day of Nissan).

Now the fourteenth day of Nissan is referred to in the Bible as the Festival of Passover. It is the commemoration of the attachment of the Hebrews to the G-d of Israel and the world, risking their lives by sacrificing the lamb-god (Ares) of Egypt and placing its blood on their door-posts. This was clearly a religious act of commitment to G-d, which took place while they were still servants in Egypt, before the tenth plague; the destruction of the Egyptian first born. The actual consumption of the meat, however, took place at the

seder in Egypt on the evening of the fifteenth of Nissan, the date of the exodus.

Does the seder hark back to the previous day's religious devotion to G-d? Or does it look forward to their actual freedom from Egypt at the end of that long night, when they entered the desert with their unleavened bread as a newborn nation?

In our Tannaitic literature, there are two separate accounts, which attest to the two possible subjects of the seder evening. Our Passover Haggadah quotes the Mishnah (B.T. Pesachim, chapter 10): "There is a story told of Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Yehoshua and Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah and Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Tarfon who were reclining at the seder feast in Bnei Brak discussing the exodus from Egypt all night, until their disciples came to inform them, 'our masters, the time has arrived to recite the morning Sh'ma....'" Clearly it was the exodus from Egypt - our birth as a nation - which animated the seder in Bnei Brak.

However, the Tosefta in Pesachim (10,12) gives a parallel account of a seder celebration: "There is a story told of Rabban Gamliel and the Sages who were reclining at the seder feast at the home of Boethius the son of Zunim in Lod and were immersed in studying the laws of Passover all that night until they heard the crowing of the rooster; they then removed the seder table and prepared to leave for the House of Study for the Morning Prayer." Clearly, it was the laws of the Pascal Sacrifice - and the dedication to the religious laws of G-d - which animated this seder in Lod!

Fascinatingly enough, there is a difference of opinion in the Talmud as to when the seder must end, which likewise reflects these two opinions: Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah maintains that the eating of the afikomen - the conclusion of the seder meal - must take place no later than midnight, whereas Rabbi Akiva argues that one may extend the seder until daybreak, the actual time when the Hebrews left Egypt "in haste" with their unleavened bread (see B.T. Berahot 9b). The first opinion would emphasize the religious nature of the seder, whereas the second, would stress the national nature of our freedom from Egypt.

Normative halakha - as well as the conduct of these Sages themselves - would seem to be in accordance with the conclusion of the first Mishnah in Babylonian Talmud Berahot, which rules that "Whenever our Sages limit a ritual to midnight, it may be performed until the rise of the morning star; the limitation is only to keep us far from transgression." (See too Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Acts of Sacrifices 10:8).

I would therefore argue that we celebrate our national freedom on Passover, but the ideal of, and the necessity to fight and sacrifice for, freedom is rooted in the Divine creation of every human being in the image of G-d; our fealty to G-d demands that we work towards

the freedom of every moral human being! © 2011 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

This week's parsha is the introduction to the halachic process of observance of the commandments of the Torah. In every commandment there are numerous layers of meaning and importance. There is the social and moral value that the commandment represents and teaches. There are also the technical minutiae and complex details that comprise the fabric of every commandment.

The commandments regarding the observance of Pesach and of the structuring of the Jewish calendar are part of this week's parsha. The general values of these commandments are apparent to all. Pesach represents for us the value and concept of freedom from bondage and teaches us the beginning history of our people. The calendar has always been a necessity for social and commercial life and keeps us in tune with the changing seasons of the year.

These are the general reasons and lessons of these commandments. However, as we also all know, the devil always lies in the details. What is the mechanism that will enable the story of our departure from Egyptian slavery to freedom to remain fresh and vital thousands of years later? Values only have life if they are somehow translated into human action and normative behavior.

Theories are wonderful but they rarely survive the tests of time and ever changing circumstances. Every scientific theory is therefore subjected to be proven by physical experiment and validation. Freedom is a great theory but unless somehow put into practical application in society it remains divorced from the realities of everyday existence. Just ask the North Koreans or the Syrians and Iranians about freedom! It is the technical requirements of the commandment-the matzo, chametz, hagadah, etc.-that alone are able to preserve the value and validate the theory and guarantee its meaningfulness for millennia on end.

The uniqueness of the Jewish calendar lies also in its technical details. The permanent calendar that we now follow, established in the fifth century CE, is a lunar calendar with adjustments to make it fit into a solar year span. The technical halachic details how the last Sanhedrin squared this circle are too numerous and detailed for the scope of this parsha sheet.

However, suffice it to say, that if not for those details and calculations our calendar would long ago have disappeared just as the ancient calendars of Egypt, Babylonia, Greece and Rome have disappeared. Many people look at calendars not as G-dly commandments but as merely a practical way to mark our passage through time. Thus the details are really

not important to them since we are only interested in the so-called result.

But in Judaism, the details are of equal if not even greater importance than the general value and end result that they represent. In our time, those Jews who for various reasons only concentrated on the values, who were good Jews at heart but observed no commandments or details, rarely were privileged to have Jewish descendants.

Of course concentrating only on the details and ignoring the value system that it represents is also a distortion of the G-dly word. Seeing both the general value of a commandment and observing its necessary technical details in practice is the guarantee for allowing the Torah to survive amongst the people of Israel for all times. © 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

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“**W**hy did [G-d] bring [a plague of] darkness upon [the Egyptians]? Because there were Israelites in that generation who were wicked and didn't want to leave [Egypt]. And they died during the three days of darkness so that the Egyptians wouldn't see their downfall and say that even they (the Israelites) are being smitten like we are" (Rashi on Sh'mos 10:22). During the plague of darkness (or at least during its first three days), those who were unworthy of being redeemed (apparently because they didn't want to be) died, and were buried by their brethren under the cover of darkness afforded by the plague. Which leads one to wonder how the survivors felt. Could they appreciate the miraculous plague G-d had performed for them while suffering such a massive loss themselves?

Rashi continues by describing how the cover of darkness provided by the plague also allowed the Children of Israel to discover which valuables their Egyptian neighbors owned, and where they were hidden. After burying their dead, were they really interested in researching what they could ask their Egyptian neighbors for when they are finally freed? Even if, as the commentators on Rashi explain, the wicked Israelites died during the first set of three days of darkness and the searching for valuables took place during the second set of three days (when the Egyptians not only couldn't see, but couldn't move), was the frame of mind of the survivors such that they could focus on remembering which vessels were hidden where? Although this would explain why Moshe would have had to plead with them to look for expensive items they could subsequently ask for (see Rashi on 11:2), since this request occurred immediately after Hashem told Moshe there would be one more plague (11:1), the

plague of darkness must have already been over, as was the searching done during that plague.

The Mechilta (Introduction to Parashas B'shalach) says that when the wicked died during the plague of darkness, the survivors "gave thanks to G-d and praised Him because their enemies (the Egyptians) didn't see [the wicked Israelites die] and rejoice in their downfall." Rather than being upset that their brethren had died, the survivors were appreciative that the Egyptians didn't notice. Apparently, the righteous Israelites somewhat expected, or at least were not surprised, that the wicked Israelites had perished, and the emotion they felt was happiness because of the way it occurred (and its timing). Why weren't they upset about these deaths? Why did they expect it to happen?

Sh'mos Rabbah (14:3, see also Midrash Tanchuma, Va'era 14) delineates the wickedness of those who died: "For there were sinners among the Israelites who were appointed leaders by the Egyptians, and they had status, wealth and honor, and they didn't want to leave. G-d said, 'if I punish them publicly and they die, the Egyptians will say that just as He was upset at us, he was upset with them.' Therefore, He brought three days of darkness upon the Egyptians so that [the Israelites] could bury their dead without their enemies seeing them, and they (the Israelites) will praise G-d for it." Midrash HaGadol (Sh'mos 10:23) refers to the wicked who died during the plague of darkness as informers "who didn't believe they would be redeemed and revealed the hidden things of the Israelites to the Egyptians." If these wicked Israelites were collaborating with the Egyptians for their own personal benefit, we can understand why the righteous Israelites did not mourn their deaths and why they were not surprised that they were killed before the redemption came. (Even if only the collaborators died, most Egyptians would not have been aware of who was collaborating, and would not attribute their deaths to their having been traitors.)

Nevertheless, if 80% of the Israelite population died during the plague of darkness (see Rashi on Sh'mos 13:18), it would be difficult to imagine that there were that many collaborators, who all became wealthy and received honor, subjugating only the remaining 20% of the population. Another issue (raised by Rav Shimon Schwab, zt"l, at the beginning of Parashas B'shalach) is how the wicked dying and being buried during the plague of darkness helped keep the Egyptians in the dark (pardon the pun) about these deaths. After all, wouldn't they notice, after the light was turned back on, that so many Israelites were missing?

Sefer Hayashar describes the wicked who died as people who "rebelled against G-d, did not listen to Moshe and Aharon, did not believe that G-d had sent them, and [who] said 'we will not leave Egypt, lest we die of starvation in the desolate desert.'" It is possible that the collaborators/informers were a subset of this group, and all of whom would have done the same thing

if they were given the opportunity. Therefore, when G-d smote the collaborators, He included everyone who didn't believe in the redemption, wouldn't have left Egypt, and were willing to be traitors (even if they hadn't actually been traitors). We still have to deal with how the Egyptians didn't notice all those missing Israelites, and how the righteous Israelites knew that so many of their brethren, even those who had not been asked to be traitors, wouldn't leave Egypt no matter what.

Rabbeinu Efrayim and Rokayach say explicitly that the plague of darkness took place in the month of Adar, the month before Nissan (when the exodus from Egypt occurred). This is implicit in the Midrashim and commentaries who say that G-d had to tell Moshe about the tenth plague while he was still in Pharaoh's palace, despite its ritual impurity, because Pharaoh had told Moshe not to come see him any more (Sh'mos 10:29, see Rashi on 11:4); if the plague of darkness took place in Nissan, Moshe would have already known that the tenth plague was coming on the night of the 14th from the prophecy he related to the Children of Israel by Rosh Chodesh Nissan (12:1-12), and wouldn't need an "emergency prophecy" while standing before Pharaoh. The conversations surrounding the first eight plagues may have made it clear where people stood (so it was not surprising who, or how many people, had died in the ninth plague). And with Egypt being "in ruins" (10:7), The Egyptians may have been too distracted to notice which Israelites, or how many, were no longer around (but would have noticed many funerals suddenly occurring).

Rabbeinu Bachye (10:5), working out the timing of the ten plagues, says that the plague of darkness started at the beginning of Nissan and lasted for a week, followed by a week respite before the tenth plague, which occurred on the 14th (at night, as it turned into the 15th). If the plague of darkness started after Moshe had told the Children of Israel about the imminent exodus-and what they needed to do to be worthy of it (circumcision, bringing an animal that the Egyptians worshipped as an offering to G-d)--it could become apparent rather quickly who really believed their redemption was at hand, and who wasn't willing to leave.

Based on there having to be something for the locusts to eat (during the eighth plague) that hadn't been destroyed by the hail (during the seventh plague), and the timing of when the grains that hadn't sprouted (and were therefore spared from the hail) grew enough to be eaten by the locusts, Ramban (10:4-5) says that the plague of locusts must have occurred in Nissan, followed by the plague of darkness and the smiting of the first-born. Panim Yafos points out that this follows Rav Ashi's opinion (B'rachos 4a), that Moshe said G-d will smite the first-born at this same time (midnight) tomorrow, meaning that he said it on the 13th of Nissan (as it turned into the 14th). If Moshe said this right after the plague of darkness ended, the ninth plague must

have occurred on the 11th, 12th, and 13th of Nissan (there are several Midrashim and commentaries who say the plague of darkness only lasted three days, not six). Since the animals to be offered on the 14th were tied to the bedposts on the 10th (see 12:3), and the "chaburos" (groups) who shared an animal were arranged then, it would be quite obvious who was planning to leave Egypt with Moshe and who wasn't—who was part of the Nation of Israel and who had assimilated into Egyptian culture. Sides had been chosen, with some pledging their loyalty to Moshe and Aharon and others siding with those who had collaborated with the Egyptians. It was therefore not surprising when G-d removed these wicked Israelites from the scene; it might have even been a relief that they would not be able to get in the way when the time came to leave Egypt. And since the Exodus occurred just a day later, the Egyptians never had a chance to notice that any Israelites had died; for all they knew, everyone had left with Moshe. © 2011 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI YAAKOV BERNSTEIN

Haaros

Paraoh claimed that he didn't know who Hashem was. Through the makos, he would certainly come to recognize Hashem's authority, and respect the people associated with the Name. Yisrael, too, learn to honor and respect the Names of Hashem.

Hashem told Moshe to have the people shecht the Pesach and put the blood on the doorposts and lintel. Hashem would then pass over their houses when He would strike the firstborn of the Egyptians.

The Zohar says that they were to write the name of Hashem on the doorposts. The Brisker Rav, Reb. Yehoshua Leib Diskin, questioned this. The name of Hashem must be respected and not erased! When they were to leave their houses, the name of Hashem would be destroyed or abused!

We find an argument in the Mechilta whether the blood was placed on the inside of the house (as in Rashi 12:13), or the outside. Reb. Yehoshua Leib explained: Both opinions are correct. The name was written on glass from the inside. It was written in reverse. From the outside of the house, one could see the name facing the correct direction.

Using this information, our questions can be answered. Since they were writing the name in reverse, they were not actually writing the Name (each letter was in itself reversed, rendering nonsense characters). Although the name of Hashem appeared on the outside, it had no sanctity—and thus could be erased. (Mararil Diskin al Hatorah, p 68)

This is an important concept. The names must be written with kavana (intention). The intention of the sofer (scribe) gives sanctity to the names. Since the sofer in our case was not actually writing the names of Hashem, he gave them no sanctity. Even so—without

sanctity-the sign on the doorpost was vital in saving their lives.

Rebbenu Bachya also explains that the Name was written on the doorposts. He understands that the actual application of the blood to the doorposts formed the letters of Hashem's Name. The bar above the door and the sideposts form the shapes of the letters of Hashem's Name. If so, we shouldn't be troubled with Reb. Yehoshua Leib's question regarding the erasing of the Name- the smearing of blood represented Hashem's Name, but the blood would run together-the letters would not be legible.

When Moshe gives the first mitzvos of the Torah, he includes among them tefillin. Here, the tefillin are described as a sign upon the arm and a remembrance on the head. Later, in Devarim 25, the Torah states: "All the nations will see the Name of Hashem upon you, and they will be afraid of you." The Talmud explains that the verse is referring to the tefillin of the head.

Rashi (Menachos 35b) explains literally: They will see the letters of Hashem's name-"Shakai"-on the outside of the tefillin. (The letter Shin is embedded on the tefillin of the head, and the knot on the back of the neck is shaped like the letter Daled.) The Rosh, however, explains the meaning to be that the nations will see that the Shechina dwells upon you.

The Rakanti on our parsha also says, similar to Rashi, that the reference is to the actual Name of Hashem. However, it refers to "Havaya"-the proper Name of Hashem, represented by the parshiyos inside the tefillin. (The Rakanti does not elaborate how the nations will know what is written in the tefillin. Perhaps he really means like the Rosh, that they will perceive that the Shechina dwells with Yisrael, and in this way realize the significance of the tefillin.)

The father is told: "You will tell your son on that day, 'For the sake of this, Hashem did everything for me when He took me out of Egypt.'" (13:8) It means: "Everything that Hashem did for me when I left Mitzraim, He did for the sake of His Name and His Honor." (Rebbenu Bachya and Rakanati, explaining Ramban) It behooves us to spread the honor of the Name.

The mezuzah is placed on the outside of the house, facing the public domain. Like the Chanuka neiros, the mezuzah publicizes the miracle of our existence and survival. When we enter our homes and see the mezuzah, we should remember that Hashem took us out of Mitzraim; may He protect us with hashgacha pratit at all times!

(Mezuzos are required to be checked every three and a half years. The writing of mezuzos is very complex; only a known expert can be trusted with writing and checking them. It's unfortunate that the market is flooded with invalid mezuzos. Sadly, it is common that mezuzos are checked to see if they've

become invalid, only to find that they were never kosher to begin with.)

"May we, our children, and the children of all of Yisrael, know your Name... and learn Torah lishmah (literally, for the sake of His Name)." (From morning Birkas Hatorah) © 2011 Y. Ciner & torah.org

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Mordechai Greenberg

Rosh Yeshiva, Kerem B'Yavne

Bnei Yisrael were given two separate commands to eat matza. The first one was before they left Egypt, referring to the Pesach sacrifice: "With matza and bitter herbs shall they eat it" [Shemot 12:8]. The second one is related to the general command of the Pesach sacrifice for later generations, "for seven days shall you eat matza" [12:15]. But we are told that when Bnei Yisrael were forced to hurry out of Egypt, they ate matza because their dough did not have time to rise, and that this is the reason for the command to eat matza. But then, why were we commanded before the flight from Egypt to eat the matza?

In the holiday prayer, we say, "You chose us from all the nations... and You raised us up from among all the languages." Rav Avraham Yitzchak Kook explains the apparent redundancy. We were chosen from all the primitive nations when we were commanded to separate ourselves from all the unethical actions of the nations and from their lusts. But that is not all. We were also raised above the other languages," a reference to cultured nations, in that G-d put us in the role of a nation unique among all the others, since we have Divine perfection, over and above the ethics of other societies.

This is what the Holy One, Blessed be He, meant when He said to Yaacov, "Do not be afraid of descending to Egypt, I will go down with you and I will definitely raise you up" [Bereishit 46:4]. The redundancy teaches us that we will not only return to our former level, we will in fact return to an even higher state than before - "I will definitely raise you up." This is what Sforno wrote in his commentary on the verse, "Yisrael is my firstborn" [Shemot 4:22]. Even in the distant future, when all the people will be children of G-d, when "I will turn to the nations in a clear language, so that they will all call out in the name of G-d" [Tzefania 3:9], Yisrael will still be at a higher level, that of a firstborn. There is only one child who has the status of a firstborn.

Yosef told his brothers, "G-d will surely remember you" [Bereishit 50:25], using a double verb, "pakod yifkod." "The people had a tradition that any potential redeemer who spoke of the redemption in terms of a double verb is the true redeemer" [Shemot Rabba 3]. A person who talks only about leaving Egypt but not about returning to Eretz Yisrael, becoming a special nation, and receiving the Torah, is not a true

redeemer. There must be a double lifting up, to reach a higher spiritual level - "I will definitely raise you up."

By his sin, Adam brought about a deterioration of all reality. The RAMCHAL teaches us that we now have a double task: to return to the level of humanity of Adam, and then to continue climbing up, to reach a Divine level. Adam's sin involved the Tree of Life, which according to one interpretation was wheat. This is related to the fact that the evil inclination is sometimes called "leavening." Our first task is to remove all chametz (leavening) and return to a level of humanity. We were therefore "expelled from Egypt" [Shemot 12:39], as a way of mending the earlier verse, "And He expelled Adam" from the Garden of Eden [Bereishit 3:24]. Then, when the people left Egypt in a hurry, they rose up to a Divine spiritual level, since physical matter is limited by time but the Divine is not.

Thus, there are two aspects to the eating of matza. The first is to rid ourselves of the leavening, of chametz, and we were given the command to do this before we left Egypt. The second aspect is the positive effect of hurrying, related to the Divine spirit, and that involves the command for all later generations.

This also explains the apparent redundancy in the words of the Rambam. In Chapter 7 of the laws of Pesach, he writes that "the matza is in memory of the fact that they were redeemed." But in Chapter 8 he writes, "This is because the dough of the people did not rise before the Almighty, King of all kings, was revealed to them..."

This might also be the reason for the ritual of "Yachatz" during the Pesach Seder, when a matza is split into two halves. The first half is eaten when we are hungry, in a normal way, and symbolizes a return to the level of humanity. But the second half is eaten when we are full, like the flesh of a sacrifice, not because of hunger but as a symbol of holiness and rising up to a higher spiritual level. This is a hint of the Divine aspect of the redemption. © 2011 Rabbi A. Bazak and Machon Zomet

RABBI BENJAMIN YUDIN

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The first phase of the exodus from Egypt is excitingly described in parshas Bo. In Va'eschanan (4:34), the Torah characterizes the exodus as "has any god ever miraculously come to take for himself a nation from amidst a nation" (goy mi'kerev goy). The Yalkut vividly compares the above to the birthing process. Just as the fetus / embryo is so attached to the mother, literally nourished and sustained there from, so too were the Jewish people assimilated and acculturated in Egypt. As the Egyptians were uncircumcised and groomed their hair in 'bluris style', so did the vast majority of Jews. The above analogy is further understood that just as the birth process is exceedingly dangerous, that if the midwife or farmer

were to initiate the process and attempt to extricate the baby from its mother too soon, it could be fatal for both, and only after some initial movement and activity on the part of the fetus does it signal the commencement of the process. So too in Egypt, the exodus spearheaded by G-d could only begin with the nationalistic stirrings of the Jewish nation, initiating the birth and creation of their nation.

In light of the above we can appreciate some of the details of law that were applicable only in Egypt accompanying the first Pesach seder. The Torah commands that the Pascal lamb be slaughtered and roasted on the fourteenth of the first month, the day prior to their exodus. They were to slaughter the god of Egypt, thereby actively renouncing and showing the powerlessness of the Egyptian divine. What is most perplexing, however, is why were they mandated to smear the blood of the lamb on their doorposts and lentil (12:7)? The B'ear Yosef suggests the following: given that the lamb was roasted (12:8) the aroma wafted in the homes of the Egyptians as well. Lest an Egyptian invite himself into the Jewish home for some of the barbecue, the blood of his god on the door was a horrific degradation, causing him to do an immediate about face.

The birth pangs of Egypt were the specific actions that the Jewish nation underwent that evening, celebrating their anticipated freedom. It is these Jewish stirrings from amidst the culture of Egypt that alerted Hashem as to their readiness for deliverance.

The Torah further commands, (12:22) "no man shall leave the entrance of his house till morning". The Torah does not give a reason for this prohibition. The Meshech Chachma provides a most insightful understanding to the above. The Ramban explains that the description of Yaakov's struggle -- (Breishis 32:25)

"Yaakov was left alone and a man wrestled with him until the break of dawn"- portends the struggle between the forces of Esav and Yaakov till the end of time. Similarly, the Meshech Chachma understands this verse as the formula for survival of the Jewish people in galus, in the diaspora. One is not to leave the safeguards of the Jewish home till 'morning', till the final redemption arrives. His thesis is that certain mitzvos play a more pivotal and paramount role than others, especially in galus. The seyagim-those mitzvos that were instituted to protect and safeguard the Jewish home- are crucial for the survival of our people. Thus, the Talmud (Shabbos 17b) lists the 18 enactments that the rabbis instituted including bishul akum- the prohibition of a non-Jew cooking for a Jew even if the food is kosher. This law, still in effect today, was instituted to prevent socialization between Jew and non-Jew. A non-Jew cannot prepare a meal for the Jew without their participation in the cooking process. The Talmud (Avodah Zorah 42b) states that included in this seyag is the prohibition of stam ya-nam, i.e. the prohibition of a non-Jew handling kosher wine (unless

pasteurized), again to thwart socialization and assimilation.

The Meshech Chachma notes, that historically at the time of the Egyptian exodus, we did not-yet have the Jewish laws, but had the nationalistic actions that warranted Divine approval in the form of magnificent miracles that were performed on our behalf. In sharp contrast, at the time of our exodus from Babylon, we were observant of Jewish laws, but negligent in the safeguards of our identity, as found in Nechemia (13:23-24). The Jewish youth spoke Ashdodis, they assumed non-Jewish names, and intermarried. The Meshech Chachma understands the Talmud (Sotah 36a) to say that we were denied a second miraculous deliverance because of the sins, namely because of our acculturation and lack of proper insulations. In the galus the Jew must strengthen his resolve and commitment especially to the siyagim, i.e. to those laws that assure and insure our uniqueness and individuality amongst the nations.

This teaching is so essential today. In yesteryear, the Jew living amongst the nations had to be on guard from actively going and visiting their forums of entertainment. Such a visit required, however, a deliberate and conscious effort on his part; he had to seek out this foreign set of values and morality. Today, with the internet and Blackberry almost appended to one's body, it is most difficult and challenging to avoid surfing in foreign and forbidden sites. Moreover, one mistaken inadvertent click can catapult a person "out of his home" and environment.

"No man shall leave the entrance of his house until the morning" is understood by Rav Hirsch zt"l to prevent the mob mentality from influencing the fledgling Jewish nation to retaliate against its former masters. In addition, the pasuk teaches us how we are to learn from the past and realize that our homes are to be fortified with Torah, Jewish values, Jewish music, love and concern, thereby preparing us for the dawn of our ultimate deliverance. Now more than ever, the teaching of Anshei Knesses Hagedolah, (Avos 1:1) "asu seyag la-torah-make a fence for the Torah" is crucial for our survival. © 2011 Rabbi B. Yudin & the TorahWeb Foundation

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

The Biblical term for midnight, the time Moshe (Moses) says G-d will slay the first born-is ka-hazot ha-lailah (Exodus 11:4). Different interpretations are given for the prefix ka, which gives us the key as to the true meaning of this term.

On its simplest level, ka, says Rashi, means "when." From this perspective, ka-hazot is a delineation of time, i.e. that actual moment when the night was divided - midnight.

The Talmud sees it differently - ka means "approximately." Although the plague actually occurred ba-hazi ha-lailah (Exodus 12:29) - precisely at midnight, Moshe says ka-hazot. This was because Moshe feared the Egyptians would make a mistake in calculation and believe midnight had arrived when it had not. The Egyptians would then accuse Moshe of being a false prophet. (Berakhot 4a)

Or Ha-hayyim (Hayyim ibn Attar, 18c. Morocco) understands ka as referring to a moment in the past. The term refers to that midnight in the book of Genesis when Avraham (Abraham), the first patriarch, rescued his nephew Lot. (Genesis 14) As Avraham was victorious at midnight, so would the Jews overcome the Egyptians at midnight.

Another approach can be suggested. Perhaps ka does not refer to the past, but to the future.

Consider the following: night in the Torah symbolizes suffering and exile. Hazi takes it a step further. It is not only night, but it is the night of the night-midnight, the time of the deepest suffering and exile, when the voice of G-d seems silent.

Hence, the Torah here states ka-hazot. As we were saved from Egypt, so will we in the future, survive other midnights - other times of pain and despair.

In the will of Yossele Rakover, a fictitious last testament left in the ruins of Eastern Europe, this idea of ka-hazot is expressed powerfully. There it states: "I believe in the sun, even when it does not shine. I believe in love, even when I am alone. I believe in G-d, even when He is silent."

What is true about the nation of Israel is similarly true about individual lives. Often G-d intervenes precisely when one thinks there is no hope.

Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach, of blessed memory, reinforced this message in his comment on the sentence, "As for me, I trust in Your kindness, my heart will rejoice in Your salvation." (Psalms 13:6) He suggested that the Psalmist is telling us that our faith in G-d should be so great that we rejoice in His salvation even before we are saved - even when it is still dark.

May each of us achieve such faith in our personal and national experiences of ka-hazot. © 2011 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and President of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah Rabbinical School - the Modern and Open Orthodox Rabbinical School. He is Senior Rabbi at the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale, a Modern and Open Orthodox congregation of 850 families. He is also National President of AMCHA - the Coalition for Jewish Concerns.

