

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

The Missing Fifth

Many commentators, among them the Vilna Gaon, have drawn attention to the influence of the number four in connection with the Haggadah.

There are four fours:

1. The four questions
2. The four sons
3. The four cups of wine
4. The four expressions of redemption: 'I will

bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians and free you from their slavery. I will deliver you with a demonstration of My power and with great acts of judgment. I will take you to Me as a nation.' (Ex.6: 6-7).

It may be, though, that just as an X-ray can reveal an earlier painting beneath the surface of a later one, so beneath the surface of the Haggadah there is another pattern to be discerned. That is what I want to suggest in this chapter.

The first thing to note is that there is, in fact, another 'four' on the seder night, namely the four biblical verses whose exposition forms an important part of the Haggadah:

1. 'An Aramean tried to destroy my father...'
 2. 'And the Egyptians ill-treated us and afflicted us...'
 3. 'And we cried to the Lord, the G-d of our fathers...'
 4. 'And the Lord brought us out of Egypt...'
- (Deut. 26:5-8)

There are, then, not four fours, but five.

In early editions of the Talmud tractate Pesachim (118a) there is a passage that perplexed the medieval commentators. It reads: 'Rabbi Tarfon says: over the fifth cup we recite the great Hallel.' The medieval commentators were puzzled by this because elsewhere the rabbinic literature speaks about four cups, not five. The Mishnah, for example, states that a poor person must be supplied with enough money to be able to buy four cups of wine. In both the Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmuds the discussion revolves around the assumption that there are four cups on seder night. How then are we to understand the statement of Rabbi Tarfon that there is a fifth cup?

Among the commentators three views emerged. The first was that of Rashi and the Tosafists. According to them, there are only four cups on the

seder night, and it is forbidden to drink a fifth. The statement of Rabbi Tarfon must therefore be a misprint, and the texts of the Talmud should be amended accordingly.

The second was that of Maimonides. He holds that there is a fifth cup, but unlike the other four, it is optional rather than obligatory. The Mishnah which teaches that a poor person must be given enough money to buy four cupfuls of wine means that we must ensure that he has the opportunity to fulfil his obligation. It does not extend to the fifth cup which is permitted but not compulsory. Rabbi Tarfon's statement is to be understood to mean that those who wish to drink a fifth cup should do so during the recitation of the great Hallel.

The third view, that of Ravad of Posquières, a contemporary of Maimonides, is that one should drink a fifth cup. There is a difference in Jewish law between an obligation, *hovah*, and a religiously significant good deed, *mitzvah*. The first four cups are obligatory. The fifth is a *mitzvah*, meaning, not obligatory but still praiseworthy and not merely, as Maimonides taught, optional.

Thus there was a controversy over the fifth cup. Rashi said that we should not drink it; Maimonides that we may; Ravad that we should. What does one do, faced with this kind of disagreement? Jewish law tries wherever possible to propose a solution that pays respect to all views, especially when they are held by great halakhic authorities. The solution in the present case was simple. A fifth cup is poured (out of respect for Ravad and Maimonides) but not drunk (out of respect for Rashi).

When a disagreement occurs in the Talmud which is not resolved, the sages often used the word Teyku, 'Let it stand'. We believe that such disagreements will be resolved in the time to come when Elijah arrives to announce the coming of the Messiah. One of his roles will be to rule on unresolved halakhic controversies. An allusion to this is to be found in the word Teyku itself, which was read as an abbreviation of Tishbi Yetaretz Kushyot Ve'ibbayot, 'The Tishbite, Elijah, will answer questions and difficulties.' This therefore is the history behind 'the cup of Elijah' – the cup we fill after the meal but do not drink. It represents the 'fifth cup' mentioned in the Talmud.

According to the Jerusalem Talmud, the reason

**TORAS AISH IS A WEEKLY PARSHA
NEWSLETTER DISTRIBUTED VIA EMAIL
AND THE WEB AT WWW.AISHDAS.ORG/TA.
FOR MORE INFO EMAIL YITZW1@GMAIL.COM**

The material presented in this publication was collected from email subscriptions, computer archives and various websites. It is being presented with the permission of the respective authors. Toras Aish is an independent publication, and does not necessarily reflect the views of any synagogue or organization.

**TO DEDICATE THIS NEWSLETTER PLEASE CALL
(973) 277-9062 OR EMAIL YITZW1@GMAIL.COM**

we have four cups of wine is because of the four expressions of redemption in G-d's promise to Moses. How then could Rabbi Tarfon suggest that there are not four cups but five? The fascinating fact is that if we look at the biblical passage there are not four expressions of redemption but five. The passage continues: 'And I will bring you to the land I swore with uplifted hand to give to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob. I will give it to you as a possession. I am the Lord.' (Exodus 6: 8)

There is a further missing fifth. As mentioned above, during the course of reciting the Haggadah we expound four biblical verses, beginning with, 'An Aramean tried to destroy my father.' In biblical times, this was the declaration made by someone bringing first-fruits to Jerusalem. However, if we turn to the source we discover that there is a fifth verse to this passage: 'He brought us to this place [the land of Israel] and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey' (Deuteronomy. 26: 9). We do not recite or expound this verse at the seder table. But this strange since the Mishnah states explicitly, 'And one must expound the passage beginning, "An Aramean tried to destroy my father" until one has completed the whole passage.' In fact we do not complete the whole passage, despite the Mishnah's instruction.

So there are three 'missing fifths' – the fifth cup, the fifth expression of redemption, and the fifth verse. It is also clear why. All three refer to G-d not merely bringing the Jewish people out of Egypt but also bringing them into the land of Israel. The Haggadah as we now have it and as it evolved in rabbinic times is, in Maimonides words, 'the Haggadah as practised in the time of exile,' meaning, during the period of the Dispersion. The missing fifth represented the missing element in redemption. How could Jews celebrate arriving in the land of Israel when they were in exile? How could they drink the last cup of redemption when they had said at the beginning of the seder, 'This year slaves, next year free; this year here, next year in the land of Israel'?

The fifth cup – poured but not drunk – was like the cup broken at Jewish weddings. It was a symbol of incompleteness. It meant that as long as Jews were dispersed throughout the world, facing persecution and danger, they could not yet celebrate to the full. One

great sage of the twentieth century, the late Rabbi Menahem Kasher, argued that now that there is a State of Israel, many exiles have been ingathered and Jews have recovered their sovereignty and land, the fifth cup should be re-instated. That remains for the halakhic authorities to decide.

What, though, of the four questions and the four sons? There was a fifth question. The Mishnah states that a child should ask: 'On all other nights we eat meat that is cooked, boiled or roasted; but this night only roasted meat.' This text can still be found in the early manuscripts of the Haggadah discovered in the Cairo genizah. It refers to the time when the Temple stood and the food eaten at the seder night included the paschal offering, which was roasted. After the Temple was destroyed and the practice of eating a paschal lamb was discontinued, this question was dropped and another (about reclining) substituted.

Was there a fifth child? The late Lubavitcher Rebbe suggested that there is a fifth child on Pesach. The four children of the Haggadah are all present, sitting round the table. The fifth child is the one who is not there, the child lost through outmarriage and assimilation. Rabbinic tradition tells us that in Egypt, many Jews assimilated and did not want to leave. The Torah uses a phrase to describe the Israelites' departure from Egypt, *Vachamushim alu bnei Yisrael miMitzrayim* (Exodus 13: 18). This is normally translated as 'The Israelites went up out of Egypt armed for battle.' However Rashi, citing earlier authorities, suggests that *hamush* may not mean 'armed.' Instead it may be related to the word *hamesh*, 'five'. The sentence could therefore be translated as, 'Only a fifth of the Israelites left Egypt.'

The rest, he explains, perished in the plague of darkness. The plague itself was less an affliction of the Egyptians than a way of covering the shame of the Israelites, that so many of their number did not want to leave. The loss of Jews through assimilation has been an ongoing tragedy of Jewish history. How do we allude to it on seder night? By silence: the fifth child – the one who is not there.

So the beneath the surface of the Haggadah we find, not four fours, but five fives. In each case there is a missing fifth – a cup, an expression of deliverance, a verse, a question and a child. Each points to something incomplete in our present situation. In the half-century since the Holocaust the Jewish people has emerged from darkness to light. The State of Israel has come into being. The Hebrew language has been reborn. Jews have been brought to safety from the countries where they faced persecution. In the liberal democracies of the West Jews have gained freedom, and even prominence and affluence.

But Israel is not yet at peace. In the Diaspora assimilation continues apace. Many Jews are estranged from their people and their faith. Something

is missing from our celebration – the fifth cup, the fifth deliverance, the fifth verse, the fifth question and the fifth child. That is a measure of what is still to be achieved. We have not yet reached our destination. The missing fifths remind us of work still to be done, a journey not yet complete. ©2015 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

The Passover Seder we have just celebrated is an evening dedicated first and foremost to the relationship between the generations, to parents communicating to their children the agony and the ecstasy of Egyptian enslavement and exodus - that seminal biblical drama which most profoundly forged our Israeli identity and traditions. Indeed, the masterful booklet that tells the tale and structures ("seder" means order) the entire evening is called the Haggada (literally, telling), from the biblical verse "And you shall tell your children [vehigadeta] on that day" (Exodus 13:3). But what if your children - or one of your children - is not interested in hearing? What if he or she is willing to participate in the meal, but is totally tuned out of and turned off to the ritual that surrounds and informs the meal? How are we, the parents, teachers and communicators, supposed to respond in such a case? The Haggada is not only a text of the Egyptian experience; it is also a masterful guide to the art of effectively parenting-communicating the message of our mesora (tradition). By its very place as the centerpiece of a much-anticipated evening dedicated to the performance of many commandments - commandments that parents are to experience together with their children - we learn that we can only successfully impart a value that we ourselves believe in and act out; children will learn not by what we say, but by how we perform.

Moreover, our children-students must feel that they are the prime focus of the evening, and not mere adjuncts to an adult happening; and the message must be molded in such a way as to respond to their questions and concerns (Maggid begins with the "Four Questions"). Each individual must be given the opportunity to ask his/her questions and to receive answers appropriate to both question and questioner (note the "four children" of the Seder). Finally, the atmosphere around the table must be more experiential than cerebral, punctuated by familial stories and the fun of games (hide-the-afikoman), and warmed by wine, food and love. Such is the Haggada's formula for effective communication between parents and children - not just one evening a year, but every single day of every year.

But what of the apathetic, uninterested child? One of the four prototypical children of the Seder is the "wicked child," whom the author of the Haggada

designates as such because of the biblical question ascribed to him: "What is this service [avoda] to you?" (Exodus 12:26) Why does the Haggada assume a negative attitude on the part of this child, who is merely seeking a relevant explanation for a ritual he doesn't understand? The Haggada's answer to this child also seems unduly harsh. "'What is this service to you' - and not to him. And because he took himself out of the historic Jewish community, he denied the basic principle. And so you must set his teeth on edge [hak'heh], and tell him, 'It is because of this [ritual] that G-d did for me [so many wonders] in taking me out of Egypt' (Exodus 13:8). 'G-d did for me' and not for him! Had he been there, he would not have been redeemed."

The seemingly abrasive response of the Haggada seems to be the very opposite of everything we've been positing: Set his teeth on edge! Does this mean (G-d forbid) rap him in the mouth? And why switch from second person to third person in the middle of the dialogue? First the Haggada reads, "And you tell him," and then concludes - as if you aren't even speaking to him - "Had he been there, he would not have been redeemed."

Has he been closed out of the family Seder? I believe that the most fundamental message of the Seder - indeed, of family dynamics, of classroom management and of national policy as well - is to be inclusive and not exclusive, to make everyone feel wanted and accepted rather than rejected or merely tolerated.

Indeed, it is in the context of the response to the wicked child that the Haggada teaches that the most basic principle of our faith is to include oneself - as well as everyone who can possibly be included - within the historical community of Israel, to be part of the eternal chain of Jewish being, to be a member of the family. Therefore, the problem with this child's question is not his search for relevance; that is to be applauded and deserves a proper response. The problem is that he has excluded himself from the familial-national celebration; he sees it as applying to "you" and not to "him."

The author of the Haggada tells the head of the family, when confronted by a child who excludes himself from the family ritual, to "hak'heh" his teeth; not the familiar Hebrew form hakeh, which means to strike or hit, but rather the unusual Hebrew hak'heh, which means to blunt or remove the sharpness by means of the warmth of fire (Ecclesiastes 10:10; B.T. Yevamot 110b). Tell him, says the author of the Haggada, that although we are living thousands of the years after the fact, G-d took me - and him/her as my child - out of Egypt, because we are all one historic family, united by our family celebrations and traditions. Tell him that the most important principle of our tradition is to feel oneself an integral part of a family that was once

enslaved and is now free - and to relive this message of the evils of slavery and the glories of freedom, because if they happened to our forebears, it is as if they happened to us. Since we were formed by them, we are them and they are us. And so is he/she.

And don't tell it to him matter-of-factly by rote or harshly with animus. Tell it to him with the flame and passion of fire that blunts sharp iron, with the warmth and love of a family that is claiming and welcoming its own as one who belongs - no matter what. Encourage the child to take part in and feel a part of the familial-national celebration. Then, but only then, will the child feel redeemed.

And why the switch from second person to third person? Perhaps the child asked this question, and left the table. He spoke and ran, leaving you no choice but to address him as a third person no longer in your presence. What do you do then? I would suggest that when we open the door for Elijah, it is not in order to let the prophet in. After all, anyone who can visit every Jewish Seder more or less simultaneously will not be obstructed by a closed door. I believe that we open the door - in the spirit of the herald of redemption who will restore the hearts of the children to the parents and the parents to the children - in order for us to go out, to find the "wicked child" and lovingly restore him to the family Seder table. This is the greatest challenge of the Seder night. © 2015 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

Someone remarked to me recently that he did not see or feel how anything new could be discussed at his Seder table – everything that could have been said and analyzed had been said over all of the past decades of his commemorating Pesach. I told him that I thought he had too narrow a view concerning the commemoration of Pesach.

The broad human and particularly Jewish issues of bondage, freedom, individual and national purpose and destiny, renew themselves in our lives on an almost daily basis. Our great young associate Rabbi, Itiel Goldvicht, had a discussion with me about the enslavement of the present younger generation to texting and to their smart phones. He pointed out to me that in spite of all bans, filters and other methods meant to free one from the grip and thrall of these devices, their constant use has become almost impulsive and obsessive, certainly amongst the student generation here in Israel. And, I am certain that this is true as well regarding the student population in the rest of the current Western world.

Slavery takes on different forms and disguises. There is a great difference between slavery and work. Slavery is a state of compulsion and obsession that stunts the creativity of the human mind and soul and leads to disenchantment, boredom and eventual

physical, moral, physical and mental deterioration.

One of the great attributes of the holiday of Pesach is that it allows us a new and fresh view of things. By cleaning out the chametz of our homes and souls we open ourselves up to new vistas and fresh challenges that can inspire us and deliver us to a higher level of purpose and accomplishment.

The Seder allows for a family discussion of issues, since the Haggadah itself raises almost all possible human issues – family, tradition, Torah, the land of Israel, the purpose of Jewish life and of an individual's existence, the recognition and understanding of evil, and the ultimate human necessity for reliance on faith in the Creator.

These issues are extremely relevant in today's world and affect every family and home. For most of the year we have little time or inclination to dwell on these matters for the distractions and obligations of life are many and omnipresent. But on this night of the Seder there is time, mental capacity and psychological freedom to engage with these issues. My wife, of blessed memory, told me that when she was ten or eleven years old a great rabbi was a guest for the Pesach Seder at her home.

The great rabbi talked to her, taught her melodies to sing, gave her advice for life and instilled in her an appreciation for the depth of Jewish tradition. She often told me that this Seder experience influenced her greatly and was a defining moment in her life. She did not attend a Jewish school and was a lonely Orthodox, Sabbath-observing child in the midst of a completely non-observant Jewish group of friends and fellow public-school students.

She told me that the Pesach Seder experience that year fortified her for the rest of her years in high school and college and gave her an enormous gift of self-confidence, identity and Jewish pride. I think that that is exactly what the Pesach Seder should accomplish for all of us.

The rabbis of old enjoined us that the more we speak about the Exodus from Egypt, the more praiseworthy we become. This is in line with the further statement in the Haggadah that: "in every generation one must be able to see one's own self present and participating in the Exodus from Egypt."

The Seder is meant to make the Exodus from Egypt relevant to everyone sitting at the Seder table, even today more than three thousand years later. It transports us back in time, as the very same rituals bring the past to bear upon our current situations and challenges. The Exodus from Egypt is an ongoing story and not merely a one-time commemoration of a past event. That is the secret of the strength of the Seder experience and of its fresh new quality year in and year out.

There is always something new to be said and expressed at the Seder table. And it is this constant

renewal of ideas and traditions that gives Pesach its unique ability to represent true freedom and psychological, spiritual and mental liberty. Those ancient rituals provide the tools for dealing with the relevant and seemingly modern problems that face us. The Seder night should be treasured, appreciated and loved. ©2015 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 AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

At first glance, Chad Gadya is a kind of light hearted song whose sole purpose is to provide an entertaining ending to the seder. Yet, in order to truly understand its meaning an analysis of the structure of the seder is required.

In general terms, the seder is divided into two parts. The first half which precedes the seder meal deals with the past-a retelling and reenactment of the Exodus from Egypt. The second half, which follows the seder meal, deals with the future-words of praise and song that complete redemption come soon.

It is because of this separation that we break the matza at the onset of the seder. Matzo is the symbol of redemption. One half remains on the table as we recount the past event, and the second half-- not coincidentally the larger half representing the hope of the greater redemption which is yet to come-is set aside to be eaten at the end of the meal, the section that looks toward the future.

If you take a look at most haggadahs, the bulk of commentary focuses on the first half of the seder, and there is little discussion about the last half. But this section deserves just as much attention. It begins with the eating of the afikoman, that second half of matza. This part of the seder is called tzafun. Tzafun literally means hidden, and is always associated with redemption whose time is unknown to us. The word tzafun sounds like tzafon which means north. It is said that the Messiah will come from the north.

Tzafun is followed by the Grace After Meals, the prayer of thanksgiving for food eaten during the main course. This prayer, that we recite after each meal during the year, interestingly includes the prayer that G-d send to us Elijah the Prophet who announces the coming of the Messiah.

We emphasize Elijah's presence though at the seder immediately after the Grace, when we open the door for Elijah, symbolic of our yearning for the Messiah. For the Messiah to arrive, we cannot sit on our hands-we have to do our share and open the door.

What follows is the Hallel. Appropriately, the first two paragraphs of the Hallel, which deal with redemption from Egypt, are recited prior to the meal.

The last paragraphs deal with the future, the hope that G-d will bless us (Ye-Varech Et Beit Yisrael) with redemption and hope. Thus, these paragraphs are recited after the seder meal.

And after reciting these words, we begin reciting the Greater Hallel. This Great Hallel contains prayers of hope that all of humankind will be redeemed. Included in this set of prayers is the famous Nishmat Kol Chai - may the soul of all living beings bless you O Lord.

With this we drink wine, celebrating the hope of future redemption just as we drank wine after telling the Passover story before the meal.

The seder has now officially come to an end as the statement - Chasal Siddur Pesach is read. But as in all powerful experiences, a feeling of exhilaration remains. In the case of the seder, this feeling is expressed through an ultimate encounter with G-d. The encounter, called Nirtzah, which means may G-d hear our words favorably, includes songs that allow our hearts and souls to soar heavenward.

One such song is Va-yehi Ba-chatzi Ha-laylah, literally and it was in the middle of the night. Night is the symbol of exile. The middle of the night represents the exile of the exile, the deepest darkness. As we sing these words, we're certain that somehow, no matter how dark, light will come. We continue with Adir Hu which speaks of the hope that G-d rebuild the Temple speedily. We move on with the famous Echad Mi Yodei'a which we proclaim some fundamentals of faith including the Oneness of G-d, so crucially necessary for redemption.

And here we conclude with the Chad Gadya, a playful story which demonstrates how, in the long chain of natural events, G-d prevails. The goat is devoured by the cat and the cat is bitten by the dog and the dog is slain by the stick and the stick is consumed by fire, and the fire is extinguished by water which is drunk by the ox, which is slaughtered by the slaughterer whose life is taken by the angel of death. But in the end, it is G-d who overcomes that angel.

One wonders, why is this deep message written in metaphor. It may be to teach that so much in Jewish history cannot be understood as it occurs, it can only be deciphered in hindsight. And it may be that the Chad Gadya is written playfully and humorously to teach that to survive against the odds requires the ability to laugh. Our very existence is difficult to believe, and in that sense almost funny.

As we sit down to the seder this year, we will be focusing not only on past redemption, but on the hope for future redemption. And we will sing Chad Gadya, that funny little song to remind us to laugh. The Chad Gadya, the song written in metaphors to remind us that even though we don't understand-one day we will. ©2013 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 DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

"**A**nd G-d took us out of Egypt with a strong hand and an outstretched arm" (Devarim 26:8). The Hagaddah tells us that "with a strong hand" refers to the plague of pestilence, which was the fifth plague, and that "an outstretched arm" refers to the sword G-d used to kill the Egyptians, quoting verses that prove the point. That G-d is described as having/using a "strong hand" and "an outstretched arm" to take us out of Egypt is well attested (see D'varim 4:34, 5:15). However, it is unclear what this "sword" refers to, and why it is specifically the plague of "dever" (pestilence) that is referred to as G-d "strong hand."

Several commentators (e.g. Shibolay Haleket, Orchos Chayim) reference the Midrash (Sh'mos Rabbah 10:2, Midrash T'hillim 78:16) that says that "dever" accompanied every plague. The easiest way to understand this Midrash is by applying the way some (e.g. Unkoles, Sh'mos 9:3 and Radak, shorsh D-B-R) translate the word "dever," connoting death in general rather than a deadly malady. The focus of the fifth plague was the death of the Egyptian's animals, hence it was called "dever," while the focus of the other plagues (with the exception of the tenth plague, which will be discussed shortly) was the damage they did, not the deaths they also caused in the process. When the Haggadah tells us that the "strong hand" in the verse that discusses G-d taking us out of Egypt refers to "dever," it therefore refers to the deaths caused by all the plagues, not just the death of the animals in the fifth one.

[Even though the "proof" that G-d's "strong hand" refers to "dever" is the use of the words "G-d's hand" regarding the fifth plague, since that plague's primary focus was "dever" (death, in this case of the animals), we see that the word "hand" is associated "dever," i.e. death. The bottom line is that "G-d's strong hand" does not refer only to the fifth plague, but the death caused by all the plagues.]

If "G-d's strong hand" refers to all the plagues, the "sword" that G-d's "outstretched arm" refers to must not be the death of the first born, as that was the tenth plague and would have already been included in G-d's "strong hand." Many explain the "sword" as referring to the civil war that broke out when the firstborn heard what the tenth plague will be, with many Egyptians being killed when the firstborn tried to force the rest of the Egyptians to let Israel go so that they wouldn't be killed in the tenth plague. Being that these deaths were not by G-d's hand, but were an extension of what G-d had already done, caused by the mere threat of another plague, it was referred to as His "outstretched arm." Nevertheless, it is still possible for this "sword" to refer

to the death of the firstborn, even if the deaths caused by all the other plagues are referred to as G-d's "strong hand," not His "outstretched arm."

The firstborn weren't the only Egyptians killed, as many other Egyptians died due to collateral damage (which is why the Children of Israel were warned to stay inside, in order to avoid being victims of this collateral damage, see Sh'mos 12:22). It also explains why the Egyptians were afraid that they were all going to die, not just the firstborn (see Rashi on Sh'mos 12:33; Akeidas Yitzchok understands the "sword" of G-d's "outstretched arm" to be referring to those non-firstborn Egyptians who died during the tenth plague). If the "dever" meant by G-d's "strong hand" refers to those who died during the all ten plagues, since the first nine plagues were not plagues of death, it must refer to those who died as a byproduct of the plague. (For the fifth plague, it would mean those humans who died as a result of the pestilence that was directed at the animals.) For the tenth plague, then, it would also refer to those who died as a byproduct of the plague even though they were not the primary target, i.e. the non-firstborn who died when the firstborn were smitten. This would allow the firstborn to be the ones who died via G-d's "outstretched arm," i.e. by the "sword" (directly), rather than via His "strong hand" (indirectly).

Categorizing all who died in the plagues as being victims of G-d's "strong hand" and "outstretched arm" fits very well with Moshe's initial warning to Pharaoh, that he better let Israel go or their G-d will smite them (referring to the Egyptians, even though Moshe was being polite by colloquially referring to his own people) "by pestilence (dever) or by the sword" (Sh'mos 5:3, see Rashi), which encompasses all ten plagues. But there's another way to include all ten plagues in these expressions just as effectively.

Netziv (Ma'aseh Nisim) says that the reason the word "hand" is used for the fifth plague is that each individual plague is said to be from "G-d's finger" (see Sh'mos 8:15); after five "fingers," we have a "hand." Pharaoh didn't give in after the first five plagues of his own volition, whereas for the last five (which he says also constitutes a "hand") G-d "hardened his heart." Therefore, the first "hand" is referred to as G-d's "strong hand," as it showed His strength (or at least a measure of it) while allowing Pharaoh to respond to it, while the second "hand," which Pharaoh was forced to endure no matter what, is referred to as G-d's "outstretched arm," as it was definitely going to stay "outstretched" at least until after the last five plagues had been sent. [Obviously Netziv is understanding Pharaoh's heart being hardened as his no longer having a choice, as opposed to G-d giving him back the ability to really choose despite the plagues, see S'fornu on Sh'mos 4:21 and 9:35.]

Although I described G-d's "outstretched arm" a little differently than Netziv actually does (he quotes

and applies a Zohar), the idea is basically the same. The bottom line is that each of these two expressions refers to five of the plagues, not just one, so G-d's "strong hand" is not limited to just the fifth plague, and His "outstretched arm" refers to the inevitability of the last five plagues (once Pharaoh didn't give in after the first five). Moshe's warning to Pharaoh can be explained in a similar way as the first approach; if he doesn't let the Children of Israel go he will suffer through the five plagues referred to as G-d's "strong hand" (with "dever," pestilence, being the fifth "finger" that completes the "hand") and the five plagues that are referred to as His "outstretched arm" (symbolized by a "sword" that is ready to strike).

Netziv's approach also allows us to understand another verse that the commentators struggle with. At the burning bush, G-d told Moshe that Pharaoh wouldn't listen, "not even after being hit with a strong hand" (Sh'mos 3:19). Since one of the things that facilitated our exodus from Egypt was G-d's "strong hand" (as the verse we started with explicitly says), how could G-d tell Moshe that His "strong hand" won't work? (Most commentators therefore explain the verse to mean that Pharaoh won't listen "until G-d uses His strong hand," see Rashi.) Based on the Netziv, the verse can be read in a much more straightforward manner; even after the first five plagues, which are referred to as G-d's "strong hand," Pharaoh won't give in. These plagues were still an important component of the exodus, teaching everyone about G-d and His might. And if not for the first five plagues, Pharaoh wouldn't have given in after the sixth plague even if G-d hadn't hardened his heart. But the first five plagues alone weren't enough, so when G-d told Moshe that Pharaoh wouldn't give in right away, He added that he won't give in even after being shown G-d's "strong hand."

[It is true that a later verse (6:1) implies that Pharaoh will send them out because of G-d's "strong arm," and it would be a stretch to suggest that the strong arm mentioned in this verse refers to how desperate Pharaoh will be for them to leave, to the point that he will "strong arm" them to leave faster than they otherwise would have. (This is especially true if the terms "strong arm" and "outstretched arm" are purposely used to counter the use of those expressions to describe the self-promoted strength/divinity of Pharaoh, see <http://tinyurl.com/oeh76jv>, as using them to describe Pharaoh would strongly undermine that. The use of the terms in Yechezkel (20:33-34) to describe what G-d might do to us doesn't disprove that theory, as it was a threat directed against those who now associated those terms with what G-d did to the Egyptians.) Nevertheless, since the context of that verse is a rebuke of Moshe for not seeing the bigger picture and becoming discouraged because of things seemed to have gotten worse, G-d could have been

pointing out that even though it looks like speaking to Pharaoh didn't accomplish anything, it was a necessary preparatory step in the redemption process, just as the "strong hand" He will use against Pharaoh won't seek to work at first even though it greatly impacted the eventual outcome.] ©2015 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

As we prepare for Pesach (Passover), the following two perspectives conveyed by Rabbi Avi Weiss might help facilitate the discussion:

Although written as questions, the Ma Nishtana can be viewed as a declarative statement. After all, the first two questions deal with matza and marror (bitter herbs), symbols of servitude, while the next two deal with dipping foods and reclining while eating, symbols of freedom. This teaches us that the message of Egypt is never to despair. After oppression comes redemption, day follows night, light disperses darkness.

Another approach to the Ma Nishtana is the realization that the pathway to learning is to question. It is told that Isidor I. Rabi, a Nobel prize winner in physics, was once asked: "Why did you become a scientist?" He responded, "My mother made me a scientist without ever intending it. Every other Jewish mother in Brooklyn would ask her child after school: 'Nu? Did you learn anything today?' But not my mother. She always asked me a different question. 'Izzy,' she would say, 'did you ask a good question today?' That difference -- asking good questions -- made me become a scientist." (Donald Sheff, letter to the New York Times, January 19, 1988) Hence, the seder begins with questions. Rabbi Joel Cohen suggests that perhaps not coincidentally, the seder concludes with questions as well: "Who knows One (G-d)? Who knows two (the tablets)?" Having responded to the children's questions during the seder, we in turn conclude the evening by asking them -- "have you learned the message well?" ©2015 Rabbi S. Ressler & LeLamed, Inc.

JEWISH WORLD REVIEW

The Illusion of Freedom

by Rabbi Yonason Goldson

After generations of slavery and oppression, amidst miracles unprecedented and unrepeated, the Children of Israel marched forth out of Egypt and into the wilderness as a free people for the first time in their collective memory. Fifty days later they stood together at Sinai to receive the Torah - the code of 613 commandments that would define every aspect of their lives.

What happened to freedom? What happened to the promise of redemption when all that really happened was the trading of one master for another?

Much of the modern world has built its understanding of freedom upon Thomas Jefferson's

famous formulation of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." But what would life be like in a society of unrestricted freedom? How many of us would chose to live in with no rules at all, where everyone was free to drive on either side of the road, to take whatever they desired regardless of rightful ownership, to indulge every whim and impulse without a thought of accountability? The absolute "freedom" of pure anarchy would provide no protection for the rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Consequently, it would provide no freedom at all.

Intuitively, we understand that some freedoms have to be sacrificed in order to preserve order and ensure the common welfare. If so, we are forced to refine our concept of freedom. In contrast to ancient Egypt, in which our ancestors were coerced by the rod and the whip to bow before Pharaoh's will, the G-d of our redemption allows us the freedom from immediate retribution. By doing so, the Almighty empowers us with the freedom to make our own choices, to take responsibility of our own actions, and to transform ourselves from creatures of physical impulse into beings of spiritual refinement.

Ultimately, the freedom we possess is the freedom to choose our own master, to choose the leaders and system of laws that will best serve our collective interests in the long run.

Because we live in a society with others who also demand freedom, our choices will necessarily be limited by the conventions of society. More significantly, the values of the society in which we live will shape our own attitudes, influencing the ways we think that priorities we hold dear. From the moment we are born, our impressions are determined by others: our parents, our teachers, and our peers, as well as writers, celebrities, sports stars, and advertisers.

How often have we asked ourselves whether the ideas that govern our choices as spouses, as parents, and as community members are truly our own? How often do we stop to reflect whether we have acquired the values that guide us in our relationships and our careers through thoughtful contemplation or through cultural osmosis?

The illusion of freedom convinces us that our own gratification comes before our obligations to others, before even our obligations to ourselves. If we allow our desire for unrestricted freedom to steer our lives, we will find ourselves enslaved by our desires no less than a chain smoker is a slave to his cigarettes or an alcoholic is a slave to his gin. Convinced that freedom is a goal in itself, we will sacrifice everything of true value for the cruel master of self-indulgence. Deceived into believing that responsibility is the antithesis of freedom, we will invest ourselves, consciously or unconsciously, in philosophies like this one:

Freedom's just another word for nothing left to

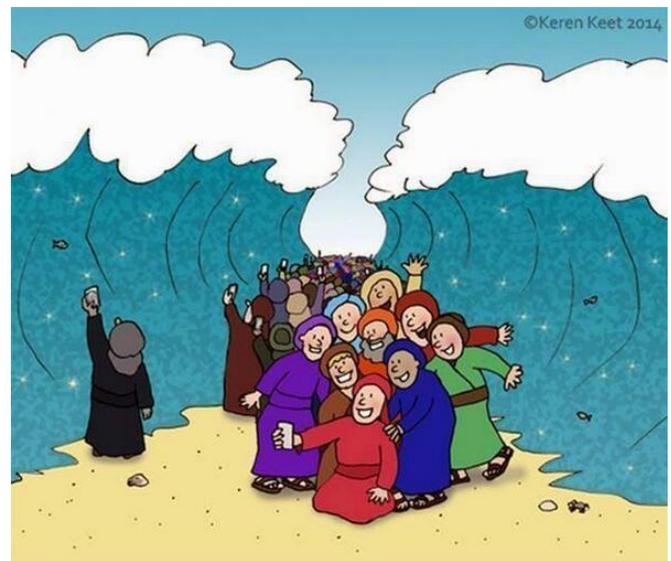
lose, Nothing don't mean nothing honey if it ain't free, now now. And feeling good was easy, L-rd, when he sang the blues, You know feeling good was good enough for me, Good enough for me and my Bobby McGee.

These are the words that made Janice Joplin into a counterculture idol, before she died of a heroin overdose at the age of 27.

Less dramatic examples confront us every day. Politicians, movie icons, and athletes destroy their careers and their family lives for a few fleeting moments of pleasure. Parents allow their children to grow up without direction or discipline lest they quash their creativity or damage their egos by imposing structure and meaning upon their lives. A once-productive citizenry increasingly looks to receive support on the backs of others, whether through welfare, lawsuits, or pyramid schemes that leave countless victims footing the bill.

More than anything, Passover celebrates the freedom to think, to take stock of our lives and reassess our values, to take a fresh look at our own motivations and our own decisions, to acknowledge where we may have lost sight of truly meaningful goals and sincerely commit ourselves to striking out on a truer course.

Last year we were slaves to our inner masters; this year we have a chance to set ourselves free to seek the paths of truth and follow them toward the destination of enduring spiritual redemption. © 2009 Rabbi Y. Goldson & jewishworldreview.com



If there were cellphones at the Red Sea