

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

God made the people take a roundabout path, by way of the desert..." (Exodus 13:18) Having observed the Passover Seder just one week ago, we would do well to reflect back on that experience now in order to glean new insights for everyday life. For example, why did we recline while eating matzah? In what I believe is a teaching that captures the essence of Passover, our Sages state that on Passover Eve, "...even a pauper should not eat until he reclines, and he should be given not less than four glasses of wine, even if he is so poor that he eats by means of the community charitable fund" (Mishna, Pesachim 10:1).

One night a year, even the destitute throw off the shackles of their misery and feel as if they, too, have been freed from Egypt. They, too, celebrate this festival, which speaks of a nation of slaves transformed into a free people. And all of us on the communal 'zedaka committee' must make sure that every last Jew, no matter how poor he or she may be, shall be given the opportunity to recline like the most free of people.

Fascinatingly, our Mishna's concern that even the poorest recline is based on a Midrashic comment to a verse in Exodus, where we read that when Pharaoh finally lets the Israelites go, "...God made the people take a roundabout path, by way of the desert..." (Exodus 13:18).

The Hebrew word for 'being made to take a roundabout path', 'vayasev,' has, curiously enough, the same root of the Hebrew word 'reclining' (yesev). The Torah explains that God takes the Israelites on a roundabout path because taking the most direct route would have caused the Hebrews to pass through land of the Philistines. This act could have provoked an aggressive nation who might very well have attacked and frightened the Israelites into retreat.

Despite having witnessed the fall of the Egyptian empire, the miracles of the Ten Plagues and the splitting of the Reed Sea, the Israelites are still frightened to wage war. God knows that they are still slaves at heart. One of the manifold tragedies of slavery is the psychological impact on the victim whereby he believes himself to be worthless and incapable of fighting for his rights.

Indeed, Moses learns this lesson after he slays

an Egyptian taskmaster for beating an Israelite, an act he had probably hoped would incite and inspire the Hebrew slaves to rise up against their captors and demand their freedom. The very next day, when he tries to break up a fight between two Hebrews, they taunt him for having killed the Egyptian. Instead of hailing Moses as a hero who risked his own life to save a fellow Jew, they deride him. Slavery corrupts captor and captive alike.

If power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely, then powerlessness corrupts most of all. A magnificent post-Holocaust Australian play, "The Edge of Night," has a former Kapo declare: "There were no heroes in Auschwitz; there were only those who were murdered and those who survived."

A slave feels helpless: uncertain of his ability to obtain food, he becomes almost obsessed with the desire for a piece of bread -at almost any cost. From this perspective, the desert possesses not only a stark landscape, but also a stark moral message concerning the transformation of an enslaved Hebrew into a freed Hebrew.

The manna, which descended daily from heaven, was intended to change the labor camp mentality of greedy individuals in Egypt into a nation in which "...the one who had taken more did not have any extra, and the one who had taken less did not have too little. They gathered exactly enough for each one to eat..." (ibid., 16:17-18).

The Haggadah begins, "This is the bread of affliction that our ancestors ate in the Land of Egypt. Whoever is hungry, let him come and eat; whoever is in need, let him come and join celebrating the Passover offering." This is more than just generous hospitality; it is fundamental to Jewish freedom; the transition from a frightened, selfish and egocentric mentality of keeping the food for oneself into a free and giving mode of sharing with those less fortunate.

Now we understand clearly why the Midrash connects 'reclining' with a 'roundabout' path. Far beyond use of the same root, the very purpose of this path is intended to purge the state of mind that still thinks like a slave, frightened not only of Philistines, but of another mouth who one fears is always waiting to take away the little bit that one has. Therefore, it is when we give so that others, too, may have and thus feel free, that we demonstrate in a most profound way that we are no longer slaves, but are truly free. ©2022

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RABBI JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

Migdal Ohr

"You shall eat [your tithes] before Hashem in the place He chooses to rest His name, so you shall learn to fear Hashem, your G-d, all of the days." (Devarim 14:23) This posuk refers to Maaser Shaini, a tithe taken from one's produce which is brought to Jerusalem to be eaten there. One who has too much to bring may change it into money, which is then used for food and drink in Jerusalem.

The commentaries explain that when a person comes to Jerusalem, it will have an impact on him. When he sees the Kohanim doing the service in the Bais HaMikdash, and the Levi'im singing there, and the Yisraelim standing by and participating in the korbanos in their way, and the Sanhedrin sitting in judgment, he will learn to fear Hashem.

Being in the presence of people fulfilling their obligations to Hashem and their nation, he recognizes that Man is not here on earth simply to enjoy the fruits of his labors. Rather, he has a responsibility to others, and even to himself, to serve Hashem in whatever capacity he can. Seeing this over and over again ingrains this message in the person and changes him, so he is trained to look at the world in a different way.

But why do we tie this to eating? Why not simply require that people come to Jerusalem and watch the service in the Bais HaMikdash? Make it mandatory for people to come to a class or lecture and learn Torah in Jerusalem. Why must one take his produce to the holy city and through this consumption gain the lessons?

It would seem that when we watch others engaged in holy service, while we are involved in mundane matters ourselves, the contrast is striking and makes us take notice. We recognize that we are not doing something elevated and we may feel bad. Much as if we were to sit at a table and watch someone else setting, serving and clearing, we should feel pangs of guilt for not helping, when we are eating and enjoying, but watch others who are actively involved in serving Hashem, we should long to be doing so ourselves.

Therefore, Hashem tells us, "I gave you a mitzvah to eat your maaser shaini where you can be inspired and influenced. You are serving Me by doing so, even if to you it seems mundane. When you do any act for My honor and at my request, that is a mitzvah."

Then, when he goes home, the person looks at his everyday life differently, and finds ways to infuse holiness, and a true desire to serve Hashem, into every act.

Wishing to show his son how perspective can affect happiness, a man took the boy to a construction site. He stopped a worker and asked, "What are you doing?" The dour man replied, "I'm hammering nails

into wood." They approached a second man, who seemed a bit happier and asked him the same thing. "I'm supporting my family," he replied.

Then they approached a worker whose enthusiasm was palpable. When asked what he was doing he replied, "I'm building a family their new home."

The thoughts you infuse into your actions can change them completely. ©2022 Rabbi J. Gewirtz and Migdal Ohr

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

A central part of the Passover Seder is the study of four sentences found in Deuteronomy. They prescribe the ritual that is to accompany the presentation of the first fruits at the sanctuary in Jerusalem. A beautiful prayer is recited. It deals with the Jews settling in Egypt; their being enslaved by Pharaoh; their crying out to God for help; and finally their being freed. (Deuteronomy 26:5-8)

One wonders: why should verses from Deuteronomy be recited at the seder table rather than sections of the Book of Exodus in which the story unfolded? Several answers come to mind.

The portion of the first fruits instructs the native Israeli to thank God for his bounty by bringing the first of his produce to the Holy Temple. Although not enslaved in Egypt he recalls the Egyptian experience in the first person as if he were there. Hence, this text is read on Passover night, as it is our challenge then, not only to "retell" the story of the Exodus but to "reenact" the event as if we, living thousands of years later, were in Egypt. "Only through this total identification as a Jewish people," writes Rabbi Shlomo Riskin in his Passover Haggadah, "can we ensure the historical continuity of Judaism and Jewry."

Rabbi David Silber of Drisha offers an alternative approach. Paradoxically, he argues, only the people who were not in Egypt can fully understand that bondage. In fact, the slaves who left wanted to return—as they never fully comprehended what it meant to leave Egypt. Only a free people could attain the proper perspective to recognize that the experience in Egypt may not have been a punishment but a covenantal opportunity.

In a similar vein, the generations after the Holocaust, not having been there, have the potential to understand the Shoah in ways that even survivors may not

A final idea comes to mind. The Psalmist writes, it is not enough to "leave evil," it is crucial to take it to the next step and "do good." (Psalms 34:15) Hence, the text chosen to be analyzed on the Seder night deals with Israel to teach that leaving slavery only has meaning if it is followed by entry into the Jewish land. Interwoven into the message of the Passover holiday is the centrality of Israel. ©2022 Hebrew Institute

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RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

With no Shabbos Chol haMoed this year, we will be reading the Megillah of Shir haShirim on the 7th day of Pesach (Passover), as it is also Shabbos. While the connection between Megillas Esther and Purim is obvious, as well as that between Megillas Eichah and Tisha beAv, the reading of Megillas Shir haShirim on Pesach is much less obvious.

As the "love" portrayed in this "Song of Songs" is an analogy for the relationship between G-d and the Nation of Israel, many understand the connection to simply be that the "inaugurating experience" that made the "Children of Israel" into the "Nation of Israel" was the Exodus from Egypt. It would therefore seem appropriate to read the Megillah that poetically describes this relationship during our celebration of the beginning of this relationship.

At one point in Shir haShirim (3:11), Shelomo refers to "the day of His wedding" and "the day of His heart's happiness." Our sages have given numerous explanations for which "days" Shelomo is referring to. The Talmud (Taanis 26b) says that the "wedding" is the giving of the Torah and the "happiness" refers to the Temple being consecrated. The midrashim (e.g. Shemos Rabbah 52:5) add additional possibilities, such as Sinai/Jerusalem (which may refer to the same things as the Talmud), the sea/the Tent of Meeting, and the Mishkan/the Temple. Other combinations are also given (see Vayikra Rabbah 20:10 and Bamidbar Rabbah 2:26 and 12:8), where Sinai is alternatively paired with the Tent of Meeting, with the giving of the Torah (which is interesting in that it makes "Sinai" an occasion in and of itself - besides receiving the Torah there), and with "Words of Torah" (which may be the same as the "giving" of the Torah, but may refer to teaching and learning Torah - that G-d's "day of happiness" is any and every day that we learn His Torah). None of these are comparing the exodus from Egypt to either the "wedding day" or to the "day of happiness" though. Nevertheless, the exodus can be considered the "day of engagement," and it would therefore be appropriate to read about the "love story" on the "anniversary" of the "engagement." However, with the splitting of the sea occurring on the 7th day of Passover, and the Mishkan being consecrated in Nissan - and both of these being compared to either the "wedding day" or the "day of happiness" - these milestones in the relationship may also be part of the reason why we read Shir haShirim on Passover.

Tosfos says that the reason we read Shir haShirim on Pesach is because it has 117 verses, corresponding to the 117 times that the exodus from Egypt is mentioned in the Torah, and the 117 years from the time that Levi died - when the oppression started - until they left Egypt.

In his introduction to Shir haShirim, Rashi says that "Shelomo, through divine inspiration, saw that Israel would eventually experience exile after exile, destruction after destruction. In this exile, they would mourn for their original honor and remember the earlier affection when they were [G-d's] treasured nation. They would [then] say 'I will go and return to my first husband (i.e. G-d) for things were better than they are now,' and they will remember His kindness [to them] and how they had acted treacherously towards Him, and [remember] all of the good things that He had promised to give them at the end of time."

Rashi continues by saying that this "love story" has a happy ending, as the husband (G-d) still loves the bride even after she was sent away (i.e. suffers in exile), and was awaiting her return to him (i.e. Him, through repentance) when they would resume their relationship.

In this context, it is rather easy to understand why Shir haShirim is read on Pesach. After spending the first night(s) reliving the exodus, and discussing - at length - all of the miracles that G-d performed to personally (not through a messenger) take us out of Egypt and under his wings, we are hit with the cold reality that we don't enjoy that relationship anymore. The contrast is much more stark than any other time of the year, so our sages told us to read Shir haShirim in order to console us, to help us realize that even if G-d is only watching us from a distance (see 2:9), the relationship still has hope. We may no longer enjoy the same relationship we once had - and relived just a few nights ago - but we can, and we will.

Just as Koheles is read on Succos after the completion of the harvest season to remind us that physical plenty has no intrinsic value (if it is not used for a higher purpose), Shir haShirim is read on Pesach to counter the possible despondency of realizing how far our relationship (as a nation) with G-d has fallen.

As this month of Nissan comes to a close, let's hope - and pray - that the ultimate redemption is close at hand, and try to do everything we can to restore our relationship to its former glory. ©2005 Rabbi D. Kramer

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

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

The literal approach to the Haggadah's four children is straightforward. On four different occasions, the

Torah describes questions asked by children about Passover. Based on the language of the question, the author of the Haggadah labels each of them. One questioner is described as wise, the second rebellious, the third simple, and the fourth not even knowing how to ask. And the Haggadah, basing itself on the Torah text, offers answers to suit the specific educational needs of each child. But if we go beyond the literal approach, hidden messages emerge.

While this section of the Haggadah is associated with youngsters, is it not possible that the children referred to here include adults of all ages? After all, no matter how old we are, we are all children-children of our parents and children of G-d. From this perspective, the

message of the four children is that every Jew has his or her place in Judaism. The challenge is to have different types of Jews seated around the Seder table in open respectful dialogue, each contributing to the Seder discussion, each exhibiting love for the other. It also reminds us that we have much to learn from everyone -- this realization is what truly makes us wise. In the words of Ben Zoma, who is mentioned just before this section in the Hagaddah: Who is wise? One who learns from each person." (Pirkei Avot 4:1) ©2011 Rabbi S. Ressler and LeLamed, Inc.

RABBI YAAKOV HABER

Shabbat Shalom Weekly

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

Mr. Meshel and R. Kaminetzky had a conversation during the trip, which R. Sherer could overhear. Mr. Meshel, who is far from a religious Jew, was asking R. Kaminetzky many questions about Judaism, all of which R. Kaminetzky answered.

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

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

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

"It's very simple", replied the Rabbi, "and I can explain it to you briefly. In your outlook, the emphasis is on human progress, human improvement. This means that you look on your grandparents as primitive, as living in the dark ages, and your parents also, to a lesser extent. But it also means that your children, in turn, look on you as backward. So why should they show you honor? In our outlook, it is the opposite. Each

generation that is born is one step further removed from the Revelation at Sinai, and so the light of Revelation gets progressively dimmer. This means that each person honors his parents as being one generation closer to Sinai."

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

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

RABBI KALMAN PACKOUZ Z"L

Shabbat Shalom Weekly

The year is 1978 and the man's name is Yosef Mendelovich. The setting: a dank cell, deep within the bowels of the Christopol prison the Soviet Union. The date is April 12. On the Jewish calendar it is the 14th of Nisan, one day before the start of Passover.

Yosef is a prisoner. He is a gaunt human shell, and he is about to light a candle. Made of hoarded bits of string, pitiful droplets of oil, and stray slivers of wax, this is a candle fashioned by Yosef's own hands. The candle is lit -- the search for chametz begins.

Sometime earlier Yosef had complained of back problems. The infirmary in hell provided him with mustard to serve as a therapeutic plaster. Unused then, this mustard would later reappear as marmor -- bitter herbs -- at Yosef's Seder table. A long-saved onion bulb in water has produced a humble bit of greenery. This would be his karpas. And the wine? Raisins were left to soak in an old jelly jar, water occasionally added, and fermentation was prayed for. This was wine. The Haggadah which Yosef transcribed into a small notebook before being imprisoned had now been set to memory. The original was secretly passed on to another "dangerous" enemy of the State: Anatoly Sharansky.

Is Yosef free? He cannot do whatever he wants. He has been denied even the liberty to know when the sun shines and the stars twinkle. For Yosef the world of free men doesn't even begin to exist.

Yet, Yosef, perhaps, is more free even than his captors. Clearly self-aware, he knows exactly who he is, what he wants, and is prepared to pay any price to have it. Today he walks the streets of Israel, studies Torah, and buys box after box of matza to serve at his Seder. He is a free man now, just as he was even behind those lifeless prison walls.

Self-awareness means that we are able to stand outside of ourselves; to look within and assess our goals, values, priorities, direction and truthfulness.

Unaware of these things, we remain mired in a dense fog of confusion and doubt. Can we ever be fully self-aware? Probably not. But aware enough to set ourselves free? Yes, and this is one of life's most pivotal challenges.

Achievement and maintenance of freedom is available only through the ongoing struggle for self-awareness. This process of clarification, coupled with the conviction to follow wherever it may lead, is the only way to achieve a spiritually sensitive, value-driven life of liberty. Ironically, this freedom can land you in a prison where you are the captor, while your guards are the prisoners. Just ask Yosef Mendelovich -- one of the freest people who ever walked the earth. ©2016 Rabbi K. Packouz z"l & aish.com

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

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RABBI YEHUDAH PRERO

Project Genesis

Pesach commemorates the exodus of the nation of Israel from their slavery in Egypt. The exodus marks the birth of the nation of Israel; the people emerged from slavery to Pharaoh to become a nation, slaves only to G-d. The Medrash (Yalkut Shimoni 225) sheds some light on how the exodus impacted Pharaoh and his view of his former slaves.

"Vayehi b'shalach Pharaoh es ha'am..." "And it was when Pharaoh sent out the nation..." The Medrash homiletically interprets the word "Veyehi" as "Voy," a groan akin to "oy yey." Who was it that groaned when Pharaoh sent out the nation? It was Pharaoh himself, the Medrash states. The Medrash explains why Pharaoh groaned by means of a parable. There was a man who collected a large amount of sticks and twigs. Assuming that they were of little value, when he brought this merchandise to market, he sold his entire inventory to one purchaser for a very low price. The purchaser was a craftsman, an artisan. He fashioned the sticks and twigs into boxes, structures, and other assorted objects. When the seller saw these items fashioned from his twigs, he groaned. "If only I had known the true value of these sticks, I would never have rid myself of them for the price that I did!" Similarly, when Pharaoh observed the people of Israel enslaved in Egypt, he saw them as haulers of bricks and spreaders of cement. They were, in his opinion, mindless laborers. He did not recognize the people for what they were: a powerful, capable, intelligent nation. When Pharaoh set the people free, he suddenly saw something he had never seen before. He saw an organized nation, with a banner leading each tribe. He realized what he had in his country, and what he let go. When he realized the true worth, the enormous value of the people, the nation, he let go, he let out a groan.

In Mishlei (Proverbs), it is written (25:6) "Educate the child in the way he should go." Rabbeinu Yona explains this passage to mean that one has to accustom the child to proper character and refined actions in the fashion in which he will be most successful. The child has to be taught in the fashion that will best allow the child to comprehend what he is studying, and incorporate it into his life.

We find in the Hagadah that there are four sons who need to know about the exodus from Egypt: The Wise Son, the Wicked Son, the Simple Son, and the Son Who Does Not Know How To Ask. The Malbim explains that the four passages cited in the Hagadah, the responses to each of the sons, are all needed. Each differs from the other, because each son is different, and as Rabbeinu Yona explained, each child has to be educated in the way which best suits him. Each of these children, four very different children, must be responded to.

They must learn about the exodus from Egypt. Why is this lesson so important?

Pharaoh failed to realize that the people enslaved to him had enormous potential. Each person had a unique talent, a special ability, and a distinct personality, something to add to the value of the people as a whole. Only when he saw the nation together, acting together in concert, in splendor and glory with banners furled, did he realize that he did not just lose a bunch of slaves, but he lost a nation, a people. It was a

huge loss. Pharaoh learned a lesson about recognizing potential, and it is this lesson we can not forget.

When the nation left Egypt, they realized their potential. They were able to develop into a nation, a process that slavery had stifled. Recognition and realization of one's potential is a lesson that emerges from the departure from Egypt. We teach this lesson to each child in the nation of Israel, in the way that the child best understands. In this way, regardless the intellect or relative capability of the child, the child will know that he or she is a member of a nation. The child will know that he or she is a unique part of a whole, who brings experiences to the table to add to the collective value of the nation. We are told that we must educate our children in the way that best suits them. We do this so that they will truly learn, so they will truly be educated, so they will reach the highest educational plateau within their grasp. They will reach their potential. We teach each of the four sons about the departure from Egypt so that they will learn the lesson that Pharaoh had to learn the hard way: the nation of Israel, in sum and especially in its parts, is a treasure to be valued. © 2000 by Rabbi Yehudah Prero and torah.org

RABBI YAAKOV HABER

The Pain of Being Special

The Pesach Haggada, in recounting the history of the Jewish people, talks about the children of Isaac: "And I gave to Isaac Jacob and Esau; and I gave Esau Mount Seir to possess, but Jacob and his children went down into Egypt."

I recently read, in the writings of of prophet Malachi, G-d quoted as saying: "I loved Jacob and hated Esau." These are strong words! (Granted that Esau had some personality problems.) Anyway, how did G-d treat these two? He gave Esau Mount Seir, which is between Eilat and Beersheba. Think of that: Esau getting some good real estate, and being able to relax in the sun all day. And Jacob? He gets sent down to Egypt, where his descendants were enslaved! What sort of divine appreciation is this?

I shall try to explain this with a story. Imagine a well-to-do businessman with two sons, one of whom he loves, and the other of whom (G-d forbid) he hates. How does he deal with them? On the son he hates, he settles a quarter of a million dollars, and says, "Now go, live off this, and leave me alone." But as for the son he loves, he wants to bring into the business. So he gives him a job in the stockroom at the standard wage, with the understanding that the boy will work his way up, on his own merit, to become eventually a partner.

So it was with the Jewish people, the descendants of Jacob. As G-d's beloved, they had to go through hardship in Egypt to prepare themselves for their role in world history. And every step in our advance, as a nation or as individuals, requires

hardship. We cannot get something for nothing. As the saying goes: "No pain, no gain."

R' Chaim Volozhin, the most distinguished student of the Gra (Vilna Gaon), wrote that the Gra was once visited by Elijah the Prophet, who promised to reveal to him the most hidden parts of the Torah. His response was "No!" He would certainly have loved to know these secrets, but only by his own unaided toil. Otherwise such knowledge would be worthless.

One more point in this connection: The Gemara (Sotah 2a) says: "It is as difficult to find one's marriage partner as it was for the Red Sea to part." Now one may ask: "But what's difficult about the Red Sea parting? G-d just sent an east wind, and that was that!" But it did not happen just like that. Before the sea parted, according to the Midrash, Nachshon ben Aminadav walked into the sea, deeper and deeper, and it was only when the water reached his nostrils that the sea parted. So even here, the parting of the sea required the self sacrifice of Nachshon's effort.

It is my prayer that for those of you who have been toiling with your problems, and feel the water rising to your nostrils, G-d will finally part the sea, and solve your problems. © 1987 Rabbi Y. Haber

RABBI RAFAEL SALASNIK

Daf Hashavua

by Rabbi Jason Kleiman, Clayhall Synagogue

"You don't bring me flowers anymore" is the title of a popular song in which two people, who used to express their love for each other, now bemoan the breakdown of their relationship. The failure of many marriages can often be traced to the deterioration in communication between husband and wife. Likewise, many a family broygez is the result of relatives failing to communicate effectively with each other. How do such problems develop?

One factor is the lack of articulated appreciation as in the case of the husband who never complimented his wife on her cooking, even though her culinary skills were excellent. When asked why he never said a good word to his wife about her meals, the husband replied, "It's supposed to be good. When it's bad, then I tell her!"

The assumption that our everyday responsibilities towards our loved ones should be carried out as a matter of course, without receiving any expression of love or appreciation from those closest to us, can cause us to feel neglected and taken for granted. We all need to feel loved, and even though we may fulfil our commitments to our families regardless, it does mean a lot when our nearest and dearest relatives make us feel special.

It is this message that explains the reading of Shir HaShirim on Shabbat Chol Hamoed Pesach.

Shir HaShirim, the Song of Songs written by King Solomon, conveys the tremendous love that exists

between G-d and the Jewish people. Judaism portrays our relationship with G-d through the metaphor of marriage, which is the prevalent motif of Shir HaShirim. Hence, we welcome the onset of Shabbat in the language of a groom greeting his bride and the Jew adorned with Tefillin relates to G-d as a marriage partner when reciting the words: "I will betroth you to me forever".

Even though the Seder nights have passed, and we have retold the story of the Exodus in the Haggada, we maintain our expressions of love for G-d to indicate a growing relationship that is to be continually cherished. The Sfat Emet explains that the word Pesach is a combination of the words peh and sach, meaning "the mouth that talks", to indicate the newly found capacity of the Jewish people to articulate their praise of G-d that had been suppressed during the years of Egyptian servitude.

This new appreciation of reacting to G-d had to be sustained beyond the experience of the miracles of the Exodus. Indeed, the Sages explain a great deal of Shir HaShirim as the story of the Jewish people in the aftermath of the Exodus, the time that is recalled in the Book of Jeremiah as Israel's "bridal days", when they followed G-d "in an unsown land" (Jeremiah 2:2).

It was Shakespeare who said, "They do not love that do not show their love." Both Pesach and Shir HaShirim convey the message that the most important of relationships have to be nurtured by telling those who are most precious to us of our love for them on an ongoing basis. © 2002 BriJNet and United Synagogue - London (O)

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

Down and Dirty

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

Reb Aryeh Levin, whose compassion for Jews was as passionate as his piety, was concerned with a merchant whose store was open on Shabbos. One Friday, Reb Aryeh went to the man and was about to tell him about the beauty of Shabbos and its sanctity, but as he neared the store, he hesitated. He decided to come back on Shabbos itself. The next day,

immediately following the morning prayers and a quick meal, Reb Aryeh went to the store but did not step inside. Instead, he sat outside the store the entire day and just watched the customers come in and out. He stood inconspicuously until closing, when suddenly the owner realized that the famous Tzadik of Jerusalem had been observing his business for almost seven hours.

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

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

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

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

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

