

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“In each and every generation, a person is obligated to see himself as if he left Egypt” (Pesachim 10:5/116b, codified by Rambam in Hilchos Matza 7:6, and included in the Haggada). Although the Exodus occurred over 3,300 years ago, we are apparently supposed to convince ourselves that we were actually there, marching out of Egypt shortly after eating from the first Korban Pesach, chased out by the Egyptians who were afraid that the 10th plague would kill more than just the firstborn. Seems like a pretty tall order.

Yes, I know the commentators tie it to something from the beginning of the Haggada, that if G-d had not taken us out of Egypt we would still be there, subservient to whomever was in power there now – so in a sense taking the Children of Israel out then allows us to still be out today. Nevertheless, most of us are blessed to live in a democracy, so the notion that we would be subject to the authority of a tyrannical government is hard to envision. (And those actually living under such conditions may find it difficult to appreciate why their current situation is better than things were then.) Is part of the obligation learning all the Midrashim that describe what life was like in Egypt, or to become an expert in Egyptian history in order to understand what being a slave there meant, in order to picture ourselves being part of the 600,000 (or 2 million) that left Egypt on the 15th of Nissan in 2448?

On a larger scale, how are we supposed to be thankful that G-d freed us from being slaves if He arranged for us to become slaves in the first place?

Egypt is compared to an “iron (smelting) furnace” (D’varim 4:20 and M’lachim I 8:51). As numerous commentators (e.g. Kli Yakar) explain, the reason G-d caused us to go through those experiences in Egypt was to remove our impurities, so that we would become worthy of being His nation. Was it a rough experience? Sure. But one that was necessary, and extremely beneficial (or G-d wouldn’t have put us through it). Without it, we wouldn’t have been able to receive the Torah, and continue the mission initiated by our Patriarchs.

In hindsight, we can appreciate this, especially since we didn’t experience the slavery personally. But it puts the Exodus in a dual perspective: Those who were there in 2448 could appreciate the transition from slavery

to freedom, and those who lived (and live) in subsequent generations could appreciate the entire process, from the time we became slaves – and ultimately became better because of it – until today, when we are still working on fulfilling the purpose of creation.

Can we create a mindset where we envision ourselves being slaves in Egypt, experience the Exodus personally, and therefore appreciate and be thankful for the micro-transition from slavery to freedom the way our ancestors did over 3,300 years ago? We can certainly try! As we say in the Haggada, “we were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt and G-d took us out of there with a strong hand and an outstretched arm.” But we can also look at the bigger picture, how we, so many years, centuries and millennia later, can appreciate and be thankful for the macro-transition of one small family into the nation that left Egypt prepared to fulfill G-d’s purpose. As we also say in the Haggada, “originally our forefathers were pagans, but now G-d has drawn us closer to His service.”

We aren’t just commemorating the Exodus and all the miracles that occurred then, but rededicating ourselves to being part of the continuing history of the Jewish people, with much more left to accomplish. In each and every generation, we are obligated to see ourselves as if we personally “left Egypt,” prepared and ready to do whatever it takes to get the job done. ©2023 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

While the Passover Seder is still freshly on our minds and taste buds, allow me to suggest an important lesson that we are likely to overlook.

Fascinatingly, alongside Moshe who is not really mentioned by the Haggadah, there is another great Biblical personality who plays a major role in the Haggadah, but who is likewise overlooked. This personality is Joseph, firstborn of Rachel, favored son of Jacob-Israel and Grand Vizier of Egypt.

Let us start at the very beginning of the Seder. After we raise the first cup of wine and recite Kiddush, we wash our hands without a blessing before eating a vegetable, usually parsley, and we make the blessing to God, “Creator of the fruit of the earth”. The usual explanation for this is that karpas is the Greek word for vegetation, and Greco-Roman meals would generally begin with the vegetable hors-d’oeuvre together with a

'dip'. The Seder is a reclining meal reminiscent of a Graeco-Roman feast and so we begin the Seder evening with this vegetable hors-d'oeuvre/dip.

For us, the vegetable is also a symbol of spring, Passover is called the Festival of the Spring – and the dip is generally salt-water, reminiscent of the tears of the Hebrew slaves.

There is, however, an entirely different interpretation of the karpas suggested by Rashi in his commentary on the verse, which mentions the coat of many colors (k'tonet passim Genesis 37:3). Rashi links this source to the verse in the Scroll of Esther which describes the rich embroidery of the palace of King Achashverosh: "There were hangings of white fine linen (karpas, Esther 1:6), thereby identifying with the Persian word karpas which describes an expensive material or garment; the second syllable pas means stripe in Hebrew and evidently refers to an expensive material with stripes of many colors. The karpas would therefore refer to Joseph's coat of many colors, the gift he received from his father elevating him over his siblings and singling him out as the bechor (firstborn).

Interestingly enough, there is a custom in many Yemenite communities to dip the karpas vegetable into the charoset, a mixture of wine, nuts and sometimes dates, which the Jerusalem Talmud says is reminiscent of blood. Hence, just as the brothers dipped Joseph's cloak of many colors into the blood of the goat claiming to their father that Joseph had been torn apart by a wild beast; we dip our karpas into the charoset.

What does this have to do with Passover? The Babylonian Talmud (B.T. Shabbat 10b) teaches in the name of Rav: "One should never favor one child over the other children in a family. It was because of an expensive garment bought for two sela'im that Jacob gave to Joseph – more expensive than anything he had given to any of his other children – he was envied by his brothers, and the issue 'snowballed' until our forefathers were enslaved in Egypt." Hence, the Seder begins by warning every leader of the family to learn from the Joseph story the importance of showing equal affection and treatment to all of one's children so as not to engender causeless hatred and strife.

The Seder's theme of the Joseph story continues with the cups of wine. Although the Babylonian Talmud (Pesachim 99b) links the four cups with the four (or five) expressions of redemption in the Book of Exodus (6:6-7), the Jerusalem Talmud (Pesachim 10:1) connects the cups of wine to the four or five times the word kos – cup – appears in the butler's dream in the book of Genesis (40:9-13, 21). And of course Joseph's interpretation of the butler's dream is that he would be freed from his prison enslavement and would be able to once again serve his master. Since this source deals with freedom from slavery in Egypt and actually uses the word kos, it is certainly legitimate to see it as a source for the cups of wine that we drink in remembrance of our

exodus from Egypt.

Rabbi Elijah of Vilna, (known as the Vilna Gaon, 1720-1797) identifies a reference to Joseph at the very end of the Seder as well, with the Had Gadya song. He masterfully interprets the little goat bought for two zuzim as the goat whose blood was used to soil Joseph's coat of many colors: Jacob 'acquired' the shock that he received upon seeing the bloodied cloak by virtue of the two sela'im he had spent on the expensive cloak, which engendered the causeless hatred of the other brothers – a hatred unto death.

In a fascinating and parallel symbolic manner, the Jewish people are also the blameless goat whom our Father in Heaven bought unto Himself with the Two Tablets of Stone, the Decalogue He gave them at Sinai. Because of that gift, and the status of the Jewish people as the chosen people, we have been hated throughout the generations and persecuted unto death by cruel tyrant after cruel tyrant. And despite the causeless hatred against us, each of our attackers will be destroyed in turn until eventually even the angel of death will be destroyed by our Father in Heaven. At that time, Israel and the world will be redeemed and death will be destroyed forever.

May it be speedily and in our days! ©2023 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI MORDECHAI WEISS

Going in the Same Direction

We are at the threshold of the time of Geulah-redemption. It was during the month of Nissan that the Jewish people- after two hundred and ten years of slavery-left the land of their persecution-the land of Egypt-and began their dramatic story which was to become the spectacular story of the formation of the Jewish people as a people. This journey has lasted even until the present day as still today we are found in different stages of our redemption and we are asked to react and overcome challenges that we face daily as a people . What was strange about the leaving Egypt was that though we all left as one people we comprised twelve unique and different tribes-each with their special flag and no doubt each with their special customs and each with their separate views.

The Midrash relates that when the Jews crossed the sea, the sea split in twelve parts giving each of the tribes a special path to follow. One would expect that Almighty G-d would have provided or at least preferred that all of the tribes would proceed in unison --that there would be only one lane for everyone-as a sign of harmony and agreement-"achdut"- as Rashi states when the Jews received the Torah "keish echad b'lev echad" as one person with one heart. Yet each tribe, according to this Midrash, was provided with a special path-a special direction. Perhaps the message at this time of

redemption was that the Jewish people needn't be all alike. We can be different! But the most important characteristic, however, is that we are all pointing and going in the same direction. How we get there is of little concern. What is important is that we all have our sights on the same goal.

A remarkable occurrence is happening in the state of Israel Today. The vast majority of the people living there-whether observant or non observant-ultra religious or not-a very high percentage observe the holidays as national or religious events in their lives. Well into the eighty or ninety percent of Israeli citizens celebrate Yom Kippur, Rosh Hashanah, Purim Succoth and Pesach. Whether their reasoning is based on Torah law, or on nationalistic pride-the bottom line is that these holidays are being observed! And the results are truly amazing. To me it is a sign that we are experiencing the Messianic era. There is no doubt in my mind that over the ensuing years those who observe these holidays because of nationalistic reason will realize the historic one as well and the religious aspect will also be their drive for observance.

The difference in living in Israel verses outside of Israel is that in Israel Judaism is the basis of the country's daily operations. On the radio on Friday they will wish you a Shabbat Shalom. On Pesach they will tell you Chag Kasher V'sameach. On Purim everyone gets dressed up in a costume and on Succoth all the stores sell decorations for your Succah and people wish each other a Chag Sameach. The entire nation is moving in one direction-which is heartwarming.

Out side of Israel our Jewish lives are very often in direct opposite of our daily and business lives. There is tension. We need to make an effort often to swim against the tide to retain our Jewishness-and it is in this environment that some of us-our children-lose direction and mix-up goals and get lost in this society.

There is no question in my mind that the future of the Jewish people is in Israel. May this time of redemption bring us all to that ultimate goal. ©2012 Rabbi M. Weiss. Rabbi Mordechai Weiss is the former Principal of the Bess and Paul Sigal Hebrew Academy of Greater Hartford and the Hebrew Academy of Atlantic County where together he served for over forty years . He and his wife D'vorah live in Efrat. All comments are welcome at rvmordechai@aol.com

RABBI JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

Migdal Ohr

"We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt" (Passover Hagada). After the child asks the question, or at least, expresses wonderment, that the evening's meal is so different, we begin the answer with these words. We explain that the reason for the Seder is to commemorate and relive the Exodus from Egypt. (It is interesting to note that the one asking the Mah Nishtana has not yet witnessed the things he asks about. Rather, they will yet see them throughout the Seder. That should be food for thought and lively discussion at your table.)

There is a famous tune used for this answer in homes around the world. The tune involves repeating some of the words for emphasis. When it is sung, it sounds like this, "Avadim Hayinu – HAYINU. L'Pharaoh b'Mitzrayim – B'MITZRAYIM!" Using this nearly universal tune as a guideline, we can glean a beautiful message about Jewish survival throughout the generations.

Avadim hayinu, we were slaves – but HAYINU – WE WERE. Even when we were slaves, we were; we still existed and survived. Hashem sustained us throughout the slavery.

L'Pharaoh B'Mitzrayim; to Pharaoh in Egypt. The word Mitzrayim, Hebrew for Egypt, is close to metzarim, a narrow, transitional place. The three weeks leading up to Tisha B'Av, for example, are called Bein HaMetzarim, "in the straits." Though we were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, - yet B'MITZRAYIM! We were just passing through that existence. The slavery to Pharaoh didn't define who we were, it refined who we would yet become.

When we celebrate the Seder and do things to recall how special and precious we are as Hashem's children, we are reminding ourselves that the troubles and tribulations we've experienced throughout history were times that Hashem carried us, and the challenges were intended to purify us and help us grow. This is a message that must be remembered and transmitted from generation to generation.

Someone once asked the Kotzker Rebber: "If we're so worried about chametz on Pesach, why eat matzah at all? One mistake in the bakery and you're doomed. Why don't we just stick to foods that cannot possibly become chametz?"

The Kotzker Rebbe smiled. "Chametz represents the Yetzer Hara. You can't totally avoid him; you have to know how to deal with him and vanquish him. Therefore, we eat matzah made from a grain that can become chametz, and we work to ensure it does not!" ©2023 Rabbi J. Gewirtz & Migdal Ohr

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The glorious holiday of Pesach is upon us once more. With all of its rituals and wonder, Pesach marks the uniqueness of the Jewish people -- a people delivered from centuries of bondage through miraculous Heavenly intervention. So, one of the main functions of Pesach is to connect us to an event that occurred millennia ago in a distant land.

The natural inclination of people is to feel disconnected to that event. This is implicit in the questions raised in the section of the Hagadah devoted to the four sons. Their basic question is: "What is the relevance of this long-ago event to me?" And this has remained the basic question in all of Jewish life throughout the ages.

The enormous number of Jews who are

completely disconnected from their faith and their people, from their homeland of Israel and from the values and observances of Torah, testifies to the intensity of doubt and difficulty posed by this question. If the Exodus from Egypt does not speak to me, then the rest of Judaism is pretty immaterial to me as well.

And that is basically the statement and question of the evil son in the Hagadah. In effect he is saying that the whole rite of Pesach as well as all of the other rituals of Judaism are meaningless because he has no connection to the Exodus from Egypt or to Jewish history generally. It is this disconnect that creates rampant assimilation and a constantly diminishing connection to the past and destiny of the Jewish people.

The answer of the Hagadah to the seemingly irrelevance of the Exodus from Egypt to our current world, three thousand, three-hundred, twenty-six years later, is difficult for us to understand. We tell that evil son that had he lived at the time of the Exodus from Egypt he would not have been redeemed and would have died in Egyptian captivity.

Midrash teaches us that a majority of the Jews in Egypt did not survive, spiritually or physically, to participate in the Exodus. The clear message here is that Exodus denial means spiritual annihilation as far as the individual Jew is concerned. In order to be able to achieve freedom -- inner and lasting freedom -- as a Jew, one must first feel connected to the Jewish people and to its past and committed to its future.

Ritual is one of the proven methods to achieve such a connection. Every bite of matzo brings me closer to my people and to its eternal mission in world civilization. One of my grandsons when he was a little boy said to me at the Seder: "Zaidy, tell everyone to be quiet I want to hear what the matzo is saying to me." In his wise, childlike way he encompassed the message of Pesach to all of us.

We have to listen to what the matzo is saying to us. By so doing, we connect ourselves to the Exodus from Egypt and thereby to all of Jewish history and Judaism itself. Without listening to the matzo, we will be disconnected from our past and all of Judaism will appear to be irrelevant to us.

Pesach teaches us many basic lessons about life generally and Jewish life particularly. It teaches us that we are a unique people and therefore have to behave in a unique fashion. It teaches us that the past has to always live in our present and that memory is the key to wisdom and survival. It teaches us never to despair and to always hope and trust for better times and salvation. It teaches us of the power of an individual -- even one individual alone, such as our teacher Moshe -- to affect and alter all of human history.

It points out to us the inherent danger of Jews not feeling Jewish and distancing themselves from their people and their own individual destiny. It proclaims for us G-d's rule over nations and the omnipresence of His

Divine hand, so to speak, in human affairs. Many times this guidance is an unseen force but there are times in history, such as the Exodus from Egypt and perhaps even in our time in the miraculous resilience of the Jewish people after the terrible events of the past century, when G-d's direction of events is more visible to us.

Pesach and its matzo have a great deal to say to us if we are prepared to listen and understand the message. Rabbi Nachman of Breslov was reputed to have said: "Every step that I take brings me closer to Jerusalem." We can also say that every bite of matzo that we take brings us closer to the experience of the Exodus from Egypt and to the great redemption of Israel that yet awaits us. ©2014 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

The Deeper Meaning of Dayenu

Perhaps the most famous song in the haggadah is Dayenu. What is its meaning?

Note that the song begins with the words *kamah ma'lot tovot* how many good favors has God bestowed upon us. The song then lists fifteen generous gifts that God has given us.

But the word *ma'lot* may not only mean good favor, but may also mean ascent, referring to the fifteen *shirei ha-ma'lot* songs of ascent found in Psalms. *Ma'lot* also means steps, referring to the fifteen steps in the area of the Holy Temple.

These views have one point in common. Both teach that Dayenu alludes to the ultimate redemption when Psalms will be recited in the rebuilt Temple. While Passover is the holiday that celebrates our freedom from Egypt and, indeed, the section prior to Dayenu (*Arami oved avi*) focuses on that exodus Dayenu reminds us that full redemption means incorporating the spirit of the Psalms and the Temple into our lives.

Dayenu includes another message. Many feel that redemption requires complete change. The Dayenu reminds us that redemption or self improvement is a process. Each line of the Dayenu makes this very point. For example, we say had God taken us out of Egypt and not executed judgement upon the Egyptians, Dayenu -- it would have been enough. One should be perpetually moving towards self improvement. The process is sometimes more valuable than the end result.

One final thought. I remember in some of the most difficult times of the Soviet Jewry Movement, standing outside Soviet government buildings and chanting Dayenu. Our message was clear. We were

declaring, enough of the suffering that our sisters and brothers in the Soviet Union were experiencing. We would spell out what we meant using the structure of the Dayenu itself. Had only the Soviets prevented the baking of matzot, and not imprisoned Sharansky it would have been enough....

But in reality, Dayenu teaches the opposite message. It tells us that had God only done one favor for us, it would have been enough. Dayenu is not a song of complaint; it is rather a song of thanksgiving to God.

Dayenu is a perfect way to bring the learning in the magid section to a higher level. Once recounting the story of the Exodus, we cannot contain ourselves as we declare thank you God for allowing us to ascend and come one step closer to full redemption. ©2023 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 YITZCHAK ZWEIG

Shabbat Shalom Weekly

This upcoming Wednesday evening (April 5th), Jews all over the world will begin to celebrate the holiday of Passover. This holiday doesn't just memorialize the miracles that God performed in Egypt for the Jewish people, it also commemorates the birth of the Jewish nation – when we transitioned from a clan of familial relationships to a society with a national identity.

Interestingly enough, the first person in the Torah to note this transition from familial interconnectivity to nationhood was Pharaoh (who saw this new entity as a threat to the Egyptians), “And he said to his people: Behold, the nation of the children of Israel are more and mightier than we” (Exodus 1:9). Given the fact that Passover celebrates the birth of the Jewish nation, it should not be surprising to learn that the Passover Seder is a key Jewish “life cycle” observance.

What is a Passover Seder? The Hebrew word “seder” (pronounced “say-dehr”) translates to “order” in English. This refers to the fifteen rituals that are performed in a very specific order during the Passover holiday meal. The order of the Seder is presented in the Haggadah, which is the special Passover booklet containing the liturgy and instructions for the night's many rituals.

According to the Pew Research Center, almost 80% of those who identify as Jews participate in a Seder. Of this same group, only about half fast (at least partially) on Yom Kippur and only about 20% light Shabbat candles regularly. Surprisingly, more than 40% of those who don't have any religious affiliation whatsoever (defined as those who acknowledge some Jewish parentage but identify as atheists or agnostics) also participated in a Seder.

Why? What makes this night different than all other Jewish rituals?

One of the overriding themes of Passover – found repeatedly in the Haggadah – is that we are enjoined to see ourselves as if we had personally been freed from the bondage in Egypt. This is more than a little strange; after all we weren't slaves – we were born some 3,300 years after the enslavement in Egypt. Why are we supposed to “pretend” as if we ourselves were actually freed? What does this really accomplish?

I have always been fascinated by how important it is to the human psyche to identify oneself with a larger subset of people. This innate need is easily demonstrated when it comes to sporting events. A person walking into a room of people watching a football game will inevitably ask, “Are we winning?” As if he and the people in attendance actually own part of the team. This is true in every aspect of our lives (we won the Revolutionary War, etc.).

The holiday of Passover, being that it is the celebration of the birth of the Jewish nation, is all about self-identifying as a Jew. This explains why it was so important for the Jews of Egypt to identify themselves by placing the blood of the paschal lamb on their doorposts so that they wouldn't be affected by the tenth plague – death of firstborn sons. It wasn't because God needed it to identify which was a Jewish home versus an Egyptian home. It was an act of self-identification; we had to identify that, even though we had lived in Egypt for a couple hundred years, we still identified as Jews and not as Egyptians. (It is, of course, no coincidence that to this very day we place mezuzot in that very same place – the doorposts of our homes – to identify it as a Jewish home.)

On Passover we must see ourselves as if we ourselves left Egypt – because it isn't merely history, it's our history and we have to make that affirmation. As my brilliant brother Rabbi Akiva Zweig likes to say, “Judaism isn't a spectator sport; it's a contact sport.” We need to immerse ourselves within it and own our Judaism. Freedom from Egyptian bondage isn't what happened to the Jews in Egypt – it is what happened to us.

This is how Judaism doesn't stay rooted in the past – it is always looking forward. As Jews, we take our past experiences and learn from them in order to work towards a brighter future. As a nation, our goal has always been the same: the unification of our people, settling in “our” land (Israel), and living in a true moral and just Torah society. Thus, Passover is the time when we remind ourselves where we came from and where we hope to arrive. This is the true meaning of “Next Year in Jerusalem!”

In order to achieve this perspective, the overarching theme of the Seder is the retelling of all that the Almighty has done for us as a people. There is a very specific mitzvah in the Torah regarding this:

That you may tell your son and grandson how I toyed with the Egyptians and the miracles that I performed in their midst so that you may know that I am

God (Exodus 10:2).

This verse is the source of the mitzvah of telling over the story of the Exodus. Yet the construct of the verse seems a little odd; the verse ends "[...] so that you may know that I am God." Since the purpose of retelling the story of the Exodus is to relate the greatness of the Almighty and all that He has done, the verse should have ended with "so that they will know that I am Hashem." Why do we say so that you will know that I am God?

Naturally, one would think that a person would have to internalize the greatness of the Almighty before telling it over to one's children and grandchildren. So why does the Torah point out that only after telling the story to your sons and grandsons will you know "that I am God"?

The Torah is conveying a very deep message here. We live in a society that celebrates people for no other reason than that they are the children of famous people. For the most part, people are preoccupied by their lineage – as if they were racehorses. They tend to focus on themselves as if their parentage makes them somehow special.

However, what most people fail to grasp is that, in the end, it's their children who will define them. Wherever their kids end up, they will end up as well. Time and time again, I have seen that if the children become more religious than the parents will slowly follow suit. Unfortunately, the converse is also true; if one's children lessen their Torah observance then the parents usually make accommodations and compromises.

When it comes to choosing between family and religion most choose family. After all, it's only natural to want to be with one's children and grandchildren.

This is what the Torah is conveying: When you properly educate your children in everything that the Almighty has done for the Jewish people and their descendants, then your children and grandchildren will follow the same path. Ultimately, where they go you will follow. That's why the verse ends "so that you may know that I am God." © 2023 Rabbi Y. Zweig & shabbatshalom.org

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

As we sit down on Pesach (Passover) night at the Seder, we make a transition that we wouldn't realize unless we think about it. All day we prepare the food, making sure we don't have Chametz (leavened bread), making sure we have all the Marror (bitter plants) and eggs ready. The unleavened bread is to remind us that we're still poor, the Marror to remind us of the past exile, and the eggs dipped in salt to remind us that we're still in exile. Then, we start the Seder, and the first thing we say is how this is the "time of our freedom". We continue by telling the story of how we were freed, and we even act like we're kings by leaning when we sit! Are we slaves, or are we free kings?

R' Yerucham of Mir explains that the "time of our

freedom" means that not only was it when we were freed from slavery many years ago, but it's the time when we can do the same TODAY! What does that mean? Aren't we free? And if we're not, how does Pesach 'free' us? That's where Pesach, Matzah and Marror come in. Those are the 3 things that remind us, especially when we're feeling like kings, that we were slaves, and that we're still in bitter surroundings. If you think about it, because we were saved from slavery by G-d, we are now indebted to Him, which means that we're still not, and never will be, really free! The point we have to take from all this is that although we're free to do as we wish, it's only worth something when we use that freedom to do something good, and be constructive with our lives. Pesach teaches us that "freedom" used just for the sake of being "free-" is pretty "-dom"! © 2008 Rabbi S. Ressler & LeLamed, Inc.

THE AISHDAS SOCIETY

Aspaqlaria

by R' Micha Berger

The Mishnah (Pesachim 10:5, TB 115a-b), in a section quoted by the Hagadah, states: "Rabban Gamliel used to say: Whomever doesn't say these three things on Pesach did not fulfill his obligation. And they are: Pesach, Matzah and Maror..."

"In generation after generation, a person is obligated to see himself as though he left Mitzrayim [Egypt]. As it says (Shemos 13) "And you will tell your child on that day, saying, 'Because of this Hashem Acted for me when He took me out of Mitzrayim.'"

"Therefore, we are obligated to thank, praise, glorify, honor, exalt, extol, and adore the One Who did for our ancestors and for us all these miracles -- took us out of servitude to freedom, from depression to joy, from mourning to holiday, from darkness to great light and from subjugation to redemption. And we will say before Him, "Praise G-d!"

On an electronic forum, someone asked the group, "Putting aside jokes about Pesach prep, does anyone feel like they accomplish this? Does anyone feel they succeed in conveying this sentiment to their kids? I'd like to hear anyone's thoughts on how to relate the hagadah to today's world."

My answer...

On Oct 15th, 2002, I was laid off from my job. (As was 80% of the business unit. I made it to the 2nd of 3 waves.)

On Oct 21st, my daughter wanted to watch TV. The only TV in our home at the time was in my room, so we had some control over what they watched. She plunked herself down on my bed, and sat right on my foot. My toe was in excruciating pain. Two hours later, I hopped to the ER to get it taped.

(Yes, this is relevant. Hang on.)

Turns out that -- Barukh Hashem -- I was born with a defective pinky-toe bone, a mere sliver that broke

easily. This broken bone is what got me to the ER, where I finally showed the doctor that swollen gland that wasn't going away after nearly a month and a half. She told me that swollen gland required that I "should see a doctor. Tomorrow." So, I went to my own doctor the next morning. He sent me for a needle biopsy and by lunchtime I found out I had lymphoma.

(I bet you're still wondering where I am going with this.)

It took the doctors at Sloan Kettering a while to figure out how to treat this particular form of lymphoma. As of 2010, only three people were diagnosed with it, which involves both T and B cells, and has features of both large and small cell lymphomas. (True as 2010.) To the doctors, it looked like a little of everything and was a variation on the theme they hadn't seen before.

Michael Ryan (NYPD, died 5-Nov-2007, age 41), Brian Ellicott (FDNY EMS, died 29-Nov-2007, age 45) -- both zikhronam livrakhah -- and myself (who in Nov 2007 was 42). All three of us were men, similar in age, who were in downtown Manhattan on 9/11 -- although obviously my exposure was far far less than that of two people who went down to "the pile" for rescue and retrieval work in the days after the collapse. But it turns out Hashem gave me a means of being forewarned about my cancer 3 years it became obvious. So my disease was caught in stage one, meaning: before the problem was visible beyond the first lymph node, the one removed in a second biopsy.

And being laid off? A severance package at 100% pay was better than being on disability.

That winter, I thought I was caught between a pair of life's greater trials, but in truth Hashem had made sure my hard times was of the exact measure He planned.

The term for a pair of difficulties? Mitzrayim -- the dual form of meitzar, from the same root as tzaros. (Etymologically, the name of the country "Mitzrayim" refers to the upper and lower Misr, what the Egyptians called each the lands on either side of the Nile.)

Anyone who has had hard times can look for how Hashem took them out. No less than when He took us out of Egypt. And so, a person is fully capable of seeing himself too having left Mitzrayim. When I say Shema with appropriate concentration, this is the "Hashem your G-d who took you out of Mitzrayim to be G-d for you" that I think of in the closing sentence. (Bamidbar 15:41)

I really think that's what the mitzvah is about. More than believing that we, too, in the 21st century would still be enslaved to some now long-dead empire... Or maybe even to their values. It's to realize that life today, even though it looks less miraculous, is no less Hashem's doing than were the flashy miracles of the Exodus.

And it is for the redemption we relive in our own lives that we must "thank, praise, glorify, honor, exalt,

extol, and adore the One Who did for ... for us all these miracles!"



To be intellectually honest: The story loses some of its impact if you think about Officer Ryan and Firefighter Endicott's families, who lost their love ones specifically because they were determined to give other rescue workers' families the closure of being able to make a funeral. On 9/11 itself, for every story retold of someone who was spared being there because they were out doing some mitzvah is a story of someone who seems no less deserving who was killed in the attack.

Every life has its own story.

I cannot know G-d's calculus in my own, never mind in others'.

But the mystery of tzadiq vera lo (why the righteous suffer) doesn't free me from feeling grateful for the good in my life (hakaras hatov) and feeling thankful to the ones -- or in this case the One -- who provide it (hoda'ah). ©2016 R' Micha Berger & The AishDas Society

RABBI YAAKOV BERNSTEIN

Haaros

The Talmud Yerushalmi (Chala, 1:1) says that Hillel would eat the Pesach, Matzah and Moror bound up together. Today, we can't begin our meal this way, because, without the Pesach offering, Moror is not obligatory due to Torah Law; rather it is required by the Rabbis. The Mitzvah d'rabbonon of Moror should not be combined with the Matzah -- which is of Torah status. (Talmud Bavli, Pesachim 115a) Instead, we begin with Matzah alone (with its brochos), the Moror alone (with its brocha), followed by the korech combination -- without any brochos -- as a remembrance of the mikdash according to Hillel. (Ibid.)

According to the Rambam, in the days of the Beis Hamikdash, one would begin the meal by saying 1. Hamotzi, 2. a special brocha for the matzah and moror together ('al achilas matzos umororim'), and then eat the korech (the combination of matzah and moror). If, however, he ate the matzah first, he would say a brocha for the eating of matzah alone ('al achilas matza'), then a brocha for the eating of moror alone ('al achilas moror').

This would be followed by the eating of the Chagiga offering, then the Pesach offering. Following the meal, he would eat one last k'zayis of the Pesach. (Mishnah Torah, Hilchos Chametz Umatzah, 8:6-7, 9.)

Today, however, since we don't have the sacrifices, he begins with matzah alone, followed by moror alone, each with their respective brochos. Then he binds together the matzah and moror and eats the combination, without a brocha, as a remembrance of the mikdash. (Ibid., 8:8.)

The Rambam didn't mention Hillel at all. Today, (he wrote) we have a "remembrance of the mikdash", but not a "remembrance of the mikdash according to Hillel"! Rav Yisrael Meir Zaks answered that, since the actual

practice was according to Hillel's view, it is no longer necessary to mention "according to Hillel", rather, "a remembrance of the mikdash".

The Vilna Gaon proved that the main halacha is not according to Hillel. There is a dispute as to which kind of t'fillin we are obligated to wear, 'Rashi t'fillin' or 'Rebbenu Tom t'fillin'. For those pious individuals who chose to wear both, the brocha is said on 'Rashi t'fillin' - and the halacha requirement is 'Rashi t'fillin'. (Teshuva Ashkenazis, quoted in Beis Yoseif, Orech Chaim 34.) Here, too, since the brochos are said on matzah and moror separately -- but no brocha is said on the combination -- it appears that the main halacha is not in accordance with Hillel. (Biur to Orech Chaim, 34:7)

The Talmud Yerushalmi (Chala, 1:1) shows that Rebbe Yochanon disagreed with Hillel. At the same time, it is known that Rebbe Yochanon began his meal with the Korech combination! This is a contradiction! (Ibid.)

One of the answers given is that Hillel ate all three combined, but Rebbe Yochanon ate only the matzah and moror combined. Since the Rambam only mentions -- even in ancient times -- combining matzah and moror, but not the Pesach with it, his words are not only in accordance with Hillel. There are those who rejected Hillel's approach, but still ate the combination of matzah and moror.

The Chasom Sofer explains how mitzvos, according to Hillel, coalesce (e.g., the matzah, moror and pesach are eaten together, and do not take away from each other). Transgressions, though, nullify each other (this refers to specific ratios of permissible and forbidden substances mixed together): Similar entities work together and do not nullify one another. Dissimilar entities, however, fight to destroy each other. The mitzvos are similar in that their purpose is to carry out the will of Hashem. Each transgression, however, stands apart, on its own, for itself. In regard to mitzvos, they can each support one another for the same, ultimate goal. The transgressions, though, standing for themselves, seek to overpower and destroy one another. (See Teshuvos Chasom Sofer, Yoreh Deya, 96 d.h. v'zeh at length.) ©2019 Rabbi Y. Bernstein

HARAV SHLOMO WOLBE ZT"L

Bais Hamussar

Before Adom Ha'rishon sinned, he was able to clearly discern that despite the fact that this world seems to be a reality, it is merely a faade in comparison to the reality of ruchniyos in general and Hashem in particular. However, after he sinned, the yetzer hara i.e. the power of imagination became part and parcel of Adom's very being. The extent that he exercised the use of his imagination, the more he turned the physical world into a reality. This in turn obscured the true reality of the spiritual world.

Rav Wolbe (Da'as Shlomo Geulah pg. 313) writes that this concept holds true for each and every one

of us. The Torah relates regarding the staffs Yaakov Avinu placed in front of the sheep, that the sheep gave birth to offspring which mirrored the designs on the staffs. The "imagination" of the sheep had the power to create a reality. The same holds true for our imagination. When a person uses his imagination to conjure up various worldly pleasures, he is creating; he is turning the physical world into more and more of a reality. This in effect obscures the reality of ruchniyos thereby giving it inferior status.

How does one combat this yetzer hara masked in his imagination? The answer can be found in the Kuzari (3, 5). "The pious commands his imagination to conjure up the most splendid images stored away in his mind in order to create a picture for a desired G-dly phenomenon such as the revelation by Har Sinai, Akeidas Yitzchok, the Mishkan along with Moshe and the service performed therein, the glory of the Bais Hamikdosh and many other images." It is imperative that one utilize his imagination in his avodas Hashem. Otherwise, his imagination unchecked will run wild, and solely paint portraits of the many pleasures and temptations of this very materialistic world.

The importance of using one's imagination to aid his avodas Hashem is expressed succinctly by the Sforno in his explanation of two pasukim in Devarim (27, 9-10).

"Haskeis" -- Depict in your mind "U'Shema" -- and contemplate. "V'Shamata B'kol Hashem Elokecha" - - When you depict this and comprehend it, then you will most certainly heed the word of Hashem."

This being the case, concludes Rav Wolbe, we have clarified for ourselves the avodah of Pesach. A person is obligated to feel as if he himself left Mitzrayim. This can only be accomplished by picturing the bondage and the subsequent freedom. For this reason we are instructed to recline, drink four cups of wine, and eat matzah and marror. Going through the motions of freedom, observing the "pesach" and tasting the bread of affliction all aid our imagination in a more complete picture of Yetzias Mitzrayim.

If we truly want to gain from this Yom Tov of Pesach, let us follow the Kuzari's advice. Let's not merely "go through the motions" of the Seder, but also take some time to picture the scenes of Yetzias Mitzrayim. The ten makkos, Paroah's nocturnal search for Moshe and Aharon, each Jew with ninety donkeys laden with the bounty of Mitzrayim, Kriyas Yam Suf and the cloud and fire that led the Jews through the wilderness. These pictures can do wonders in advancing our emunah. Chag Kasher V'sameach with much health! ©2020 Rav S. Wolbe zt"l and torah.org

