

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

When the men of the Great Assembly compiled the Passover Haggadah, slavery was very much a reality. In that part of the world, the free would feast during special banquets while reclining on a divan, the actual meal served on a small table to the diner's left. Thus the Passover seder, celebrating the passage of the early Hebrews from slavery to freedom, attempts to symbolically capture this new-found state by requiring us to recline while eating.

In the first Mishnah of Chapter 10, Tractate Pesachim, we are instructed that during the seder meal, "...even a pauper among Israelites should not eat until he reclines, and he should be given not less than four glasses of wine, even if he's so poor that he eats from the public plate."

The Mishnah strikes at the heart of what Passover is about. One night a year, even the hardcore poor throw off the shackles of their misery, feel as if they too have been freed from Egypt, and celebrate this festival which speaks of a nation of slaves transformed into a free people. And all of us on the 'tzedaka committee' must make sure that every last Jew, no matter how penurious he may be, shall be given the opportunity to recline like the freest of men.

Our Mishnah's concern that even the poorest of Israelites recline is based on a Midrashic comment to a verse in Exodus, where we read that when Pharaoh finally lets Moses' people go. "...G-d therefore 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' is 'vayasev,' strangely enough the very same root of the Hebrew word to recline (yesev). Clearly the linguistic connection, which has been noted by many Biblical interpreters, is much more than merely coincidental and certainly deserves comment.

When we think about the exodus from Egypt, the reason why G-d makes the Jews take a roundabout path is given in the text itself, (v. 17): G-d wants to avoid the shorter route, which would have caused the Hebrews to pass through land of the Philistines, an aggressive nation who might very well attack and frighten 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 Jews are still frightened to wage war, to fight back. Remember that when Pharaoh and his chariots chase after the Israelites before the Reed Sea, no one (not even Moses) thinks of the possibility of fighting against them. Apparently slavery is not just skin-deep. It reaches into a person's essence. G-d knows the Jews are still slaves at heart.

This is certainly a major reason for Moses' ability to lead the Jewish people: he was raised in the palace of Pharaoh, without the fear of a slave, devoid of a slave mentality. Slavery is a tragedy, and one of its consequences is how the victim ends up internalizing the accusations made against him, believing himself to be a worthless parasite, incapable of fighting for his rights. Indeed, Moses learns this lesson after he slays the Egyptian task-master, 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 because he risked his own life to save a fellow Jew, they throw his actions back into his face. Moses now realizes "...the incident is known..." (Exodus 15:2). If he wants to save his life, he must flee at once. Slavery corrupts captor and captive alike.

There is yet another issue. Power may corrupt, absolute power may corrupt absolutely - but 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." And a slave feels impotent, uncertain of his ability to obtain food, and becomes almost obsessed with the desire for a piece of bread - almost at any cost. From this second 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..." (Exodus 16:17-18)

The Haggadah begins with the words, "This is the bread of affliction that fathers ate in the Land of

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Egypt. Who is hungry, let him come and eat, who is in need, let him come and join celebrating the Passover festival." This is more than just generous hospitality; it is fundamental to Jewish freedom, the transition from a frightened, selfish and ego-centric mentality of keeping the food for one-self into a free and giving mode of sharing with those less fortunate. With this in mind, be mindful of a commentary by Rav Pesah Tzvi Frank, an early Chief Rabbi of Jerusalem "Seven days shall you eat matzot.." commands our Bible (Exodus 13:6), but the following verse reads, "Matzot should be eaten for seven days" (13:7). Is this next verse not redundant? Not at all, says the Chief Rabbi. The first verse is the general commandment for us - every Israelite - to eat matzot, while the second verse commands that matzot should be eaten - 'ye'a'chel', the passive nifal form of the verb, - by others, that we must both eat ourselves and provide for others to eat as well !

Now we understand clearly why the Midrash connects 'reclining' with a'roundabout' path. It goes far beyond use of the same root. The very purpose of this path is intended to purge the state of mind which 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.

And when we give so that others too may have and feel free, we are proving in a most profound way that we are no longer slaves. © 2008 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

Passover commemorates the exodus of the Jewish people from Egypt. They left on the 15th of Nisan (the first day of Passover) and crossed the split Sea of Reeds (before it came crashing down on the Egyptians) on the 21st of Nisan (the seventh day of Passover). Fifty days later the nation received the Torah, hearing G-d's voice on Mt. Sinai. The 49 days between their leaving Egypt and receiving the Torah are the days of "Sefira," when we "count" the days and weeks from the exodus, when we became free, to the public revelation when we received the Torah, which provided meaning and purpose to that freedom. It follows, then, that this period of time is one of

preparation for accepting the Torah and recommitting ourselves to its values.

However, when you think of Sefira, what association comes to mind? For many, Sefira is thought of as a period of mourning, as during this time period Rabbi Akiva's students perished. It seems kind of odd that a time that should be spent getting ready to recommit to G-d and his Torah is more a "downer" about the tragedy than being a time of exciting anticipation about our continually growing relationship with G-d. Since it was this time period when Rabbi Akiva's students died, there must be a profound connection between their deaths and preparing to accept the Torah and its lifestyle.

One connection that is often suggested is based on why his students died. The Talmud (Yevamos 62b) tells us it was because "they did not give honor to each other." The message would therefore be that treating each other properly is a prerequisite to living a religious life. And this is certainly true. Nevertheless, a closer look might reveal a more specific connection between the death of Rabbi Akiva's students and how we should prepare for our own acceptance of the Torah.

The Midrash (Beraishis Rabbah 61:3 and Koheles Rabba 11:6) words the deficiency in Rabbi Akiva's students a bit differently, telling us that they died because "they were stingy and wouldn't share their Torah with each other." It wasn't that they insulted each other, or treated each other poorly in some other way, but that they didn't respect each other enough to share their own Torah thoughts, ideas and discoveries with them. Not that they didn't appreciate a "good vort" they heard from the others enough, but that there were no "good vorts" shared to even give others an opportunity to either like or dislike them.

"Two [people who are] sitting and not discussing Torah subjects constitutes a 'gathering of scoffers' (Avos 3:2). Previously (www.aishdas.org/ta/5767/acharei.pdf), I have discussed how two people learning, albeit not with each other, are considered "scoffers" because they are belittling the benefit of sharing their ideas and thoughts with each other. Had Rabbi Akiva's students valued the contributions that others could have made had they shared their thoughts with them, they would not have been stingy with their own Torah. Instead, they would have told others what they had come up with, hoping that their ideas could be refined, built upon or even corrected. Because they didn't give each other the proper respect, they kept their Torah to themselves and it was left an unfinished product. Had they survived, these students would have been the next in the transmission process, and the "norm" would have become learning in a vacuum. The casualty of such a process would be all of the ideas that, from then on, would be left unshared, and thereby unrefined.

Last week I contrasted the personal introspection of Yom Kipper with the national experience of the exodus. Learning Torah is a very personal experience, but it can only thrive if it is part of a group discussion. Today's scholars may not be as great as previous ones, but they can take what the earlier generations discovered and shared and build upon it. By having an intergenerational Torah discussion along with one that is intragenerational, we can all gain a deeper understanding of what is being learned. Because they died specifically between Pesach and Shavuot, we can learn from the mistake of Rabbi Akiva's students and apply it to our own Torah learning. Are we accepting the Torah as we understand it, or the Torah that G-d gave us? Only by learning and sharing with others can we hope it is the latter. Mourning over the death of Rabbi Akiva's students therefore helps us remember that a prerequisite of accepting G-d's Torah is not just treating each other properly, but helping others - and ourselves - better understand what the Torah is really teaching us. © 2008 Rabbi D. Kramer

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak

The seventh day of Pesach is called "atzeret" (Devarim 16:8), as is the eighth day of Succot (Vayikra 23:36; Bamidbar 29:35). The meaning of this word in the Torah is not clear. In all three verses where it appears it is linked to a prohibition of performing labor. What does it mean?

There seem to be two possible explanations for the word, and they might well be related to each other. On one hand, it seems to imply a gathering, or a grouping, similar to the word "atzara" which appears in other places, such as in the verse, "Declare a fast day, call for a gathering, gather the elders and all the dwellers of the land in the house of your G-d" [Yoel 1:14]. The word atzeret appears with this meaning in the lament about the nation, "Who will give me lodging in the desert, so that I can leave my nation and go away from them, for they are all adulterers, a gathering of traitors?" [Yirmiyahu 9:1]. This would imply that on the seventh day there is a mitzva to make a special gathering of the people in order to take note the end of the holiday.

However, in his commentary on Vayikra 23:36, Ibn Ezra rejects this interpretation of the word atzeret for the seventh day of Pesach, since the verse where it appears is preceded by an explicit declaration that after offering the Pesach sacrifice on the first day, "You shall turn away in the morning and return to your tent" [Devarim 16:7]. Thus, he insists that the word atzeret cannot mean a gathering, since it is clear that by the seventh day the people had returned home. Therefore he interprets atzeret in a different way: "that the people

shall abandon all worldly interests." This interpretation is based on the appearance of Doeg the Edomite in the Tabernacle at Nov: "And on that day a man from the slaves of Shaul paused before G-d, and his name was Doeg the Edomite" [Shmuel I 21:8].

However, perhaps Ibn Ezra's problem with respect to the other interpretation can be answered and his approach can be combined with the more common one. It may be that the Torah is not referring to a single central gathering, something which indeed takes place only on the first day of the holiday. Perhaps the Torah is giving a command to organize local gatherings, every community for itself. The purpose of such gatherings would be to stand before G-d in an expression of the sanctity of the day, at the end of the holiday.

This would mean that the holiest days of the main holidays in the year? the first and the last days? symbolize two different aspects of how man is attached to a greater entity. On the first day, the entire nation is involved, with all the people coming to the Temple to show themselves before G-d. On the last day of the holiday, a man shows himself as part of his nearby community, gathered together before G-d in order to put aside their worldly pursuits. Between these two days, a person remains in an internal state, "Return to your tent." Thus, in summary, the holiday of Pesach incorporates within it all three cycles of human life: the family, the community, and the nation.

Gershon Jumped into the Water Too

by Rabbi Shlomo Shok, teacher in Yeshivat Siach and Nokdim Prep-school

It often happens that we enter a series of long and wearisome indecision. Our thoughts flicker like faulty fluorescent bulbs, and in the end we make a decision that is no different than what we thought at first. Is it really necessary in every act of decision to go through a tiring wishy-washy process? And if we make a spur-of-the-moment decision, should we consider it as insignificant?

Here is a story that I heard which is relevant to this question.

A handsome Jew with a long beard entered a synagogue that he happened to pass by in order to pray the Mincha and Maariv services. The custom in this synagogue was to have a short break between Mincha and Maariv, with time for some study. Because of his impressive appearance, the guest was invited to speak to the congregants. Since he was really not experienced in talking he tried to refuse politely, but the people finally prevailed on him to speak.

Since the week's Torah portion was Beshalach, he began with a discussion of the events of the splitting of the Red Sea. And here is what he said: The nation of Yisrael has left Egypt, and they are now approaching the Red Sea. The sea lies before them and the Egyptian horsemen are coming at them from behind.

Their distress grows, it seems that they will be forced to jump into the sea. But who will be the first one to lead Bnei Yisrael into the sea? Well, there was a man named Gershon who decided to be the first one to jump into the water. (At this point, the listeners tried gently to correct the speaker, telling him, "Nachshon, Nachshon, not Gershon.") But the man continued as before (perhaps he understood that he had made a mistake, perhaps not). He said, and Gershon ("Nachshon, Nachshon," the listeners prompted) jumped right into the sea. But whom did he meet in the water?

Gershon met none other than the one who was already in the water—he met Nachshon. Nachshon was the first to jump, and he was the one who was praised by all... It may be that the speaker continued with his talk, or perhaps the time for Maariv had arrived. But let us try to understand the differences between Gershon and Nachshon. Gershon acted after careful consideration. Nachshon acted in an instinctive way that takes precedence over careful thought. And that is why Nachshon acted before Gershon.

There are times when careful consideration is necessary. But there are other times when we must make room for a Nachshon-like flash of inspiration that does not depend on detailed preparation and knowledge. We must take into account that we have a devil within us which will not always enter our heads to remind us that we must thoroughly weigh all our options.

RABBI SETH NADEL

Taste of the Afikoman

Pesach immediately conjures up vivid memories of childhood: the scents, sounds, and tastes, special time with family, and the experience of exploring our rich tradition. As a child, my eye was on the prize: the afikoman prize, that is. Hiding and stealing the afikoman is a rite of passage, and perhaps even a national pastime. It is the way that parents have kept their young children awake and engaged for Centuries of late night Sedarim. And it just may be the first time a Jewish child learns to "bargain." But, like everything in our tradition, it teaches us something profound.

The word afikoman, is based on a Greek word which means "that which follows." And of course, that which follows the meal is dessert! The word afikoman, over time has come to describe the piece of matza eaten at the end of the Seder which symbolizes the Passover offering. The Mishnah (Pesachim 10:8) teaches, "ain maftirim achar hapesach afikoman." A loose translation renders, "One may not eat any dessert after eating the Passover Offering." One is required to leave the Seder with the taste of the Paschal Lamb, or in our case the matza, still in their mouth. One is required to savor it; to take it with them.

But why can't we eat anything after the afikoman? Why not even a little snack?

The Seder can be a powerful experience. To truly fulfill the mitzvah of sippur yetziat mitzrayim, relating the story of the Exodus from Egypt, one is required to make it more than just an intellectual experience. It should be experiential, emotional, and engaging. Rabban Gamliel said, "Whoever has not discussed three things on Pesach has not fulfilled their obligation. And they are: Pesach, Matza, and Maror." (Ibid 10:5) Every year, I introduce my Seder by saying, "Whoever has not laughed, cried, sung, and danced at their Seder has not fulfilled their obligation."

After experiencing so much, we are challenged to take the experience with us; to internalize it. That is why, explains the Sefat Emet, one of the great Chassidic thinkers of the 19th Century, we are not to eat anything after the afikoman. We go to bed with its taste on our lips to remind us to take this experience and savor it.

Perhaps that is why we answer the Chacham, the wise son with precisely this law. Wisdom is important, but the Seder is not solely an intellectual endeavor. One is required to engage their emotions. We teach the Chacham that this experience has to be more than just cognitive; it has to engage us emotionally and its message should resonate throughout the rest of the year.

May we all merit taking the taste of the afikoman with us! © 2008 Rabbi S. Nadel

RABBI KALMAN KAMINER

Parshas Hashavua

On the seventh day of Pesach we read Az Yashir. The second pasuk of the Shira says Ozi V'zimras Ka Yay'hi Li Lishua. What does this mean? The Metzudas Tzion in Y'shayahu (62:8) says the meaning of Oz is from the concept of strength. What is special about Ozi that it is the cause of the salvation? Furthermore, the might of the Jews was not what caused them to be saved. The Pasuk says Hashem Yilachem Lachem V'atem Tachrishun—Hashem is fighting for us and we will be victorious.

The Meshech Chochma understands Ozi V'zimras Ka to refer to the special relationship between Bnei Yisrael and Hashem. We wear t'fillin which express the greatness of Hashem. The Talmud tells us that Hashem too wears t'fillin with four Parshiyos describing the greatness of Bnei Yisrael. The Meshech Chochma cites the talmudic statement (Brachos 6a) that ein oz ela t'fillin—the epitome of strength is the t'fillin. Furthermore Vezimrat Ka is referring to the T'fillin which Hashem wears. Bnei Yisrael wore t'fillin after leaving Mitzrayim because then they truly believed in Hashem. Thus the t'fillin is testimony to the belief that Bnei Yisrael has in Hashem.

The Gemara in Beitza 25b asks "Why was the Torah given to Bnei Yisrael?" It then answers: "Because they are Azin." The Maharsha writes in his

Chidushei Agadot that the word Oz is referring to the Torah. Thus the Maharsha learns Azi V'zimras Ka to mean "I am fierce among the nations and, therefore, the Torah was given to me and I merited to be saved." Both the Maharsha and the Meshech Chachma essentially prove that Oz is either t'fillin or Torah through the same pasuk, found in T'hillim: "Hashem oz l'amo yiten Hashem yivarech es amo bashalom."(29:11) Rashi (Z'vachim 116a) says the Torah is the Jews' source of strength - - the Mei'azon shel Yisrael. In Brachos he says that the t'fillin are the oz, or strength, of Bnei Yisrael. Perhaps the t'fillin and the Torah have a special relationship between them. In Sh'mos (13:9) it is written "V'haya l'cha l'os al yadecha u'l'zikaron bein einecha l'man tihye Toras Hashem b'ficha....." The T'fillin, which are referred to as oz, serve to remind us of the Torah which is the cause of our oz, our strength.

May we quickly see the fulfillment of the promise (Yishayahu 82) that Hashem made b'mino (Torah) u'vizroa uzo (T'fillin) that Klal Yisrael will be referred to as the holy nation redeemed by Hashem.

THE MISSING BRACHA

Although sipur y'tzias Mitzrayim constitutes one of the mitzvos of the seder, no bracha is said before magid. This is difficult to understand, since we know that all mitzvos are generally preceded by an appropriate birkas hamitzva. Why does the mitzva of sipur y'tzias Mitzrayim not receive a bracha?

A possible solution can be found in comparing y'tzias Mitzrayim to the process of geirus. When the convert abandons his old way of life and enters into a covenant with Hashem, no bracha is said before the t'vila. Similarly, the Israelites only became Am Yisrael when they left Mitzrayim behind and began their journey into the desert. Therefore, it is fitting that we recite a bracha only at the end of the magid after Bnei Yisrael had undertaken their journey. Only then was Am Yisrael "born" and the bracha of Ga'al Yisrael appropriate.

Today too, we are in a galus similar to the galus of Mitzrayim. The Talmud (Yoma 9b) says that our present galus was caused by the baseless hatred we have for each other. The fact that we have not been redeemed is a sign that we continue to sin in this fashion. This hatred can be attributed to a person's envy of his fellow man. He views his friend as an obstacle to his fulfillment and thus causes hatred within Am Yisrael.

Although the lack of a bracha preceding magid on the surface tells us about the situation of the Jews leaving Mitzrayim, we can also relate it to our own experience. We too are suffering the torment of galus, like we did in Mitzrayim long ago. This painful awakening to our lack of independence and redemption should cause us to distance ourselves from our

desires, and thus, we should be able to expunge the baseless hatred between our fellow Jews. Yet this has not occurred. We do, however, hope that history will repeat itself and that the Jews will be returned to their true state as an Am Hanivchar—a Chosen People.

May we be zoche to say the bracha of Ga'al Yisrael in the best possible way—at the time of our final g'ula; may it come speedily in our days!!!

HA LACHMA ANYA

It is quite interesting- and perplexing- that the many Halachic and Aggadic components of Sippur Y'tzias Mitzrayim in Maggid are preceded by the declaration of Ha Lachma Anya. What is the special significance of Ha Lachma Anya that warrants its precedence?

Each of the texts that we recite in the first part of Maggid relate or reflect Halachos governing the first night of Pesach, for, as the Tosefta notes, the mitzva of Sippur Y'tzias Mitzrayim consists of "V'af Ata Emor Lo K'Hilchos HaPesach," a discussion of the Halachos of Pesach. Avadim Hayinu, Ma'aseh B'Rabbi Eliezer and Amar Rabbi Elazar Ben Azarya (simply a continuation of Ma'aseh...) all reflect the Halacha that Sippur Yetzias Mitzrayim is incumbent even upon the wisest of men; Afilu Kulanu Chachamim. The passages relating to the four sons express the Halacha that Sippur must be done by each according to the extent of his comprehension; Yachol MeiRosh Chodesh establishes the time and circumstances of Sippur- B'Sha'a Sheyeish matza U'Maror Munachim L'fanecha, "at a time when matza and Maror are placed before you."

Yachol..., as well as the statement of Rabban Gamliel further on, teach us that the generators of the Mitzvah of Sippur are the Mitzvos of the night- i.e., Pesach, matza and Maror. Since only the Mitzvah of matza applies MiD'Oraysa in our time, matza is the sole Mechayev of Sippur; therefore, prior to the Sippur, it is important to establish the dual symbolism of matza- that, aside from the element of Cheirus, freedom, that was previously expressed in Kiddush, matza represents Avdus, enslavement, as well- and that ergo, both elements must be reflected in Sippur Yetzias Mitzrayim.

A TASTE OF TORAH

The Ben Ish Chai (Tzav Year 1, par. 35) writes, "After you finish the se'uda, eat the afikoman in happiness... a zecher (reminder) of the Korban Pesach which was eaten after one was already satiated.... One should eat two k zeisim (olive-sized portions): one k'zayis for the zecher of the Korban Pesach and one k'zayis for the zecher of the matza that was eaten with the Pesach." According to this, the afikoman represents the Korban Pesach. In the same light, the Rambam (Mishne Torah, Hilchos Chametz u'Matza 8:9) writes that the prohibition to eat anything following the Korban

Pesach (to ensure that its taste remains in one's mouth) applies to the afikoman as well.

Perhaps this prohibition contains a hidden message. The gematria of afikoman is 287. This equals the gematria of the phrase bahem ne'h'ge yomam valaila—"We shall engage in them [the words of the Torah] day and night." The afikoman, then, represents the Torah. Just as the "taste" of Torah must remain in our mouths constantly, so too we must not remove the taste of the afikoman after having eaten it.

The Torah teaches us, "On that day you shall relate to your son, saying 'It is because of this that Hashem did for me when I went out of Egypt.' It shall be a sign on your hand and a reminder between your eyes, so that Hashem's Torah will be in your mouth; for with a mighty hand and outstretched arm Hashem brought you out of Egypt. You must keep this Law at its designated time, year to year." (Shmos 13:8-10) In other words, Hashem brought us out of Egypt so that we would follow all the commandments of the Pesach (Rashi *ibid.*). We are commanded to place the parshiyos describing the Exodus in the T'fillin in order to be reminded of it constantly; hence the words of Torah will be in our mouths constantly (Ramban *ibid.*).

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RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

The only events in Jewish history that are powerfully remembered are those which have become part of Jewish ritual. Consider the Exodus from Egypt. It is remembered precisely because of the Seder ritual, which serves as a paradigm for the way ritual works.

During the seder, we say that in every generation there is an obligation to see oneself (lirot et atsmo) as if one is leaving Egypt. Lirot comes from the root ra-ah, to see. But ra-ah in the Torah goes well beyond ocular ability. Rather it deals with empathizing and feeling emotionally attached to that which one is thinking about.

The first step of feeling the Egypt experience leads to a second, the mandate to tell the story of the Exodus to one's children and grandchildren-vehagadeta levincha (Exodus 13:8). Here, the feeling of the evening is translated into the spoken word: to actually verbalize what occurred.

This two step process of feeling and verbalizing the Exodus event is not unique to Passover. Every morning and night we are mandated in our prayers to recall Egypt. At the Seder, however, we take those dimensions to a third level, that of re-experiencing. Concerning Passover the Torah states "zachor et hayom hazeh, remember this day in which you came out of Egypt." (Exodus 13:30). A similar formula is used relative to Shabbat, "zachor et yom ha-Shabbat lekadsho, remember the Sabbath day to sanctify it." (Exodus 20: 8)

Just as "zachor" of Shabbat means re-enacting G-d's resting on the Sabbath, so does "zachor" of Egypt mean re-enacting the Egypt experience. Hence, at the Seder, we relive those moments in the past when our mothers and fathers were slaves and were ultimately freed. We eat matzah and bitter herbs representing servitude even as we consume wine and recline, representing freedom.

These three steps, feeling, speaking and reenacting are all crucial ingredients in the way ritual observance achieves its goal-to help us remember the past.

It is during Passover when ritual abounds that one can't help but note the dearth of ritual concerning the Holocaust. The contrast is especially stark given that the Warsaw Ghetto uprising occurred during the Passover holiday. It is my belief that despite all our efforts to keep the memory of the six million alive, the Holocaust will not be remembered because, unlike the Egypt story, it has not been ritualized.

Only when our community makes a commitment to develop Shoah ritual will the Shoah be etched in Jewish memory forever. If we fail in this endeavor, the Shoah, I fear, will one day be relegated to a footnote in Jewish history. © 2003 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 ELIYAHU HOFFMAN

Olas Shabbos b'Shabbato

“What does the wicked son say? 'What is this service to you?' 'To you,' and not to him. He has excluded himself, demonstrating his heresy. You too-set his teeth on edge (ha'keh es shinav) -- and say to him, 'It is because of this that Hashem did this to me when I left Egypt.' 'To me,' and not to him; were he there, he would not have been redeemed." [Haggada Shel Pesach]

What exactly does it mean that we "set the teeth of the wicked son on edge" with our answer? (Ha'keh means to dull or blunt; it also refers to teeth being set on edge by a pungent or tart taste, such as that of unripe fruits.) Also: Why do we consider this son an apostate just because he excluded himself from the service? After all, he has not denounced Hashem. And if he is indeed wicked, why should it bother him if we tell him he would have been excluded from the redemption? Wouldn't it have been better for the wicked son to stay in Egypt, where he could enjoy a different sort of freedom— freedom from Torah and mitzvos?

R' Benzion zt"l, grandfather of the present Bobover Rebbe shlita, offers the following approach to answer these questions (Kedushas Tzion volume 2): The Egyptian exile had been foretold to Avraham at the

famous Bris Bein Ha-besarim (Covenant Between the Pieces—Bereishis/Genesis 15:13).

"And [Hashem] said to Avram: You must surely know that your offspring will sojourn in a foreign land; they will enslave them and hurt them for four-hundred years." Ultimately, the Egyptians went "above and beyond the call of duty" in their fulfillment of "they will enslave and hurt them."

"They embittered their lives with strenuous work (Shemos/Exodus 1:14)," they killed their children and broke their spirits with impossible demands. They cast their dead children into the Nile, and bathed in their blood. If it wasn't part of the decree, why did Hashem allow it to happen? Mefarshim (commentaries) explain that the original decree was for an exile of 400 years. In the end, the Jews were in Egypt for only 210 years. It was the intensity of their subjugation that facilitated their premature emancipation.

Their answer, though, requires explanation. The Gemara says (Avodah Zara 4a) that one punishes a loved one a little at a time; upon an enemy one brings to bear the full brunt of his misdeed in one fell swoop. If so, would it not have been preferable for them to stay in Egypt for the duration, thereby lessening the extent of their suffering?

Were this possible, it would indeed have been better. Hashem did not rush the redemption in order to punish them quicker; He did so because the Jews in Egypt had descended so quickly and definitively into the bowels of pagan worship that were they to have stayed any longer—even a moment—they would have traversed a spiritual point of no return. (This, says the holy Arizal, is the meaning of (Shemos 12:39), "For they were driven from Egypt, and they could not delay.") There was no choice but to hasten their redemption, with the unfortunate repercussion of increased enslavement and torture.

While the pill of increased subjugation is a bitter one to swallow, and from a material standpoint it is easier to bear a longer period of lesser torture, delaying the redemption would have put our very souls at risk of oblivion, and our forefathers willingly accepted the "tightening of the noose" in exchange for its spiritual advantages.

This is only true of the faithful Jew. The wicked soul, on the other hand, was none too happy to have his slavery increased in exchange for spiritual redemption, in which he had no interest. He thus asks: What is this work to you? -- true, our grandfather Avraham was told there would be slavery, but no one ever said anything about back-breaking work and death warrants! We would like to answer him with the truth: Indeed, things have gone beyond their original intent, but it is for our own good, so that we can make an early departure, thereby preventing us from falling into the abyss of spiritual oblivion. But alas, this answer hardly satisfies him. To you, but not to him—he would far

rather lessen the load of slavery, even at the risk of losing our ability to receive the Torah. Indeed, he would rather not receive the Torah, which will only further limit his ability to enjoy the pleasures of material life. By giving preference to an extended exile/lesser yoke rather than spiritual redemption, he demonstrates his own heresy.

The Gemara (Berachos 5a) says that affliction is only effective if one accepts it lovingly. The wicked son, by complaining about the additional suffering in exchange for less years, and refusing to accept affliction, does himself a tremendous disservice. Not only does he demonstrate his misplaced priorities; he also revokes the ability of the additional suffering to shorten his enslavement! Were he there—we tell him—he would not have been redeemed—for there would still be time left to work.

Now, according to the wicked son's own crooked logic, the Jews left Egypt before the appointed time. He does not accept the fact that the over-affliction shortened the time, for in his eyes it was not accepted willingly.

The Gemara (Sanhedrin 107a) refers to someone taking something before it's meant to be had as "eating unripe grapes." And, "One who eats unripe grapes, his teeth are set on edge (see Yirmiyahu/Jeremiah 31:29 -- ti'khena shin'av)". By claiming our forefathers left Egypt before their time had come, he claims they "ate unripe grapes." We respond in part by "setting his teeth on edge," telling him that they deserved to leave early, for they accepted Hashem's decrees with faith, trust, and love. He, on the other hand, would still be there.

It is not without substantiation that we can claim that our ancestors have suffered longer and more bitterly than our forefathers in Egypt over the past 2,000 years of exile, abuse, and persecution. Throughout, Jews have trusted, remained faithful to Hashem, and accepted their lot with love. No doubt our ultimate redemption, may it come speedily in our days, lies in their merit not far off. © 2004 Rabbi E. Hoffman and torah.org

RABBI LIPMAN PODOLSKY

Yeshivat Hakotel

One of the highlights of the Seder is the recitation of the ten plagues. Everypinky extended (or tiny spoon, in the age-honored custom of the Yekkish communities), we solemnly spill minute drops of wine at the mention of each plague. As ceremonies go, it's pretty short and to the point. And, it is fun for the children. As we grow, though, our approach to Torah ceremonies should deepen. As our intellectual capabilities mature, so should our attitude to Torah. That which we learned as children—as a necessary introduction to a very complex subject—should never remain on the level of kindergarten. It behooves us to

delve deeper every year, to ponder, to ask, and to discover.

Each plague constituted a breath-taking display of Divine intervention. The laws of physics were abrogated time and again with the stated aim to teach the world that Hashem exists, that He is personally involved with us puny mortals, and that He is omnipotent. If the plagues came to teach, ours is to learn. Merely spilling a drop of wine doesn't do the plagues the slightest justice. Each plague deserves attention, focus, and inquisitiveness. The more we seek, the more we will unveil, much to our great delight.

I find that most of the plagues relate to me in some way. Take water turning into blood. Considering that I filter all my drinking water, the picture of thick red blood flowing forth from the tap arouses in me tidal waves of nausea, to say the least. Imagining slippery, slimy, croaking frogs invading every nook and cranny, from my challah dough to my small intestines, is the stuff of nightmares. Lice, as well, is something that we here in Israel can all too often relate to. Just ask my children and their playmates in Gan!

But then we have Devver, the plague of pestilence. This plague I find hard to identify with. I don't personally own any animals (not counting my daughter's pet goldfish, Zahavi), and the closest I ever come to livestock is at my Shabbos table (where stock no longer live). So a few animals came down with a fever, nebbach. What does Devver have to do with me?

Sometimes when we doubt, Hashem sends us little reminders of Reality. Case in point: An orthodox Jew once met with some business associates at a non-kosher restaurant. Being observant, he abstained from eating. One of his partners tried to convince him to at least indulge in a glass of wine. "After all, what could be non-kosher about wine?"

Patently, the observant Jew explained how our Sages had enacted a decree prohibiting the consumption of gentile wine on the suspicion that part of the wine had been consecrated as a libation in some idolatrous worship. "Oh, come on, my friend! This is the nineties! Nobody worships idols anymore. How obsolete and 'old-fashioned' can you get?"

A few minutes later, in walks the wine-waiter. "Pardon me, but I couldn't help but overhear your conversation. I thought that you might find it interesting to know that I am a Neo-Pagan. Part of my religion is that each evening before I serve wine to the customers, I pour off a small amount for the G-ds!" So much for obsolete! By the same token, up until recently I wondered about the effectiveness of Devver. What kind of plague was it anyway? Would a senior, sophisticated society like Egypt be put off by a paltry pestilence? It probably wouldn't even make a dent in their diversified economy! Or so I thought...

And then came BSE-'Mad Cow Disease'. What began as a very local, British problem, soon became an

epidemic of global proportions. Worldwide boycotts have been placed against European beef, and many economies have been devastated.

If that weren't sufficient, up popped 'Foot and Mouth' disease. This time, the entire world seems to be affected. Millions of cattle and sheep have been slaughtered for no purpose other than as a desperate gambit to stem the spread of the epidemic. In England they are racing against the clock to bury the thousands of carcasses. Fascinating. Governments that possess the capability of destroying the world and of putting men on the moon stand helpless in the face of these relentless plagues. And there is no end in sight.

The panic that we perceive in the press is just a modicum of what transpired in Egypt. They could not import fresh (or frozen) beef. Their economy was in shambles, with no foreseeable resolution. How the farmers must have panicked. Their livelihood evaporated instantaneously. What were they to do? Now, that's a plague!

Moreover, not only did their agricultural economy collapse, but their transportation as well. The verse clearly states that the vulnerable animals included horses, donkeys and camels (Shmos 9:3). What would happen if all the buses, subways, and private cars came down with 'Tire and Carburetor Disease'? Now we're starting to get the picture!

But the greatest lesson of all was the fact that in spite of the Egyptian epidemic, not one animal of the Jewish people succumbed. A veritable island of health amidst a sea of disease! Did the Jewish veterinarians vaccinate their animals against Devver? Did they employ any special quarantine measures to protect their livestock? A miracle within a miracle! Wonder of wonders!

And so I finally found myself able to relate to Devver, and to appreciate. Such is true with every single plague, and indeed, with every wonderful phenomenon that exists in our universe. Thank you Hashem... it's time we realized that we definitely couldn't have done it without You!!

