

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

As we celebrate our exodus from Egypt over 3,000 years ago, it is interesting to note that ours was not the first biblical exodus described. Centuries earlier (401 years, to be exact), Lot experienced his exodus from Sedom. Lest you think I am just borrowing the term "exodus" inappropriately, it becomes quite apparent from the way our exodus from Egypt and Lot's exodus from Sedom are described that the Torah wants to call our attention to the similarities between the two. [The parallels in the text were brought to my attention by essays written by Rav Chanoch Waxman (www.vbm-torah.org/pesach/pes64-cw.htm) and by Rav Yoel Bin-Nun (www.vbm-torah.org/pesach/pes69-ybn.htm). Although I will not list all of the parallels they included, I will try adding some of my own.]

Lot was "taken out" of Sedom (Beraishis 19:17), with the root word for "going out" (yud-tzadi-aleph) used numerous times to describe his going out (and his attempts to convince his family to leave with him). Our exodus from Egypt is referred to as "Yitzias Mitzrayim," with the Torah using the term "take out" throughout, including at the burning bush (Shemos 3:10), when the commandment to actually take us out was given (6:6, 6:13 and 7:4) and during much of the exodus narrative (e.g. 12:51). But there's much more.

In both cases, there was protection inside their houses and extreme danger right outside their doorways. Lot was brought inside his house by the angels before they smote the people of Sedom standing right outside the door (Beraishis 19:10-11), while the Children of Israel were warned not to leave their homes ("the doorways of their homes") when the "destroyer" smites the Egyptians (Shemos 12:22-23). In both cases, a select group (the first-born and those outside the home) were "smitten" (Shemos 12: 12 and Beraishis 19:11) while those beyond that group were either destroyed (Beraishis 19:13) or in danger of being destroyed (Shemos 12:13). The men outside Lot's door were blinded (Beraishis 19:11), and the Egyptians couldn't see during the plague of darkness (Shemos 10:23). Sulfer and fire rained down on Sedom, killing all vegetation (Beraishis 19:24-25), while hail with fire rained down on the Egyptians (Shemos 9:23), "smiting all the vegetation and all the trees in the fields" (9:25). Lot "tarried" (Beraishis 19:16), while the Children of

Israel were "unable to tarry" (Shemos 12:39), implying that they otherwise would have. Lot had to be grabbed by the angels and forced to leave (chuf-zayin-kuf, Beraishis 19:16), while the Children of Israel were forced to leave by the Egyptians (chuf-zayin-kuf, Shemos 12:33). Lot lost most of his family in Sedom because they refused to leave or hesitated at doing so (of the eight members of his family, only he and his two single daughters survived; his wife, his married daughters and his sons-in law all died), while the majority of the Israelites died during the plague of darkness (see Rashi on Shemos 13:18) because they didn't really want to leave Egypt (see Rosh at the end of his comments on Rashi on Shemos 10:10). Lot didn't want to move too far from Sedom (Beraishis 19:19-20), and the Children of Israel (or at least some of them) yearned for Egypt whenever there was any distress (such as by the Yam Suf, when they were hungry and when they feared going to war). After their exodus, Lot's children (Amon and Moav) inherited land in Avraham's merit, as did the Children of Israel, they conquered the land from some of the ten nations whose land was promised to Avraham, as did the Children of Israel, and they had to drive out giants ("Refa'im") to conquer it (see Devarim 2 19-20), as did the Children of Israel.

These textual and conceptual parallels are not accidental, and it isn't just modern day scholars that point them out. The Torah tells (Beraishis 19:3) that Lot made matzos for his visitors, with Rashi telling us that this occurred on Pesach. (It was the second night of Pesach, as the angels had visited Avraham on the first day of Pesach.) Why was it so important for the Torah (and Rashi, and the Midrash Seichel Tov he is likely based on) to bring this to our attention? What is the significance of Lot also having experienced an exodus? If we compare what happened after the exodus, perhaps we can understand why the Torah wants us to take notice of the fact that Lot also had an exodus.

We tell over our exodus story every year, and relive the experience. Lot was miraculously saved from the destruction of Sedom; did he make sure his children, his descendants, remembered the story of their exodus? Did they tell their children how they would have been destroyed, that they would not be alive to share their story, had it not been for the merit of Avraham? If they did, they must have noticed the parallels to our exodus story, and should have felt a kinship because of our shared lineage and shared experiences, as well as feeling appreciation to their

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great uncle (and his descendants) for their very existence. Yet, when the Children of Israel came out of Egypt, they didn't offer any help or provisions, didn't allow them to pass through their land to the Land of Canaan, and hired Bilam to curse them. If they didn't pass their exodus story down through the generations, why not? Shouldn't they recount how they were saved from destruction (and why)? Either way, by drawing our attention to the fact that Lot had his own exodus story, its not leaving an impression on him (or them) should leave an impression on us (as well as helping us understand why they are not allowed to join us even if they want to convert).

I think the lesson goes beyond that, though. Having an exodus story isn't enough. It's what you do afterwards that really matters. Lot procreated with his two daughters, and the only thing we really hear from them afterwards (aside from the story of Rus) is the troubles that they caused us. (Rus may have contrasted how we handled our post-exodus with how they handled theirs during her conversion process.) Did Lot grow from his experience? Did the nations that he fathered gain from having been saved through divine intervention? By pointing out that having an exodus narrative is only the beginning, the Torah is teaching us that the important thing is what we do after it. After leaving Egypt, we moved on to receive the Torah and build the Mishkan, bringing G-d into our lives. In order to make the retelling of our exodus story a success, we have to relive that part as well.

A "Twitter friend" of mine (YC) suggests that this adds another dimension to G-d's telling Avraham what He was about to do to Sedom before He did it (Beraishis 18:17-19). Since Avraham was going to teach his children (and the nation he founded that would become the Chosen People) to go in the "Derech Hashem" (path of G-d) and "do righteousness and justice," G-d wanted to alert Avraham to the lessons that should be learned from "Yetzias Sedom," helping us make the most of "Yetzias Mitzrayim." © 2010 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI KALMAN PACKOUZ

Shabbat Shalom Weekly

In the story of the Exodus of Egypt, the Almighty commands Moshe to request a 3 day retreat to the

desert for the Jewish people, though the intent was to leave Egypt permanently. The Almighty is not a trickster nor a liar. Why was it done in this manner?

The Vilna Gaon comments that there are two other times where the Almighty used deception-in Jacob's dealings with his father-in-law, Lavan and during the Purim story. Jacob used deception to have the flocks produce offspring that would have the coloring that according to his agreement with Lavan, would belong to Jacob. In the Purim story, the Midrash tell us that the Almighty sent angels dressed as servants to malign Haman so that Achashverosh would not cool off from his anger at Haman for wanting to kill Esther and her people.

The Almighty is always sending us messages for us to recognize our mistakes and be able to correct them. With regards to Pharaoh, Lavan and Haman-each one used deception. Pharaoh enslaved the Jews by having a "National Work Day" where the Jews volunteered their labor-and then he kept them as slaves. Lavan substituted Leah for Rachel, thus deceiving Jacob. Haman deceived Achashverosh about the people he wished to exterminate. Thus, the Almighty returned measure for measure so that each could learn his lesson. © 2010 Rabbi K. Packouz and torah.org

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

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 Haggadah, "eizehu hakham? Halomed miko! Adam. Who is wise? One who learns from each person." (Pirkei Avot 4:1)

Another approach to the four children: Perhaps they are not four separate individuals? After all, no one is completely wise, totally rebellious, perfectly simple, nor absolutely unable to ask. Rather, the four children are really one individual in whom there are each of these elements: wisdom, rebelliousness, simplicity and silence.

The message: as we sit opposite each other at the Seder, we ought to recognize that everyone has strengths, represented for example by the hakham (the wise child), and weaknesses, represented, for example by the rasha (the rebellious child). The challenge is not to allow the weaknesses we know to exist within ourselves to destroy our self image. For that matter, neither ought we allow the weaknesses we see in others to destroy our relationship with them. As opposed to our first hidden message that teaches integration, this approach teaches us that there are times when weaknesses should be set aside in order to continue on.

A final thought: Perhaps the most important child is none of the four, but the fifth, the one who is not mentioned, the one who is not even at the Seder table. It was Rabbi Eliezer Berkovits who once quipped: "Who is a Jew? One whose grandchildren are Jewish." The sad reality is that for most Jews their grandchildren are not Jewish or will not be.

The message at the Seder is to reach out to that fifth child. Maybe that's why we open the door for Eliyahu HaNavi (Elijah the Prophet). It's Eliyahu, according to the Prophets, who returns the hearts of children to their parents. (Malakhi 3:23?24)

As we reach out for the missing child, we ought recall the words of Rav Shlomo Carlebach, of blessed memory: "Do you know the way you walk back from the Holy Wall? You don't turn around and walk away. When you meet the Czar of Russia, you don't turn around and walk away, you walk backwards. And I want to bless you, when your children grow up and they walk out of your house, and they build their own houses, sad enough, a lot of children turn around and they don't build a Jewish house any more. I want to bless you your children should walk away backwards." © 2010 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 BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

What new idea can still be written about Pesach? Over the thousands of years of Pesach one would think that the topic has been pretty well exhausted by now. But it is always current events that provide the framework in thinking about Pesach and its significance.

The Jewish people and especially the Jewish state are currently beleaguered, isolated and under dire

threats of ultimate extinction, G-d forbid. In such a climate when proclaimed friends are really something else entirely, and proclaimed enemies apparently mean what they so brazenly say about our destruction, Pesach allows a look back into other troubled times and timely deliverances.

The Rabbis taught us that the Pharaoh of Egypt had three advisors on the Jewish question and problem. They were Yitro, Bilaam and Iyov. Each of them had a different view of the matter. Yitro advised caution and restraint in dealing with the Jews. He was opposed to coercing them into servitude. Pharaoh was greatly displeased by this counsel and Yitro had to flee into Midian to save himself from Pharaoh's wrath.

But Yitro eventually achieved immortality in the Torah and became the father-in-law of Moshe. His courageous and ethical stance on behalf of the Jews paid great dividends in later times. We could use a few counselors and leaders in the world today that would represent the courage and worldview of Yitro in dealing with the Jewish people and state today.

But pious "humanitarian" bias and ingrained stubbornness in not admitting past policy failures rule the halls of power in most of the world's governments as far as Jews and Israel are concerned. The Yitros are always few and far between and usually have to flee from the powers that be.

Bilaam openly told Pharaoh to enslave and destroy the Jews. He openly advocated a "final solution" to the Jewish problem plaguing the then-known world. Of course Bilaam would have nice complimentary words later to say about the Jewish people. But Bilaam is the speaking in theory, in platitudes of praise but not about real live people who he intends to curse and destroy.

Bilaam receives a large fee for his efforts from the Pharaoh. He is the classic gun for hire in the biblical era. For unknown reasons he somehow has come to hate the Jews and this hatred clouds his judgment and even works against his own self interest. The great seer that he claims to be cannot envision the tragic consequences of suffering and pain that his advice will bring to thousands of innocents.

He also does not realize the loathing of centuries that his name will now inspire in the eternal people. And he certainly cannot forecast that he himself will be killed by the very people that he came to enslave, curse and destroy. But the bitter lesson of history is that those who rise against the Jews eventually are themselves destroyed, humbled and punished in a manner that no one can predict.

It is clear that there are many Bilaams around today. Pesach in essence reminds us of their ultimate fate. Jewish history records carefully and eternally who are Yitros and who are Bilaams.

The third counselor Iyov is well meaning, truly pious and generous - but hopelessly naïve and passive. He takes a neutral even-handed position. He is silent about the entire matter. But there are many times in life

when silence is tantamount to complicity. Lyov is punished with suffering. I think that Lyov's suffering is not only the physical pain and the family tragedies that he is forced to endure but it is the deep suffering of his own inner conscience for having been silent when he realized that morally he should have taken a stand and spoken up.

American Jewry, amongst others, still feels the suffering and pangs of conscience regarding its inaction and silence during the years of the Holocaust. The fact that it may not truly have made any difference then is beside the point. I would think that most of the Western world is in the position of Lyov regarding the Jews and Israel today - silent, passive and unwilling to speak up for what their conscience tells them is right and moral.

Our Pesach celebration stands as a wakeup call to us and to them as well. History's conscience will not allow these responses to be forgotten and ignored. There are always consequences to one's actions or inaction. At the Seder, all past history is reviewed and judged once more. This is one of the great benefits of this glorious holiday of our freedom and survival. © 2010 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 SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

On Seder night, we are commanded to tell the story of the Exodus from Egypt. The Mishna tells us that the retelling should be done in response to questions posed by the children. If they have no questions, we teach them the four questions, which form the "Ma Nishtana." Today, at every seder table the questions are asked and the answers discussed. But there is one question which has always disturbed me: "On all other nights we do not dip even once and on this night of Passover we dip twice." This particular question is never answered within the Maggid portion of the seder. The fact that we do have "dips" as a kind of 'forshpeis' to our seder meal is certainly in keeping with the Passover feast, but why our specific dips of karpas (green vegetable) in haroset; (haroset was used by the Rambam, Yemenite community and many other communities as well) and then the Bitter Herbs in haroset?

Another question. We all enjoy a spirited singing of "Dayenu," the quintessential thanksgiving to G-d for every step through which He guided us on the road to redemption. "Had He taken us out of Egypt and not wrought so many judgments against the Egyptians, it would have been sufficient - dayenu ... had He given us their money but had He not split the sea for us, it would have been sufficient - dayenu." However there is one line in this song of praise which has always troubled me: "Had He brought us in front of Mount Sinai and not

given us the Torah, it would have been sufficient - dayenu." In what sense would it have been enough? What value could there have been for G-d to have taken us close to the mountain without revealing to us His laws?!

The fact is that the entire drama of the servitude and exodus from Egypt began with an act of 'dipping' and concluded with an act of 'dipping'. The Israelites initially made their way down to Egypt as a result of the fact that Joseph the son of Jacob, was sold into Egyptian servitude by his brothers. Since the brothers had to explain in some way Joseph's mysterious disappearance, they dipped his special coat of striped colors which his father had given him (the very word "karpas" is used in the Scroll of Esther 1:6 to describe such a fancy cloth and is probably the initial derivation of the Biblical Hebrew passim) in the blood of a slain goat. When Jacob saw the bloodied garment of his beloved son, he assumed that Joseph's body had been torn apart by a wild beast. Our Sages teach us that it was the sin of the brotherly strife and hatred which was responsible for the enslavement of the Israelites in Egypt (B.T. Shabbat 10a). Hence, some Jews have the tradition of dipping the karpas not only in salt-water symbolizing the tears that the Jewish people shed but also in the red haroset, which according to the Jerusalem Talmud symbolizes blood, expresses the tragedy of Jewish internal hatred - the root cause of our exiles and persecutions.

The second dipping took place at the end of the Egyptian enslavement, and the beginning of the Hebrew emancipation. At this time, each Hebrew family slaughtered a lamb in preparation for their exodus; "You will then take a bunch of hyssop and dip it into the blood (of the lamb) which will be placed in a basin. Place some blood on the beam over the door and the two doorposts after you have dipped your finger in some of the blood in the basin. Not a single Israelite may go out of the door of his house until morning." (Exodus 12:22) The blood of the lamb represented the willingness of the Israelites to sacrifice an Egyptian god (for such was the lamb) to their higher belief in the Lord of redemption and freedom. They performed this Pascal sacrifice during the time of the killing of the first born of the Egyptians - a plague from which the Hebrews were saved by the blood that was on their doorposts. The Israelites were all united in their commitment to the Almighty and fulfillment of this command, including their all remaining in their homes despite the fact that the Egyptian streets were ripe for looting in the frenzied hysteria which most certainly accompanied the death of the Egyptian first born. The second act of dipping served as a tikkun or repair of the first; the sin of brotherly strife found its repentance in the form of brotherly unity, by which merit we were redeemed from Egypt. This explains both dippings at the seder and intensifies the fact that if only we as a nation could be

united together, no force on earth would be able to harm us.

When the Bible describes the momentous Revelation at Sinai, we are told, "They had departed from Rephidim and had arrived at the Sinai desert, where they (the Israelites, in the plural) encamped in the desert; and Israel encamped there (in the singular) opposite the mountain" (Exodus 19:2). The change from plural to singular within one phrase is quite remarkable. The classical commentator Rashi comments, "As if they were all one individual with one heart". It was their very unity of purpose and commitment - their togetherness as a nation which enabled them to merit the Revelation. This I believe is the meaning of the "Dayenu" song: Had the Almighty merely brought us in front of Mount Sinai with singleness of goal and united in spirit, even before He gave us the Torah, that unity would have been sufficient! © 2010 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

JEWISH WORLD REVIEW

Abstract Ancestors

by Rabbi Yosef Reinman

<http://www.JewishWorldReview.com>

It always helps to know what you're saying, especially if you want to get into the spirit of things. Most American Jews who attend a Passover Seder these days say the Haggadah in English, which makes sense if your Hebrew is rather limited. In ancient times, the common language, the lingua franca, in Israel and the surrounding countries was Aramaic. Nonetheless, the Haggadah was said in Hebrew, because most Jewish people understood it reasonably well even though they didn't speak it at home or on the street. And yet, the very first paragraph of the Haggadah, the preamble to the Seder, was said in Aramaic. Apparently, it was important that people understand it perfectly. So let's take a close look at it. What is so critical about it?

According to the ancient tradition, we hold up a piece of broken matzah, and we say, "This is the poor bread our ancestors ate in Egypt. All that are hungry may come and eat. All that are needy may step inside (veyifsach, Rashi, Ex. 12:11). Now we're slaves, next year we'll be free. Now we're here. Next year we'll be in the land of Israel."

What's going on here? Are we really issuing an invitation to the hungry and the indigent to come sit at our Seder table? Does it make sense to invite them after we've locked the door, turned the deadbolt and put the chain on for extra security? This doesn't seem like a very sincere invitation.

Let us imagine for a moment that a hundred years from now a Jewish father is telling his young children about the Holocaust. "It's important for you to know, kids," he says, "that about two hundred years ago the Nazis tried to exterminate our people. Six million of our people were murdered. Your great-great-

grandfather, seven generations ago, who was living in Poland, was deported to a concentration camp, and he almost died. But he survived and rebuilt his life, and that is why we are here today."

The children stare at their father with appropriately grave and respectful looks but not exactly engaged. And then the father remembers something. "Wait a minute, kids," he says. "Stay right here. I'll be right back."

He climbs up to the attic and returns a few minutes later with an old box. He brushes the dust off the box. The children lean forward, intrigued. He opens the box and pulls out a coarse striped garment, stiff and stained, discolored with age, worn through in many places. A yellow star is sewn onto the front.

"Look, kids," he says. "This is the actual garment your grandfather wore in the concentration camp. See these bloodstains, these sweat stains? They are the blood and sweat of our ancestor."

The children reverently touch the fabric. "What does this yellow star mean?" one of them asks.

"What happened to him?" asks another. "He must have cried a lot."

The abstract ancestor has become real to them, and they suddenly care about what happened to him.

On the night of Passover, as we gather around the Seder table with our families and our guests, we remind ourselves of the enormous tragedy that befell our people in the land of Egypt. At first, we were welcomed with honor and respect, but as the years passed and the first generations died out, the Egyptians turned against us, and little by little they withdrew our rights and privileges until we were trapped in a bondage that lasted numerous years. It was a terrible time for our ancestors, a time of hunger and hardship, a time of persecution, abuse and abject terror. And then G-d forced the Egyptians to set them free, and they went forth to their destiny as a great and independence nation that would enrich the world with its genius and passion.

It is a wonderful story, but is that all it is? A story about some abstract ancestors that lived thousands of years ago? Or is it a story about our grandparents, our flesh and blood, whose seed we carry in our genes? And if so, how do we make them real in our minds and in the minds of the children whose eager faces look to us for inspiration? How do we give them substance so that we can care about them and share in their suffering and their joy?

Unfortunately, we do not have the ragged garments they wore when they labored under the whips of the Egyptian taskmasters. We do not have traces of their blood, sweat and tears. But we do have an ancient artifact that connects us directly with them in a concrete manner. We have a replica of the distinctive food they ate when they rested from their labors. We have the

matzah. And we have a description of the kind of people they were.

So we hold up the broken piece of dry matzah, the food that they ate during those long years of subjugation, and we declare, "This is the poor bread our ancestors ate in Egypt." And the rest of the preamble is a quote of what they used to say, in the style of the ancient Hebrew writers who did not use identifiers and quotation marks. Even though our ancestors were tired and hungry, even though they had only a meager piece of matzah to keep body and soul together, they cared for each other. "All who are hungry, come share my bread," they called out to their friends and neighbors. "Don't despair. We will get through this. We may be slaves now, but next year we'll be free."

That is why the ancient Jews said the preamble in the language they spoke. It is not so critical that we understand every jot and tittle of the Haggadah. But it is critical that we understand who our ancestors were. It is critical that they come to life in our imaginations and the imaginations of the children. These people were our living, breathing grandparents. They suffered hunger and privation yet remained kind and generous and supportive of each other. Ever hopeful, their spirits yearned for freedom in the darkest hours of their captivity. These were our gallant ancestors. And this is what happened to them.

Now let us begin the Seder. © 2010 Rabbi Y. Reinman & Jewish World Review

RABBI DOVID GREEN

Dvar Torah

On the first nights of Pesach we have a commandment to retell the story of our exodus from Egypt. The Hagada is made in a special order to facilitate all the observances of the night. One thing which becomes clear from the outset is that we praise and thank G-d many times during the seder. It is an underlying theme throughout the seder to show our thanks to G-d for freeing us from the bondage of Egypt. Thankfulness is one of the goals of observing the seder.

The book Duties of the Heart (Rabbi Bachya Ibn Pekuda) discusses at length all of the wonderful things which G-d bestows to the human race. He follows that chapter with the discussion of serving G-d. His reasoning for juxtaposing those two chapters is that when someone contemplates the good which he receives, it behooves him to react with recognition and appreciation to the giver. When we realize the extent of what we receive from G-d in its full depth, logic dictates that we serve Him.

The term "bread of shame" is used in the Talmud, and has become a well known term. As we know it is used to depict the feeling one has when receiving something he has not earned. A healthy person wishes to return in some measure the favor he

has received. It is human nature. This is why G-d created good and evil in the world, and gave us the opportunity to choose between the two—so we could earn the good which we receive in this world and the next. Interestingly, we can conclude that G-d puts up with all of the things in this world which occur against His will, just so we can work at doing right, and not receive bread of shame.

A student of Torah approaches the Pesach seder with this attitude. We recount the story of our exodus from Egypt and our birth as a nation of servants of G-d. We internalize the teachings of the seder, and we come to a greater clarity and commitment to show G-d our recognition and appreciation in a tangible, ongoing fashion. © 1997 Rabbi D.Green and torah.org

RABBI KALMAN KAMINER

Song of Strength

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 Beitzta 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 Chochma essentially prove that Oz is either t'fillin or Torah through the same pasuk, found in T'hilim: "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 tihiye 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.

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RABBI ELIYAHU HOFFMANN

Olas Shabbos beShabbato

“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. Hoffmann and torah.org



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