

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

The Missing Fifth

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

There are four fours:

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

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

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

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

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

(Deut. 26:5-8)

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

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

and Jerusalem Talmuds the discussion revolves around the assumption that there are four cups on seder night. How then are we to understand the statement of Rabbi Tarfon that there is a fifth cup?

Among the commentators three views emerged. The first was that of Rashi and the Tosafists. According to them, there are only four cups on the seder night, and it is forbidden to drink a fifth. The statement of Rabbi Tarfon must therefore be a misprint, and the texts of the Talmud should be amended accordingly.

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

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

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

When a disagreement occurs in the Talmud which is not resolved, the sages often used the word *Teyku*, 'Let it stand'. We believe that such disagreements will be resolved in the time to come when Elijah arrives to announce the coming of the Messiah. One of his roles will be to rule on unresolved halakhic controversies. An allusion to this is to be found in the word *Teyku* itself, which was read as an



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abbreviation of Tishbi Yetaretz Kushyot Ve'ibbayot, 'The Tishbite, Elijah, will answer questions and difficulties.' This therefore is the history behind 'the cup of Elijah' – the cup we fill after the meal but do not drink. It represents the 'fifth cup' mentioned in the Talmud.

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

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

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

slaves, next year free; this year here, next year in the land of Israel'?

The fifth cup – poured but not drunk – was like the cup broken at Jewish weddings. It was a symbol of incompleteness. It meant that as long as Jews were dispersed throughout the world, facing persecution and danger, they could not yet celebrate to the full. One great sage of the twentieth century, the late Rabbi Menahem Kasher, argued that now that there is a State of Israel, many exiles have been ingathered and Jews have recovered their sovereignty and land, the fifth cup should be re-instated. That remains for the halakhic authorities to decide.

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

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

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

So the beneath the surface of the Haggadah we find, not four fours, but five fives. In each case there is a missing fifth – a cup, an expression of deliverance, a verse, a question and a child. Each points to something incomplete in our present situation. In the half-century since the Holocaust the Jewish people has emerged from darkness to light. The State of Israel has come into being. The Hebrew language has been

reborn. Jews have been brought to safety from the countries where they faced persecution. In the liberal democracies of the West Jews have gained freedom, and even prominence and affluence.

But Israel is not yet at peace. In the Diaspora assimilation continues apace. Many Jews are estranged from their people and their faith. Something is missing from our celebration – the fifth cup, the fifth deliverance, the fifth verse, the fifth question and the fifth child. That is a measure of what is still to be achieved. We have not yet reached our destination. The missing fifths remind us of work still to be done, a journey not yet complete. ©2015 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

The Festival of Passover is called by our sages “the time of our freedom” the celebration of our exodus from Egypt. It is also Biblically known as the “Festival of Matzot”, the Holiday of Unleavened Bread.

The flat, rather tasteless dough that was never given a chance to ferment and rise, was the bread of affliction which our ancestors ate in Egypt. After a long day of servitude, they prepared the simplest fare possible and this was the same “bread” that our ancestors hurriedly prepared for their journey to freedom. Is it not strange that our liberty from enslavement by a mighty, totalitarian regime is symbolized by a half-baked pumpernickel flour and water interrupted from rising in its earliest stage of development?!

The Bible teaches that “You shall count for yourselves—from the morrow of the Festival day, from the day when you bring the Omer of the waving—seven weeks, they shall be complete... you shall offer a new meal offering baked leavened loaves of bread” (Lev. 23: 15-17) to celebrate the Festival of the First Fruits, the Festival of Weeks.

Why, after all manner of leavening has been forbidden during Passover, do we celebrate this connected holiday (through the counting of each day from the second day of Passover continuing for a full seven weeks) with an offering of leavened, risen loaves of bread? And why is this culminating festival called “Weeks” (Shavuot), which connotes a period of counting rather than an achievement worthy of a significant holiday?

One final question; on Passover we read the magnificent Song of Songs, the love song between Shlomo and Shulamit, the shepherd and the shepherdess, G-d and Historic Israel. But this is not a poem of the lover seeking his beloved, a passionate chase culminating in conquest of the prize. It is rather a search, a hide-and-seek quest for love and unity which is constantly elusive. At the moment that the beloved finally opens the door, the lover has slipped

away and gone. The very final verse cries out, “Flee, my beloved, and appear to be like a gazelle or a young hart as you upon the mountains of spices.”

The answer to all three of our questions lies in the distinction between the Western mentality and the Jewish mind-set. Western culture measures everything by the bottom line, the result of the game: “did you win or did you lose?!” The ancient world, and especially Jewish teaching, is more interested in the method, the search for meaning, how you played the game. Indeed, the Chinese religion is called Tao, the Way, the Indian one is called Dharma, the Path, and Judaism speaks of halakha, walking or progressing on the road.

Hence Passover is only the beginning of the process, the road to redemption, which takes us out of Egyptian enslavement, but only brings us as far as the arid desert. We count seven weeks paralleling the seven sabbatical years leading up to the Jubilee; but the actual Festival itself—replete with the vision of Israel rooted on her land, bringing first fruits to the Holy Temple, welcoming even the Moabite Ruth into the Jewish fold as the ultimate achievement of universal redemption—is called the Festival of Weeks after the process which will get us there, overseeing the development from half-baked dough to the fully risen loaves of bread. During the last five thousand years, the end-game, the actual redemption, has eluded us—but that is hardly the real point. It is the weeks of preparation, the arduous expectation and the paving of the way, which makes the Festival of Weeks the significant piece.

That is the true meaning behind Song of Songs. Love is not the act of conquest, the achievement of unity; it is the search for unity, and the closeness between the two which it engenders, not the obliteration of the one into the other which absolute unity suggests.

And so the truest commandment is not to effectuate the Messianic Age, but rather that we await its arrival and prepare the road for its coming. This preparation for the Messiah was the most important aspect of the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, ztz”l. He taught the necessity of preparing ourselves for the coming of the Messiah rather than the identification of who it may be. The State of Israel is not Redemption Realized, not even to the most ardent religious Zionist; it is merely the “beginning of the sprouting of the redemption,” a work-in-progress which will hopefully pave the way towards our worthiness to be redeemed.

Talmid Hakham, the Hebrew phrase for a Talmudic Scholar, does not mean “wise individual,” rather it means a student of the wise, a good Jew who aspires to the goal of wisdom. The greater a person’s wisdom, the greater is their understanding that they have not yet achieved complete wisdom. What counts is their aspiration, as the achievement is beyond the grasp of mortal humans.

Hence, especially during the Passover Seder, the questions are more important than the answers; indeed, the author of the haggadah “types” the four children by the quality—and music—of their questions. “When the one Great Scorer will place a grade next to your name, He will mark not whether you won or lost, but how you played the game.” ©2016 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

Aside from the actual lessons and topics regarding freedom from bondage and the emergence of the national identity of the Jewish people, Pesach conveys to us the wonders of the natural seasons of the year here in Israel. The great Song of Songs of King Solomon occupies a place of honor in the synagogue service of the holiday and recorded in that most holy work are recorded colorful descriptions of the beauty and variety of nature here in the Holy Land.

Pesach always falls in the spring months here in Israel, a natural symbol for the constant rebirth and vitality of our ancient and ever young nation. For many centuries a significant portion of the Jewish people - especially in Eastern and Central Europe - lived in climates and under weather conditions that were uncomfortable and even brutal. Frigid winters of snow and ice were followed by impassable mud and then dusty and hot summers. Even nature in Eastern Europe was not necessarily kind to the millions of Jews who lived there.

In the United States, winter in the Midwest or the Northeast is usually quite cold and snowy, so spring is always a welcome arrival. But here in Israel it takes on a special meaning, more than just a change in weather. The season's beauty is highlighted by the reappearance of the flowers and the blossoming of the fruit trees. Jews search for blossoms in order to recite the “blessing on the trees” in this month when Pesach arrives. Nature's revival sparks a renewal within us as well. And that is a key ingredient in our Pesach celebration and commemoration,

Unfortunately in our super-technologically oriented society many are too busy texting to notice the natural beauty that surrounds us now. In general, our educational systems and life styles do not emphasize the wonders of nature. The Torah and the Talmud are both very nature oriented. The prevalent custom here in Israel to take nature hikes is a manifestation of our attempt to reintroduce a knowledge and appreciation of the natural surroundings into our lives.

There are entire sections and tractates of Mishna that are simply not understandable even to scholarly students of the Oral Law because of our ignorance of the botany and topography of Israel. My father told me that there were certain fruits that he never tasted or even saw until he came to study here in

Israel in the middle 1920's. Except for the ritually required citron, citrus fruit was practically an unknown commodity in his native Lithuania. In extolling the virtues of the Land of Israel, the Torah dwells constantly on its natural beauty and abundant food variety and sustenance.

The holiday of Pesach subtly carries with it this message of the wonders of nature, especially as they relate to the Land of Israel. So, wherever we find ourselves on this glorious holiday that falls in this month of such verdant natural beauty, we should pause to admire the world of beauty that G-d has placed us in. It will be a delight for the eyes and a blessing for the soul. ©2016 *Rabbi Berel Wein - Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com*

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

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

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

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

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

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

not

A final idea comes to mind. The Psalmist writes, it is not enough to “leave evil,” it is crucial to take it to the next step and “do good.” (Psalms 34:15) Hence, the text chosen to be analyzed on the Seder night deals with Israel to teach that leaving slavery only has meaning if it is followed by entry into the Jewish land. Interwoven into the message of the Passover holiday is the centrality of Israel. ©2016 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 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, truly free. Pesach teaches us that "freedom" used just for the sake of being "free" is "dumb", and that it's only worth something when we use that freedom to do something good, and be constructive with our lives. ©2016 Rabbi S. Ressler and LeLamed, Inc.

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

"**[T**hen] expound from 'an Aramenian destroyed my father' until the entire section is finished." The Mishnah in P'seachim (116a) tells us that, at the Seder, relating the story of our exodus from Egypt should be based on the way it is stated by a farmer bringing his first fruits ("Bikurim") to the Temple (D'varim 26:5-8). One of the questions

discussed regarding the structure of the Haggadah (and suggested to me by Rabbi Yaakov Rabinowitz, sh'lita, when I asked him what question(s) he may have on the Haggadah) is why the Haggadah uses the verses said when Bikurim are brought, rather than using the actual narrative of the Torah (in Sh'mos). This topic is covered in the "Otzer M'forshay HaHaggadah," as well as in the explanations in the back of "The Mesivta" on Pesachim; what follows does not necessarily mirror the approaches quoted there, although there is some overlap.

My first thought was that we are commanded "v'higad'ta l'vin'cha" (Sh'mos 13:8), and the statement made by the farmer also starts with him saying "higad'ti hayom" (D'varim 26:3), so when our sages, of blessed memory, put together the text used as a starting point to "tell over" (be "magid") the story, i.e. the "Haggadah," they chose a relevant text that is also described as a "haggadah." (Rabbi Dovid Cohen, sh'lita, in "Haggadas Simchas Yaavitz," makes a similar suggestion; baruch she'kivanti.) Along the same lines, the Or Samayach (on Rambam's Hilchos Chametz/Matzoh 7:4) suggests that since the Talmud (Pesachim 36a) says that matzoh is referred to as "lechem **oni**" (D'varim 16:3) because we speak out ("onin") many things (regarding the exodus) over it, and the instructions for the farmer to continue his "haggadah" (26:5) are "v'anisa v'amarta" (and you shall speak out and say), these are the verses chosen to be "spoken out" over the matzoh. Nevertheless, unless it was determined that these verses are the optimum way of "telling" and "speaking out" how G-d took us out of Egypt, the text of the Haggadah would not have been compromised just to accommodate cute wordplay.

Shibolay Haleket (218) says that the story of our exodus begins with Yaakov being saved from Lavan because his exile in Aram was also part of the decree made, and relayed, to Avraham regarding his descendants being "strangers in a land that is not theirs" (B'reishis 15:13), and G-d saving him was also part of the promise made to Avraham. Others (e.g. Vilna Gaon) take it a step further, showing how Yaakov's exile in Aram and his being saved from Lavan parallels the exile in Egypt and exodus from it. Yaakov left Aram with many possessions (B'reishis 30:43, 31:1, 31:18), as did the Children of Israel (Sh'mos 12:36, 12:38), fulfilling "and after that they will leave with [a] great [amount of] possessions" (B'reishis 15:14). Lavan had significant monetary loss through Yaakov's sticks (B'reishis 30:37-43), and the Egyptians were smitten via Moshe's staff (Sh'mos 4:20, etc.). Yaakov ran away from Lavan (B'reishis 31:20-22), and the Children of Israel were perceived to have run away from Egypt (Sh'mos 14:5). Lavan caught up to Yaakov on the seventh day (B'reishis 31:23), and the Egyptians caught up with the Children of Israel on the seventh day (see Rashi on Sh'mos 14:5). [According to some, the

night that G-d appeared to Lavan and warned him not to harm Yaakov, which is how/when Yaakov was saved, occurred on the night of Pesach.] It has even been suggested that when Yaakov wanted to "live in peace" after returning from Aram (see B'reishis Rabbah 84:3), he thought (or was hoping) that his stay in Aram and successful departure qualified as having fulfilled the mandated exile (see Torah Sh'laima, B'reishis 37:1). Since Yaakov's experiences in Aram and his "exodus" from there were also part of the fulfillment of the decree/promise, we use the verses from Bikurim, which reference this aspect as well.

Piskay Rid (P'sachim 116a) mentions how our retelling the story of our exodus must be done in a manner that praises G-d and thanks Him (see also Abarbanel's "Zevach Pesach"); the verses read when bringing Bikurim are more conducive to being stated in this manner than reading the narrative from when it unfolded. Some compare the matzoh on our table to Bikurim, making reading these verses appropriate. Rav Yitzchok Hutner, z"l, is quoted as having compared Bikurim -- the first fruits -- to the b'chorah -- the firstborn, which played a major role in the Passover story, as evidenced by the tenth plague (etc.). Rabbi Yaakov Glasser, sh'lita, in his Shabbos HaGadol d'rasha at the Young Israel of Passaic/Clifton last week, suggested that the reason we use the verses from Bikurim is because the farmer is not just retelling our history, but is moving it forward by acknowledging that his produce comes from G-d, and contributing towards fulfilling our ultimate destiny. Similarly, our Seder is not supposed to be just a retelling of our history, nor just a reliving of our history, but an opportunity to become a part of our continuing history and move it closer to our ultimate redemption.

Our retelling of the exodus story does not end with the Haggadah, or at least it's not supposed to. Rather, the Haggadah is meant to be just the starting point; "the more one speaks about our exodus from Egypt, the more praiseworthy it is." Its text is designed to spur further conversation and discovery, not limit it. When our sages standardized this text, they didn't choose the verses from Bikurim to be the way the story was told; these verses were part of a larger "d'rasha" that also included the verses from the narrative in Sh'mos. It was this entire "d'rasha," including the verses which are alluded to in the Bikurim verses, that was chosen, not just the Bikurim verses after which a subsequent exposition was done. Whether the exact same "d'rasha" from the Sifre (or another Midrashic source) was "copied and pasted" into the text of the Haggadah, or there was an already existing "d'rasha" that was incorporated into the Haggadah and, independently, into other Midrashic literature, it was the "d'rasha" in its entirety that was chosen, not just the verses that were expounded upon.

This "d'rasha" not only stands on its own as a valid way to tell over the exodus story, but it provides an example of how to further expound on existing verses to increase the story-telling. And even though we should try to expand things even further than that, when it came to choosing a text as a starting point, a "d'rasha" that incorporates the narrative verses from Sh'mos when expounding upon the verses said when Bikurim are brought was a terrific choice. ©2016 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI KALMAN PACKOUZ

Shabbat Shalom Weekly

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

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

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

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

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

Self-awareness means that we are able to stand outside of ourselves; to look within and assess our goals, values, priorities, direction and truthfulness. Unaware of these things, we remain mired in a dense fog of confusion and doubt. Can we ever be fully self-aware? Probably not. But aware enough to set ourselves free? Yes, and this is one of life's most pivotal challenges.

Achievement and maintenance of freedom is

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

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 Sloane 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 LABEL LAM

Dvar Torah

"Why is this night different than all other nights?" (Haggadah) This is a question that every Jewish child has learned to recite? Beyond the parrot-like recitation, what's the question really asking? What is it probing to find out? Why is that the lead question that drives the Pesach Seder of every Jewish home for all time?

At the time of the exodus the verse tells us, "So G-d led the people around [by] way of the desert [to] the Red Sea, and the children of Israel were armed when they went up out of Egypt. (Shemos 13:18) The word for "armed" -- "chamushim" is an unusual term. There is a hint here! Rashi explains that according to the most modest estimate, "chamushim" mean one fifth -- 1/5. Only one fifth of the Jewish People merited the leaving Egypt while 4/5th died secretly in the 9th plague, the plague of darkness. This is shocking news. The celebrated exodus was actually accompanied by a most catastrophic loss.

The Jewish Nation consisted of 600,000 adult-males between the age of 20 and 60 as recorded explicitly in the Torah. Counting females, people above 60, and below 20 years, we can guesstimate that perhaps there were 3 million people who left Egypt. If that's so, then 12 million perished and were disappeared during the plague of darkness. What a heartrending misfortune numerically and individually! To have travelled so far in an exile only to be eliminated in the final moments before the redemption reeks of human tragedy.

Now, even after all that, here comes the tough news. Rabbi Aigdor Miller ztl said that not only at that time but in every generation, 80% are lost to the particular "plague of darkness" of that generation. That is really scary. I appreciate that statistics don't proscribe behavior in advance but only describe behavior ex post facto. Even still there is a frightening trend for we who are the children of those who survived this attrition generation after generation. How do we make sure that

we are not a statistic, and by default, go the way of 80% so much at risk of melting into the sidewalk of oblivion?

Here is a modest proposal. Let us call a meeting. We don't all need to meet in the same place. The logistics for that would be too contrived and cumbersome. People just won't participate. We want 100% participation. This is about saving a nation. I propose we meet as families. Each family should have their own meeting. The main item on the agenda should be our survival as a unique family culture with a special historical mission.

Maybe at the meeting we can ask a compelling question that will spark interest and invite participation. I was thinking of a question phrased something like this, "What can we do differently or what needs to be done differently in this plague of darkness, different from the other plagues of darkness?" As they say, "Woe to the general that fights the last battle and woe to the batter who swings at the previous pitch!" We have to deal the new and ever changing host of challenges that face us now. Sure we can draw on historical precedent to find what has classically worked in the past, but we must be open to employing a new emphasis on a certain Mitzvah perhaps as an emergency measure. The Chofetz Chaim campaigned a lifetime against Loshon Hora! It's still relevant! What is the particular emergency of our time? Where is our ship at risk of taking on water or most vulnerable to attack? That is a meeting for every family to have.

It would be so awesome and that much more powerful if we could all have that family conference on the same night. We would need a comfortable setting around a table with plenty of food and some deep references to our history and our common destiny. Perhaps in that cozy relaxed environment we can come up with some innovative and practical approaches ensuring all the attitudes and moods in our home feel their voice has been heard.

"Mah Nishtana Ha Layla HaZeh Mi Kol Ha Laylos" is really asking this question. How is this night of exile different from other nights? What can we learn (nishtana)? What can we do differently this night from all the other nights of exile? That's the compelling question that drives the agenda of our national meeting, each year, at the familial table on a night like no other night! ©2016 Rabbi L. Lam & torah.org

