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# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**THE AISHDAS SOCIETY**

## Aspaqlaria

*by Rabbi Micha Berger*

This devar Torah is written with gratitude to Rabbi Pesach Sommer, for asking: "Anyone aware of any interesting conceptual, philosophical, theological, or derush ideas connected to koreich, and the idea of eating Pesach, matzah and marror together?"

I didn't, but the question prodded me to dream up the following.

Hillel's stated motive is textual. As the Hagadah puts it: "A memorial to what was done in the Beis haMiqdash according to Hillel.

"This is what Hillel would do when the Beis haMiqdash was standing: He would wrap [qorban] pesach, matzah and maror [together] and eat them together. To fulfill what is said, '... on matzas and bitters you will eat it.'" (Bamidbar 9:11, c.f. Shemos 12:8)

Interestingly, when there is no Beis haMiqdash, and matzah is deOraisa while maror is "only" derabbanan, it is unclear whether one fulfilled the Torah obligation of matzah while mixing the taste with something the Torah doesn't require it get mixed with. (Pesachim 120a) That's why we eat them separately, and then this commemoration.

As for a lesson we can take from the mitzvah of koreikh, R' Pesach's question...

We experience history as a story. We just told the story of the Exodus starting from Terach ("in the beginning our ancestors were idolaters" describes Terach) and Lavan (who is the subject of "an Aramean tried to eliminate my ancestor"). We continue the story through the slavery, the plagues, the first seder night, the expulsion, the Red Sea, and in Dayeinu -- beyond.

As the Seifer haYetzirah writes, the root /SPR/ has three meanings: to cut (from which Hebrew gets the words misparayim -- scissors, and sapar -- barbar), to count (mispar -- number) and to tell (sipur -- story, seifer -- book). What do all three have in common? When we count we divide a whole to identify its parts. Similarly, we could just mention something happened, as when we perform zeikher liYtzias Mitzrayim -- the mitzvah to remember the Exodus from Egypt, every day and night. But on the seder night, the mitzvah is lesapeir, to separate out the details, from beginning to the end.... if the Jewish story actually had an end.

But Hashem's Action only makes sense if we see it as One. He has no Time, no beginning, middle and end to the story. As humans, this means a story makes more sense after the fact, we cannot understand the present when there is unknown future left.

The whole thing serves One Purpose, has One Meaning, even if we experience it as a sequence of events, many details we must pay attention to on this night of the haggadah.

And so, Hillel understands the commemorative mitzvos of the Torah should be performed at once. To remind us of the unity of Divine Purpose: From the suffering of Egypt of bitter maror, through the matzah of the redemption night and the quick redemption, and the qorban we can then bring once redeemed to be G-d's People. 

**RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS**

## Covenant & Conversation

One of the most dazzling insights of the sages was to connect the dots -- the three places in the Torah where children are spoken of as asking questions, and the fourth where we are commanded to "teach your child on that day" -- and turn them into the series of vignettes known as the arba banim, the four children of the Haggadah, one wise, one "wicked," one simple and one not yet able to ask.

Most fascinating and perplexing is the rasha. Today we would probably call him the rebel, the sceptic, the delinquent. I for one find it hard to describe any child as a rasha, hence the quotation marks. One puzzle is simply this: what is wicked or subversive about the question, "What is this service to you?" (Exodus 12:26). It seems straightforward. The child wants to know why his parents are doing what they do. That is what most inquisitive children want to know about the behaviour of adults.

The Torah itself does not treat the child as a rebel or the question as a provocation. The passage continues: "You must answer, 'It is the Passover service to G-d. He passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt when He struck the Egyptians, sparing our homes'" (Exodus 12:27).

This is a straightforward answer to a straightforward question. Nonetheless, the sages heard something discordant and dissident in the text, leading them to conclude that something is not quite right. What was it? To this, there are three main answers.

The first is the approach taken by the

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Haggadah itself. On this reading, the key word is lakhem, "to you." "'To you,' he says, not 'to him.'" Famously the text continues, "By setting himself apart from the community, he denies an ikkar, a fundamental principle of faith." What exactly the fundamental principle is that the rasha denies is a question worthy of study in its own right, but one thing is clear. For the Haggadah the discord lies in the word lakhem.

R. Meir Simcha of Dvinsk offered a second interpretation. He noted that the biblical text at this point says, "And when your children say to you..." (Ex. 12:26). This is unusual. The normal verb introducing a question is lishol, not leimor, "to ask" not "to say." To ask is to seek an answer. To say is to express an opinion. Hence, concluded R. Meir Simcha, what makes this child different is that he is not asking a genuine question but a rhetorical one. He seeks not to learn but to dismiss. He asks but is not interested in the answer. On this view the key word is yomru.

The Talmud Yerushalmi, though, takes a different view again. It understands the question of the rasha to be, "What is all this effort [torach] that you undertake each year?" According to one reading of the Yerushalmi the child is asking about all the effort involved in preparing the korban pesach (Shibbolei haLeket). According to the Ritva he is asking about the Haggadah itself: why delay the meal with so much talking, so many questions, answers and explanations? What is clear, though, is that for the Yerushalmi the key word is avodah. When the child says Mah ha-avodah ha-zot lakhem, he is not asking, "What is this service to you?" but rather, "What is this hard work to you?" This is a deep insight. I will argue that it goes to the very heart of the Jewish condition today.

To understand the power of the Yerushalmi's reading we need to go back to a passage at the opening of the Torah's narrative of slavery. Here is the text in the Kaplan translation: "The Egyptians started to make the Israelites do labour designated to break their bodies. They made the lives of [the Israelites] miserable with harsh labour involving mortar and bricks, as well as all kinds of work in the field. All the work they made them do was intended to break them." (Ex. 1:13-14)

And here it is in Robert Alter's translation: "And the Egyptians put the Israelites to work at crushing labour, and they made their lives bitter with hard work with mortar and bricks and every work in the field -- all their crushing work that they performed."

What these translations fail to convey -- inevitably, because of the literary conventions of English -- is that these two verses contain the word avodah in one form or another five times. Translated more literally, they read: "The Egyptians made the Israelites labour with crushing rigor. They embittered their lives with hard labour, with mortar and bricks and all kinds of labour in the field: all the labour they laboured for them was crushing."

In total, the word appears seven times -- a significant number -- in the first two chapters of Exodus. So the Torah intends us to hear, as the motif of the Israelites' suffering in Egypt, the word avodah in its dual sense of hard work and slavery. Hence our surprise when, during Moses' epiphany at the burning bush, we hear G-d saying: "I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship [ta'avdun] G-d on this mountain." (Ex. 3:12).

The Israelites will know that they have left Egypt and slavery when they arrive at the mountain and there engage in avodah to G-d. The same word is used to describe slavery and freedom, bondage and liberation, Egypt and exodus. That, according to the Yerushalmi, is the point the rasha is making. "What is this avodah to you? Nothing has changed. There we were avadim, here we are avadim. There we had to work for a master, here we have to work for a Master. There it was hard, here it is hard. All that has changed is the master's identity. There it was Pharaoh. Here it is G-d. But we remain avadim. Tell me, dear father, how we are better off now than we were. Why is being Jewish such hard work?"

As I write, the Jewish world has been reflecting on the Pew Report on American Jewry, showing that outside Orthodoxy the outmarriage rate has risen to 71 percent. 32 percent of young Jews describe themselves as "of no religion." Less than a third of American Jews belong to a synagogue. 48 per cent cannot read Hebrew.

More interestingly from a sociological standpoint, the report confirms an unusual feature of American Jewry. There used to be a saying in Yiddish: Vi es kristels zich, azoy yiddles zich. Jews adapt to the coloration of the surrounding society. If non-Jews are religious, Jews tend to be religious. If they are secular, Jews tend to be secular.

America is different. Taken as a whole, the population of the United States is one of the most religious in the world, but the Jewish community is significantly less so. 56 percent of the general population, but only 26 percent of Jews, describe religion as an important feature in their lives. 69 percent of the general population believe in G-d; only 34

percent of Jews. 50 percent of the general population attend a place of worship monthly; only 23 percent of Jews. This is a longstanding phenomenon: it was already remarked on by sociologists in the 1960s. But it remains a striking anomaly.

Let me suggest one possible explanation. Throughout a century of reflection on how to sustain Jewish identity in an open, secular society, the case has often been made that we need to make Judaism easier. Why make the barriers so high, the demands so steep, the laws so rigorous and demanding? So, one by one, the demands were lowered. Shabbat, kashrut and conversion were all made easier. As for the laws of tehorat ha-mishpacha, in many circles outside orthodoxy they fell into abeyance altogether. The assumption was that the less demanding Judaism is to keep, the more Jews will stay Jewish.

To show that this is a fallacy, I once asked a mixed group of observant and non-observant Jews to list the festivals in order of difficulty. Everyone agreed that Pesach was the hardest, Shavuot the easiest, and Sukkot somewhere in between. I then asked, which festivals are kept by the greatest number of Jews. Again, everyone agreed: Pesach was kept by most, Shavuot by the least, with Sukkot in between. There was a pause as the group slowly realised what it had just said. It was counterintuitive but undeniable: the harder a festival is, the more people will keep it. The proof is Yom Kippur, by far the most demanding day of all, and by far the best attended in synagogue.

This is not an isolated phenomenon. Those familiar with the work of behavioural economist Dan Ariely, for example, will know of the experiment he performed in which he invited a group of people to make origami shapes. Their work was then demonstrated and participants and bystanders were asked how much they would pay for them. On average, the people who made the models were willing to pay five times as much as were the bystanders. He then did a second experiment, similar to the first but with one difference: this time there were no instructions as to how to make the models. The task, in other words, was even harder. This time the makers were prepared to pay even more. His conclusion? The tougher the challenge and the more skill and time we have invested into it, the more we value it. The sages said this long ago. Lefum tza'ara agra: according to the effort is the reward.

A host of recent studies of outstanding achievement, among them Malcolm Gladwell's Outliers, David Shenk's The Genius In All Of Us, Geoffrey Colvin's Talent is Overrated, Matthew Syed's Bounce and Daniel Coyle's The Talent Code, have shown precisely this, that high achievement is the result of tireless dedication (at least 10, 000 hours of it) and deep practise. That is why people strive to get into the great universities, or win an Olympic medal or a Nobel Prize. It is also the phenomenon that Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi calls "flow" or "peak experience," the point at which a challenge tests us to the limits, calling for total focus. To be sure, there are some challenges that are simply too hard and leave us feeling overstressed and inadequate. But in general we value most highly what tests us most deeply.

Sometimes of course the opposite is true. We appreciate the one-click buy, the one-stop shop, the instant communication and the computer search that takes microseconds. But this applies when we are seeking convenience, not when we are seeking meaning. If what we are looking for in a religion is convenience, no one in his or her right mind would recommend Judaism. But if we are looking for meaning, no religion has ever been more profound.

The Yerushalmi does not tell us how to answer the child who asks why Judaism is such hard work, such avodah. Speaking personally, this is the answer I would give.

"My child, you ask a good question and I respect you for that. Others may call you a rasha, but to me you are not that at all. You are being honest. You are telling it the way you see it. You are right to speak what is in your mind. We cannot empower children to ask questions and then get angry when they ask the wrong questions or the right questions in the wrong way. I cannot give you an answer that will end your doubts, but I can say what I have learned in the course of my lifetime."

"People are prepared to undergo a long and arduous training to earn a living -- to become a doctor or a lawyer or a therapist or an economist. Judaism asks us to undergo an equally long and arduous training in order to live: to be not just a doctor or lawyer or therapist or economist but also a human being who is bigger than his or her specific roles. That is because Judaism takes life -- the art of living in the image of G-d -- with absolute and ultimate seriousness."

"The ancient Egyptians enslaved whole populations to build monumental buildings, pyramids, temples and royal palaces. They saw buildings as the end and human lives -- the lives of the labouring masses -- as a means to that end. Jews, guided by G-d, believed the opposite. Buildings are a means to an end. What matters are lives. Lives are holy."

"The Greeks produced great works of art. Jews believed that life itself is an art. Just as an artist invests time in perfecting his or her craft, so we invest time in perfecting our lives. Ancient Egypt and ancient Greece were great civilizations. They left us imperishable masterpieces of architecture and art. But neither valued life -- our lives as individuals possessed of inalienable dignity -- the way Jews and Judaism did."

"Judaism is hard work because freedom is hard work. Pesach is especially hard because it is the festival of freedom. Freedom is threatened in two ways:

by individualism and collectivism. Collectivism -- worship of the system, the state, the nation, the race -- has produced the worst tyrannies of history. That was true not only in the days of Moses. It was true in the twentieth century in the form of fascism and communism. It is true in many countries today."

"Individualism represents the opposite danger. When individuals put private gain ahead of the common good, a society eventually collapses. That has been true of every affluent society in history. It has a brief flurry of success and then enters a long or short decline. You can tell in advance when a society is about to begin a decline. There is a breakdown of trust. Leaders lack stature. Divisions grow between rich and poor. There is a loss of social solidarity. People spend more and save less. In their focus on the present they endanger the future. There is less discipline and more self-indulgence, less morality and more pursuit of desire. Cultures grow old the way people grow old, and they begin to do so when they are at the very height of their powers."

"I once asked the non-Jewish historian Paul Johnson who wrote a great History of the Jews what had most impressed him in the years he spent studying our people. He replied that in his view no civilization in history had managed as well as Jews had done the balance between personal and social responsibility -- the road that avoids collectivism on the one hand, individualism on the other."

"That is what Pesach is about. It is about my personal experience of freedom: On Pesach we must each see ourselves as if we personally had left Egypt. But it is also about our shared experience of freedom as we tell the story of our people and hand it on to future generations. Judaism is about the 'I' and the 'We.' Without our willingness to encourage questions, argument, debate, and endless new interpretations of ancient texts, we would lose the 'I.' Without halakhah, the code that binds us together across centuries and continents, we would lose the 'We.' And yes, it's hard work. But I tell you from the depth of my heart that there is no achievement worth having that is not hard work."

What we need in Jewish life today is not ways of making Judaism easier. What costs little is valued even less. We need to find ways of showing how Judaism lifts us to greatness. When that happens people will not ask, Mah ha-avodah ha-zot lakhem, "Why all the hard work?" Neither an athlete going for an Olympic gold medal nor a scientist trying a new line of research ever asks that question; nor did Steve Jobs at Apple or Jeff Bezos at Amazon. The pursuit of greatness always involves hard work. The real challenge of our time is to rediscover why Judaism, because it asks great things from us, lifts us to greatness. The rest is commentary.

In 2008 two teenage Americans, Alex and Brett Harris, wrote a book that became a best-seller. It was called, Do Hard Things, and subtitled: A teenage rebellion against low expectations. We need a Jewish equivalent. That will be the answer to the question young Jews still ask, "What does this avodah mean to you?" *© 2014 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org*

**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 gift 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 offer some explanation for 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 thereby expressing 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 the fact that they all remained in their homes; it must be remembered that specifically at this time all 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! 

**RABBI BEREL WEIN**

# Wein Online

At the great seder night of Pesach when we read and discuss the immortal words of the Pesach Hagada, my family has always enthusiastically sung the portion of the Hagada that we know as "Dayenu." By the grace of God, I have been able to witness a number of my generations singing this meaningful poem of praise to the Almighty for the bountiful goodness that he has bestowed upon us.

Since I am leading the singing that always accompanies this poem, the melody may be somewhat out of tune but what it lacks in pitch it makes up for in enthusiasm and volume. I have always thought about the words that make up this poem and the entire concept that "Dayenu" communicates to us. The poem deals with half measures, so to speak, of goodness that were bestowed upon us. As one of my grandchildren one intuitively remarks to me: "Zeydie, it is like proclaiming victory when only half the game has been played and your team is winning. But the game is not over yet, so is our cheering not a bit premature?

That same question troubled me for quite some time. How can we say that it was sufficient for us to be delivered from Egyptian bondage even if later we would've been destroyed at Yam Suf? Or what advantage would have accrued to us had we come to the Mountain of Sinai but never received the Torah or experienced the revelation that took place there? Why would we say that all these half measures would have been more than enough for us?

The answer to all of this lies in the Jewish attitude towards the holy attribute of gratitude. Gratitude is the basis of all moral law and decent human conduct. It underpins all the beliefs and behavioral aspects of Judaism, Jewish values and lifestyle. And Judaism declares that gratitude must be shown every step of the way during a person's life.

We are to be grateful and thankful for our opportunities even if they did not yet lead to any positive results and accomplishments. The Talmud admonished us not to complain too loudly or too often about the difficulties of life "for is it not sufficient that one is still living?" If one expresses gratitude simply for opportunity, then how much more is that person likely to be truly grateful for positive results in one's life?

This is not only the message of the "Dayenu" poem in the Hagada, it is really the message of the entire recitation of the Hagada itself. Gratitude for everything in life is the message of Pesach, for the matzo and even for the maror as well. And perhaps this is why the poem of "Dayenu" is usually put to melody, for it is meant to be a poem of joy, a realistic appraisal to life and not a sad dirge. Like everything else in Jewish life, it is meant to be a song of eternity. 

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**RABBI AVI WEISS**

# Shabbat Forshpeis

At first glance, Chad Gadya is a kind of light hearted song whose sole purpose is to provide an entertaining ending to the seder. Yet, in order to truly understand its meaning an analysis of the structure of the seder is required.

In general terms, the seder is divided into two parts. The first half which precedes the seder meal deals with the past-a retelling and reenactment of the Exodus from Egypt. The second half, which follows the seder meal, deals with the future-words of praise and song that complete redemption come soon.

It is because of this separation that we break the matza at the onset of the seder. Matzo is the symbol of redemption. One half remains on the table as we recount the past event, and the second half-- not coincidentally the larger half representing the hope of the greater redemption which is yet to come-is set aside to be eaten at the end of the meal, the section that looks toward the future.

If you take a look at most haggadahs, the bulk of commentary focuses on the first half of the seder, and there is little discussion about the last half. But this section deserves just as much attention. It begins with the eating of the afikoman, that second half of matza. This part of the seder is called tzafun. Tzafun literally means hidden, and is always associated with redemption whose time is unknown to us. The word tzafun sounds like tzafon which means north. It is said that the Messiah will come from the north.

Tzafun is followed by the Grace After Meals, the prayer of thanksgiving for food eaten during the main course. This prayer, that we recite after each meal during the year, interestingly includes the prayer that God send to us Elijah the Prophet who announces the coming of the Messiah.

We emphasize Elijah's presence though at the seder immediately after the Grace, when we open the door for Elijah, symbolic of our yearning for the Messiah. For the Messiah to arrive, we cannot sit on our hands-we have to do our share and open the door.

What follows is the Hallel. Appropriately, the first two paragraphs of the Hallel, which deal with redemption from Egypt, are recited prior to the meal. The last paragraphs deal with the future, the hope that God will bless us (Ye-Varech Et Beit Yisrael) with redemption and hope. Thus, these paragraphs are recited after the seder meal.

And after reciting these words, we begin reciting the Greater Hallel. This Great Hallel contains prayers of hope that all of humankind will be redeemed. Included in this set of prayers is the famous Nishmat Kol Chai - may the soul of all living beings bless you O Lord.

With this we drink wine, celebrating the hope of future redemption just as we drank wine after telling the Passover story before the meal.

The seder has now officially come to an end as the statement - Chasal Siddur Pesach is read. But as in all powerful experiences, a feeling of exhilaration remains. In the case of the seder, this feeling is expressed through an ultimate encounter with God. The encounter, called Nirtzah, which means may God hear our words favorably, includes songs that allow our hearts and souls to soar heavenward.

One such song is Va-yehi Ba-chatzi Ha-laylah, literally and it was in the middle of the night. Night is the symbol of exile. The middle of the night represents the exile of the exile, the deepest darkness. As we sing these words, we're certain that somehow, no matter how dark, light will come. We continue with Adir Hu which speaks of the hope that God rebuild the Temple speedily. We move on with the famous Echad Mi Yodei'a which we proclaim some fundamentals of faith including the Oneness of God, so crucially necessary for redemption.

And here we conclude with the Chad Gadya, a playful story which demonstrates how, in the long chain of natural events, God prevails. The goat is devoured by the cat and the cat is bitten by the dog and the dog is slain by the stick and the stick is consumed by fire, and the fire is extinguished by water which is drunk by the ox, which is slaughtered by the slaughterer whose life is taken by the angel of death. But in the end, it is God who overcomes that angel.

One wonders, why is this deep message written in metaphor. It may be to teach that so much in Jewish history cannot be understood as it occurs, it can only be deciphered in hindsight. And it may be that the Chad Gadya is written playfully and humorously to teach that to survive against the odds requires the ability to laugh. Our very existence is difficult to believe, and in that sense almost funny.

As we sit down to the seder this year, we will be focusing not only on past redemption, but on the hope for future redemption. And we will sing Chad Gadya, that funny little song to remind us to laugh. The Chad Gadya, the song written in metaphors to remind us that even though we don't understand—one day we will.  *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 YAAKOV BERNSTEIN**

# Haaros

The Talmud Yerushalmi (Chala, 1:1) says that Hillel would eat the Pesach, Matzah and Moror bound

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

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

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

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

The Rambam didn't mention Hillel at all. Today, (he wrote) we have a "remembrance of the mikdash", but not a "remembrance of the mikdash according to Hillel"! Rav Yisrael Meir Zaks answered that, since the actual practice was according to Hillel's view, it is no longer necessary to mention "according to Hillel", rather, "a remembrance of the mikdash".

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

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

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

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

**HARAV SHLOMO WOLBE ZT"L**

# Bais Hamussar

After Bnei Yisrael were commanded to bring the korban Pesach, the Torah tells us, "Bnei Yisrael went and did as Hashem commanded Moshe and Aharon, so did they do" (Shemos 12:28). Rashi explains that the superfluous "so did they do" refers to Moshe and Aharon. They also fulfilled Hashem's commandment to designate a sheep to be used for the korban Pesach. The Maharal elaborates that the korban Pesach was a mitzvah given to Bnei Yisrael as a merit to make them worthy for redemption.

Thus, one might think that Moshe and Aharon, who were Hashem's emissaries to carry out the redemption, need not perform this mitzvah. Therefore, the Torah informs us that they too fulfilled this commandment.

It would seem that the original assumption is correct. Why should Moshe Rabbeinu have to fulfill this mitzvah if he was never enslaved in Mitzrayim and did not need to be redeemed? It would also appear that he did not need the mitzvah to advance his spiritual level since he had already reached the high level where he was speaking to Hashem as one converses with a friend.

Rav Wolbe (Daas Shlomo Geulah p. 323) explains that the korban Pesach was consumed exactly at the time when Hashem passed through Mitzrayim and smote the firstborn. This final plague was an incredible, almost tangible, display of Hashgacha Pratis as Hashem killed only the firstborn and only the Egyptians. Bnei Yisrael also prepared themselves for this moment of revelation in a very tangible way. They "hurriedly ate the korban Pesach with their loins girded, their shoes on their feet and their staffs in their hands." The spiritual impact achieved through witnessing an

overt display of Hashgacha Pratis is so great that even Moshe Rabbeinu could gain from it. Therefore, he too prepared himself for the revelation by fulfilling the commandment of korban Pesach.

Leil HaSeder is all about trying to experience that awesome revelation that took place on that very night way back in Mitzrayim. The goal is to achieve a level of clarity where Hashem's hashgacha pratis in our world and our lives, is evident to our corporal eyes. Start now and look for Hashem's involvement in your life --- and it's not hard to find -- and you'll be better prepared for the Seder Night.

It's a unique night during which we are given a big dose of Heavenly assistance to reach higher levels of emunah -- an assistance that is unavailable during the rest of the year! 

**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 marror -- 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. 

**RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER**

# Weekly Dvar

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

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