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# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS**

## Covenant & Conversation

The story of Pesach, of the Exodus from Egypt, is one of the oldest and greatest in the world. It tells of how one people, long ago, experienced oppression and were led to liberty through a long and arduous journey across the desert. It is the most dramatic story of slavery to freedom ever told, one that has become the West's most influential source-book of liberty. "Since the Exodus," said Heinrich Heine, the 19th century German poet, "Freedom has always spoken with a Hebrew accent".

We read in the maggid section of the Haggadah of Rabbi Gamliel who said that one who did not discuss the Pesach lamb, the maztah and the bitter herbs had not fulfilled their obligation of the Seder. Why these three things are clear: The Pesach lamb, a food of luxury, symbolises freedom. The bitter herbs represent slavery due to their sharp taste. The matzah combines both. It was the bread the Israelites ate in Egypt as slaves. It was also the bread they left when leaving Egypt as free people.

It is not just the symbolism, but also the order these items are spoken about in the Haggadah that is interesting. First we speak of the Pesach lamb, then the matzah and finally the bitter herbs. But this seems strange. Why do the symbols of freedom precede those of slavery? Surely slavery preceded freedom so it would be more logical to talk of the bitter herbs first? The answer, according to the Chassidic teachers, is that only to a free human people does slavery taste bitter. Had the Israelites forgotten freedom they would have grown used to slavery. The worst exile is to forget that you are in exile.

To truly be free, we must understand what it means to not be free. Yet 'freedom' itself has different dimensions, a point reflected in the two Hebrew words used to describe it, chofesh and cherut. Chofesh is 'freedom from', cherut is 'freedom to'. Chofesh is what a slave acquires when released from slavery. He or she is free from being subject to someone else's will. But this kind of liberty is not enough to create a free society. A world in which everyone is free to do what they like begins in anarchy and ends in tyranny. That is why chofesh is only the beginning of freedom, not its ultimate destination.

Cherut is collective freedom, a society in which my freedom respects yours. A free society is always a moral achievement. It rests on self-restraint and regard for others. The ultimate aim of Torah is to fashion a society on the foundations of justice and compassion, both of which depend on recognising the sovereignty of God and the integrity of creation. Thus we say, 'Next year may we all be bnei chorin,' invoking cherut not chofesh. It means, 'May we be free in a way that honours the freedom of all'.

The Pesach story, more than any other, remains the inexhaustible source of inspiration to all those who long for freedom. It taught that right was sovereign over might; that freedom and justice must belong to all, not some; that, under God, all human beings are equal; and that over all earthly power, the King of Kings, who hears the cry of the oppressed and who intervenes in history to liberate slaves. It took many centuries for this vision to become the shared property of liberal democracies of the West and beyond; and there is no guarantee that it will remain so. Freedom is a moral achievement, and without a constant effort of education it atrophies and must be fought for again. Nowhere more than on Pesach, though, do we see how the story of one people can become the inspiration of many; how, loyal to its faith across the centuries, the Jewish people became the guardians of a vision through which, ultimately, 'all the peoples of the earth will be blessed'.

I wish you and all your family a Chag Kasher v'Sameach. *Covenant and Conversation 5780 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l* 

**RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

## Shabbat Shalom

"A That Moses' name is not mentioned even once in the Haggadah is one of the fascinating paradoxes in our tradition – the person who dedicated his entire life towards redeeming people is removed from the limelight on the one night when we focus all our attention on our enslavement in Egypt. As far as paradoxes go, this one is rich in irony; a text about redemption without the name of the redeemer.

But why doesn't Joseph's name appear? Not only are the names of the patriarchs present in the Haggadah, but the entire Exodus from Egypt can be traced back to the sale of Joseph by his brothers, and

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Joseph's subsequent appointment as Viceroy, which paved the way for the Israelites' eventual settlement in Goshen, the 70 descendants of Jacob multiplying over the course of the next 210 years into a nation that would suffer under the whip of the Egyptian taskmasters.

Now its true that Joseph's name is not mentioned explicitly in the text, but his presence does hover over the seder's procedings. Early sources deal with how Joseph's life permeates the Seder, albeit in a subtle form, and we don't have to go any further than the karpas right there on the seder plate.

In Greek the word for vegetation or vegetable is akin to karpas, and it's generally assumed that since Passover falls in the spring we include karpas in the Seder as a reminder of Passover's spring identity.

Besides this Greek source of the word, there are those Sages who link the word karpas to the story of Joseph.

Rashi does it linguistically. In his commentary on the verse in which Joseph's coat of many colors is mentioned (k'tonet Pasim in Gen. 37:31), Rashi writes that the word passim, "…denotes a cloak of fine wool…" and he goes on to quote a verse from Megillat Esther in which the text describes the wealthy and rich embroidery of King Ahashveraus' palace: "There were hangings of white, fine cotton (Karpas)…" (Esther 1:6) Note the presence of 'pas' in both words.

What Rashi did linguistically, Rabenu Menoah (of Narbonne, late 13th century) in his commentary on certain sections of Mishne Torah (Laws of Chametz and Matzah, CH. 12, Hal. 8) expresses directly by explaining that the karpas we take at the beginning of the seder, "recalls for us the coat of many colors, which Jacob our Father made for Joseph and which was the crucial factor in the Jews' enslavement in Egypt." This idea is also discussed by Rabbi Solomon Kluger, (1785fi1869) in Yeriot Shlomo, his commentary on the Haggadah as well as other special prayers, that the only reason we ever got to Egypt was the result of Joseph being sold by his brothers.

But the connection between Joseph and aspects of the Passover seder is already hinted at in the Talmud. After the lamb was sacrificed in the Holy Temple, it was then brought to the place where it was going to be eaten. A Braita at the end of the fifth chapter of B.T. Pesachim discusses how the animal was slung over one's shoulder in its skin. To this discussion, R. Ilish adds one word, "Tayot," (B.T. Pesachim 65b) which Rashi explains is a reference to the manner in which Ishmaelite traders transport animals.

Although we know very little today about their techniques, R. Ilish's additional comment (as interpreted by Rashi) steers our mind back to another group of Ishmaelite traders who appeared on the horizon at a crucial moment in Joseph's life, providing Judah with the opportunity to declare: "What profit is it if we slay our brother and conceal his blood. Come let us sell him to the Ishmaelites…"(Gen. 37:26-27) without the Ishmaelites, Joseph would have never ended up in Egypt.

The connection between aspect of the haggadah to the Joseph story is also evident in the charoset, featured on the Seder plate. According to the Yerushalmi, the blend of apples, date and wine into which we dip the maror (bitter herb) symbolizes the heinous act of the brothers when they dipped Joseph's coat – the k'tonet passim – into goat's blood, compounding their evil by allowing their father to believe that Joseph had been devoured by a wild beast.

The Joseph story involved two areas of mishaps. The first was the havoc that resulted from Jacob favoring Joseph over the other brothers. (Gen. 37:31) Jacob may have been justified in his love simply because Joseph was the child of his beloved Rachel. He may well have been the most talented, the most brilliant, the most obedient of all the sons, nevertheless the sibling rivalry Jacob put into play opened up a can of worms which we are suffering to this very day! Our lack of unity –and recent three elections – has its origins in the divided house of Jacob-Israel.

But on this night of the Seder, each and every father is given the opportunity to begin to turn things around. With the entire family gathered around the table, all the preparation and hard work creating an atmosphere of intense awareness, the Pesach haggadah allows the father to put certain ideas into practice – aspiring to achieve a desired equality and love between the children. This may not be an easy task, but it is of immeasurable importance. Our children did not ask to be born, and every child deserves to be loved and accepted unconditionally!

On a simple level, the youngest child, often the most overlooked, is given a measure of affirmative action this night, starting with the honor of asking the Four Questions. Soon after the theme of the night moves to the issues raised by the Four Children, but just as important as the issues they raise are their unique differences. What becomes clear to us – particularly in our generation – is the fact that they are all there, lovingly included in the seder, including the

wicked child, whose cynical questions must be softened by familial affection. This means that we, the parents, have a chance to look at our children around the table and finally give each one the love that he or she needs and deserves!

The Talmud declares that it's forbidden for a father to single out one child over the others, citing Jacob as an example. (B.T. Shabbat 10b) Indeed, failure to do so leads toward broken families, brothers and sisters who don't speak to each other, resentment, pain, disgrace, and all kinds of emotions that fracture the unity of a family.

On the night of the Seder every parent becomes a teacher, and on this night every father has to remember Jacob's mistake. This is the first 'dipping'. And the second 'dipping' is that the fundamental sin of the Jewish people results from causeless hatred, demonstrated by the brothers' hatred toward Joseph, resulting in exile and slavery. Only if we overcome this other aspect of our lives – which we usually blame on all sorts of factors, like Jacob's choice of Joseph over the other brothers – do we have a chance to begin mending the rips and cracks in out national fabric.

The Seder not only looks backwards but it looks forward as well. The family heads have to be sensitive to sibling rivalry, finding ways to acknowledge the uniqueness of each child. And if we succeed on this level, implanting family structures which are loving and sharing and protective and caring, then the ground is being paved for the coming of the next redemption.



**RABBI JONATHAN GEWIRTZ**

# Migdal Ohr

"Now we are here, next year may we be in the land of Israel. Now we are slaves, next year may we be free men."(Haggada text) These words are recited as part of "ha lachma anya, this is the bread of affliction" in the Seder, the opening words to Magid, the retelling of the Exodus story. Just before this we invite all those who are hungry or have no host for the Seder to come and join with us.

These words take on new meaning this year when we cannot have guests at our table and we have a new understanding in slavery. A slave can only do what his master allows him. He is bound to the whim of another. Under siege and quarantined because of a plague, are we not anxious for the freedom that we hope we will experience tomorrow?

Perhaps no generation in history has so acutely replicated the night of that first Pesach, while we were still in Egypt. Hashem warned us to remain indoors as His messenger wrought vengeance on the Egyptians and made the world recognize the truth of Hashem's majesty.

We were told to be ready to leave on a moment's notice, much as we constantly change based on the advice of the medical establishment. None of us knows exactly what to expect; we just wait for word from Hashem about what is next. The Midrash teaches that in 18 minutes, the entire nation of the Jewish People left the borders of Egypt. Hashem's miracles can change everything in an instant.

When we left Egypt, we became servants of Hashem. Unlike servants of man who serve their masters' benefit, Hashem's servants, by carrying out His mitzvos, are benefitting themselves. We become masters of our own destiny and we are free from the doubts that plague us more than anything. Now we are slaves: uncertain, worried perhaps, and without knowing how to best take care of ourselves and our family. Next year, may we celebrate the Pesach in Yerushalayim, with all doubts resolved and a clear plan for living our lives.

"The blood will be a sign for you upon the houses where you are; and I will see the blood and skip over you; there will not be a plague among you…" (Exodus 12:13)

After keeping the sheep tied to their beds for four days, the Jews slaughtered them, roasted them whole, then ate them at a festive meal with their families. Surely this was a challenge since every step of the way was fraught with danger. The sheep was the deity of the Egyptians and whatever the Jews did was essentially a smack in the face to the Mitzrim.

Being able to "celebrate" when you're nervous is next to impossible, so the Jews had to push themselves to trust in Hashem and eat, much as Dovid HaMelech says in Tehillim, "You set a table before me in front of my enemies." Part of the command was also to take the blood and put it on the doorpost.

Rashi quotes the Midrash that this blood was placed on the inside of the homes, where the sign was "for you" – those inside, and not for the angel to "pass over" the Jewish homes. Then Hashem would see us being involved in His mitzvos and protect us from the devastation.

The purpose of the blood inside was for us to see the obstacles we'd overcome. From taking the sheep and tying them, to slaughtering them, having circumcision for all the men (a prerequisite to eating Korban Pesach) and now, eating the meal as commanded. It was a sign for us that when we are doing what Hashem wants us to, He protects us against all odds.

*After delivering a shiur at Yeshivas Kol Torah, R' Shlomo Zalman Auerbach z"l went to visit a child in the hospital. On the way, he asked the driver to stop at a kiosk, where he bought a candy bar for the boy. Back in the car, the sage turned the snack this way and that, looking at the label. Seeing this, the driver commented, "I know that candy bar. It has a very good hechsher (Kosher certification.)"*

*"Thank you, but I wasn't looking for the*

*hechsher," said the Rav with a smile, "I was looking to see if it tastes good."*

*So many people have lost interest in Torah because they think it is all about regulations .They don't realize that the main gift of Torah and Mitzvos is that they make life sweet and delightful! © 2020 Rabbi J. Gewirtz and Migdal Ohr*

**RABBI AVI WEISS**

# Shabbat Forshpeis

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

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

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

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

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

One final thought. I remember in some of the most difficult times of the Soviet Jewry Movement, standing outside Soviet government buildings and chanting—Dayenu. Our message was clear. We were declaring, enough of the suffering that our sisters and brothers in the Soviet Union were experiencing. We would spell out what we meant using the structure of the Dayenu itself. "Had only the Soviets prevented the baking of matzot, and not imprisoned Sharansky it would have been enough...."

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

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



**HARAV SHLOMO WOLBE ZT"L**

# Bais Hamussar

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

Rav Wolbe (Da'as Shlomo Geulah pg. 313) writes that this concept holds true for each and every one of us. The Torah relates regarding the staffs Yaakov Avinu placed in front of the sheep, that the sheep gave birth to offspring which mirrored the designs on the staffs. The "imagination" of the sheep had the power to create a reality. The same holds true for our imagination. When a person uses his imagination to conjure up various worldly pleasures, he is creating; he is turning the physical world into more and more of a reality. This in effect obscures the reality of ruchniyos thereby giving it inferior status.

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

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

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

This being the case, concludes Rav Wolbe, we have clarified for ourselves the avodah of Pesach. A person is obligated to feel as if he himself left Mitzrayim. This can only be accomplished by picturing

the bondage and the subsequent freedom. For this reason we are instructed to recline, drink four cups of wine, and eat matzah and marror. Going through the motions of freedom, observing the "pesach" and tasting the bread of affliction all aid our imagination in a more complete picture of Yetzias Mitrayim.

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

**JEWISH WORLD REVIEW**

# The Illusion of Freedom

*by Rabbi Yonason Goldson*

After generations of slavery and oppression, amidst miracles unprecedented and unrepeated, the Children of Israel marched forth out of Egypt and into the wilderness as a free people for the first time in their collective memory. Fifty days later they stood together at Sinai to receive the Torah - the code of 613 commandments that would define every aspect of their lives.

What happened to freedom? What happened to the promise of redemption when all that really happened was the trading of one master for another?

Much of the modern world has built its understanding of freedom upon Thomas Jefferson's famous formulation of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." But what would life be like in a society of unrestricted freedom? How many of us would chose to live in with no rules at all, where everyone was free to drive on either side of the road, to take whatever they desired regardless of rightful ownership, to indulge every whim and impulse without a thought of accountability? The absolute "freedom" of pure anarchy would provide no protection for the rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Consequently, it would provide no freedom at all.

Intuitively, we understand that some freedoms have to be sacrificed in order to preserve order and ensure the common welfare. If so, we are forced to refine our concept of freedom. In contrast to ancient Egypt, in which our ancestors were coerced by the rod and the whip to bow before Pharaoh's will, the G-d of our redemption allows us the freedom from immediate retribution. By doing so, the Almighty empowers us with the freedom to make our own choices, to take responsibility of our own actions, and to transform ourselves from creatures of physical impulse into beings of spiritual refinement.

Ultimately, the freedom we possess is the freedom to choose our own master, to choose the leaders and system of laws that will best serve our collective interests in the long run.

Because we live in a society with others who also demand freedom, our choices will necessarily be limited by the conventions of society. More significantly, the values of the society in which we live will shape our own attitudes, influencing the ways we think that priorities we hold dear. From the moment we are born, our impressions are determined by others: our parents, our teachers, and our peers, as well as writers, celebrities, sports stars, and advertisers.

How often have we asked ourselves whether the ideas that govern our choices as spouses, as parents, and as community members are truly our own? How often do we stop to reflect whether we have acquired the values that guide us in our relationships and our careers through thoughtful contemplation or through cultural osmosis?

The illusion of freedom convinces us that our own gratification comes before our obligations to others, before even our obligations to ourselves. If we allow our desire for unrestricted freedom to steer our lives, we will find ourselves enslaved by our desires no less than a chain smoker is a slave to his cigarettes or an alcoholic is a slave to his gin. Convinced that freedom is a goal in itself, we will sacrifice everything of true value for the cruel master of self-indulgence. Deceived into believing that responsibility is the antithesis of freedom, we will invest ourselves, consciously or unconsciously, in philosophies like this one:

Freedom's just another word for nothing left to lose, Nothing don't mean nothing honey if it ain't free, now now. And feeling good was easy, L-rd, when he sang the blues, You know feeling good was good enough for me, Good enough for me and my Bobby McGee.

These are the words that made Janice Joplin into a counterculture idol, before she died of a heroin overdose at the age of 27.

Less dramatic examples confront us every day. Politicians, movie icons, and athletes destroy their careers and their family lives for a few fleeting moments of pleasure. Parents allow their children to grow up without direction or discipline lest they quash their creativity or damage their egos by imposing structure and meaning upon their lives. A once-productive citizenry increasingly looks to receive support on the backs of others, whether through welfare, lawsuits, or pyramid schemes that leave countless victims footing the bill.

More than anything, Passover celebrates the freedom to think, to take stock of our lives and reassess our values, to take a fresh look at our own motivations and our own decisions, to acknowledge where we may

have lost sight of truly meaningful goals and sincerely commit ourselves to striking out on a truer course.

Last year we were slaves to our inner masters; this year we have a chance to set ourselves free to seek the paths of truth and follow them toward the destination of enduring spiritual redemption.

**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" it pretty "dumb"! 

**RABBI ARI WEISS AND YITZ WEISS**

# No More Questions

The Maggid section of our seder begins with the traditional asking of the four questions, or the Ma Nishtanah. The source of the Ma Nishtanah is a Mishna in Tractate Pesachim,[1] which lists for us the questions with few variations from the text that we use today. The Mishna explains (according to Rashi, an early medieval commentator) that after the second cup of wine is poured, the child should begin to ask on his own why there is a deviation from the norm and why the meal hasn't yet begun. However, if the child doesn't understand enough to ask, the father must teach him to ask the questions included in the Ma Nishtanah.

The Mishna adds in a line towards the end which states, "according to the son's understanding, the father should teach him." According to the Mishna, the son is not supposed to ask all of the four questions. Instead, only the question(s) that reflect the child's "understanding" should be taught and asked. This explains a common question among children who first learn their Ma Nishtanah; It seems that there is only one question, "why is this night different?" followed by four statements of why the night is different. However, according to the Mishna, it is almost as if there are four questions of "why is this night different?" and one need only "check off" the appropriate section that fits his or her perception of the difference.

The Hagadah, in speaking of four "sons," teaches us some important lessons about how to relate to our children and to each other. The four "sons" are really four different personalities. There is a wonderful book called *Who Do You Think You Are Anyway* by Dr. Robert Rohm which investigates personalities and determines that there are four basic personality types. Most people are actually a blend of all four types.[2]

The "D" type personality is an individual who is dominant, domineering, directed and driven. This person is outgoing and task oriented - one who is less concerned with the feelings of others he must work with (or through!) than in completing the job at hand. The "D" leads - and lets you know he is in charge.

The "I" type personality is an individual who is inspiring, influential and impulsive. This person is outgoing and people oriented - one who is more concerned with how others see him (his image) than with focusing on tasks or accuracy. The "I" isn't just the life of the party - he takes the party with him wherever he goes!

The "S" type personality is an individual who is soft-spoken, steady, supportive and stable. This person is reserved and people oriented - one who is more focused on being a part of the "team" and doing his share. He wants to be well liked by everyone and although not very driven, he is the type to stick something out and see it through to the end.

The "C" type personality is an individual who is competent, cautious and careful. This person is reserved and task oriented. He is most concerned with accuracy and correctness - he's never wrong!

Our chacham, the wise son, seems to fall into the category of the "C" type personality. He's an individual who is very interested in the "nitty-gritty" - he

[1] 10:4

[2] For a more in depth discussion on this topic the book is available from Personality Insights, Inc. at 770-509-7113. It is highly recommended for anyone in education, business or otherwise who interact with people on a regular basis.

wants all the facts and figures. We are taught to respond in kind - tell him all the intricacies of the seder even to the final detail of the afikoman.

The rasha, the wicked son, seems to have a "D" type personality. The rasha is arrogant and obnoxious - "what does this service mean to *you*?" Our rabbis are teaching us that to get through to someone who has such a strong personality sometimes you have to "punch him in the teeth" (i.e. get his attention) before he will listen.

The tam, the simple son, personifies the "I" type personality. He is an individual with a flair for the dramatic. The Hagadah tells us that to explain the Pesach story to a child with an "I" personality we must weave a graphic, flowery recount of how we were slaves in Egypt and Hashem redeemed us with lightning, thunder, clouds and pillars of fire!

The sh'eyno yodeah lishol, the child who doesn't know how to ask a question is our "S" personality. He is shy, timid and content to remain in the background just watching and helping others enjoy the seder. To him the Hagadah says "at p'tach lo" you must initiate the dialogue. Not every child will ask questions - even if he doesn't ask we need to be sure he learns of his heritage.

From our understanding of the Mishna, we begin to understand the statement of the Sfas Emes, a great chassidic leader in Poland in the beginning of the twentieth century, that each question of the Ma Nishtanah parallels one of the four sons.

The first question, "on all other nights we eat chametz (leavened bread) and matzah; on this night only matzah", clearly belongs to the chacham. After all, the only difference between chametz and matzah is literally seconds. At 17 minutes 59 seconds it's matzah, and at 18 minutes, it's chametz. The wise son, who notices and asks about details, asks what difference a few seconds can make.

The "wicked" son, who asks in a negative, belligerent tone, is the one who asks, "on all other nights we eat any vegetable; on this night only bitter herbs." His question is, "why do we have to go through this all again?" Or "why can't we eat good tasting vegetables like we always do?"

The "simple" son relates to new *actions*. He has no interest in the philosophical difference between chametz and matzah, or why we *don't* do something. When he sees an obligation to do something new such as dipping, he asks, "on all other nights we don't have to dip even once; on this night we are obligated to dip twice?"

The sh'eyno yodeah lishol, though, logically shouldn't have a question. After all, he's defined as the son who doesn't ask. The truth is that some Rishonim[3] (medieval Talmud commentators) don't list a fourth question. We can explain the question of reclining as having to do with the last son, in that reclining doesn't involve any extra action or impetus. The question of the last son reflects his lack of motivation to do or ask about anything other than what he is always doing. Specifically, sitting. However, to understand the question of the last son more fully, we need to examine the four sons on a deeper level.

Rav Nachman from Braslav, the great chassidic rabbi and founder of Braslav chassidut, explains the four sons in a different light. Normally we view the wise son as the "good" son, the wicked son as the "bad" son, the tam as "stupid" and the last son as "really stupid." Rav Nachman explains the sons a bit differently. The chacham, he says, is not wise but an intellectual. He constantly feels the need to probe deeper and doesn't feel satisfied with the simple answer. The question of the chacham exemplifies his constant search for deeper understanding of the mitzvah. The answer to the chacham is "ain maftirin achar haPesach afikoman" - there is a time when one must stop. In this case, one must understand that there is a time when one cannot probe any deeper, and the rest must be accepted on faith. If the chacham does not understand that, then he may easily become a rasha.

The rasha, like the chacham, is an intellectual. This explains why the questions of both are so similar. The only difference between the chacham and the rasha is that the rasha probes deeper to find a way to disprove the Torah. The chacham looks for greater understanding. In actuality, the chacham and the rasha are really very close to each other and there is but a fine difference between them.

The tam is actually the greatest of the sons. According to Rav Nachman, tam doesn't mean "simple" but "perfect" (tamim). The question of the tam is that of complete faith - "what is this?" The tam has what the chacham hasn't achieved yet - complete, simple faith.

This explains a unusual gemara in Megillah[4] which says that Queen Esther's other name was Hadassah, because "Tzadikim (righteous people) are called hadassim (myrtle branches)." Why in the world would tzadikim be likened to a myrtle? Well, the myrtle is one of the four species taken during the holiday of Succot, and each of the species has its own special significance. The etrog has a sweet smell and taste, symbolizing a Jew who knows the reasons for the mitzvot and therefore does them. The lulav has a taste but no smell, symbolizing the Jew who knows the reasons but chooses not to do the mitzvot. The hadas has smell but no taste, symbolizing the Jew who doesn't know the reasons for the mitzvot, yet does them anyway, and the aravah, with no taste nor smell, is the Jew who neither knows nor does the mitzvot. Isn't it logical that the etrog is the chacham, the lulav is the rasha, the aravah is the sh'eyno yodeah lishol and the hadas is the tam? Based on the explanation of Rav

[3] The Rosh, for example.

[4] 13a

Nachman, it is obvious that the tzadik is the embodiment of the faith of the tam, shown in the hadas.

But what about the sh'eyno yodeah lishol? To better understand Rav Nachman's explanation, let's first go back to our Hagadah.

In the Maggid section, we focus on four key verses that describe our exile and redemption from Egypt. In fact, these verses from the parsha of bikkurim[5] are the prototype for all exiles and redemptions that ever occurred and will occur to the Jewish people. The first of the steps is "Vayered Mitzrayma.…" We went down to Egypt - for a good reason, mind you - and became great and successful there. The second step was "Vayareiu otanu haMitzrim vayaanunu.…" We were afflicted in galut, making the exile suddenly uncomfortable. The third step is "Vanitzak el Hashem.…" We finally cry out and pray to Hashem to save us until the fourth stage occurs, "Vayotzienu Hashem..." - Hashem saves us.

In truth, every galut and geula is the same - we go into galut for what seems like a good reason, the galut turns against us, we finally realize that we can't handle it ourselves and we need Hashem's help, at which time we daven and Hashem redeems us. Almost sounds simple.

But actually, these are our four sons at work again. The chacham understands that he can be as self-sufficient and successful in galut as he is in geula - sometimes even more so. (After all, what's the difference between chametz and matzah? Only a few seconds? Why should that matter?) He therefore goes out to galut, as the first posuk of Maggid indicates and he becomes very successful. That's why we answer the chacham with the halachot of Pesach. He needs to know the laws of what to do to remain Jewish in galut and not become a rasha.

The rasha feels the brunt of the exile, and how the galut turns against the Jews, as told by the second posuk. His shortcoming is that he blames it on his Yiddishkeit and Hashem. (Why does Hashem make us eat these bitter vegetables, anyway? Until now we could eat any type of vegetable.) He will stay in this phase until he can reach the level of the tam. That's why we answer the rasha "if you had been there, you wouldn't have been redeemed."

The tam is the one that has the simple faith to look to Hashem and daven for help which begins the redemption process. This is why we answer the tam, "with a strong hand Hashem saved us from Egypt." It's just a matter of time, then, until the redemption. In truth, the last two questions of Ma Nishtanah focus on freedom (dipping) and redemption (reclining) while the first two focus on exile (matzah) and bitterness (marror).

Now we understand the last son. It isn't that he doesn't know how to ask a question. It's that he has no more questions to ask. His phase in the four verses is that of redemption. When you see Hashem split the sea in front of you, I imagine there is little room left for doubt. That is why the fourth son has no questions. That is also why his is to the question of reclining, which is an expression of redemption and freedom. The last son just sits back, reclines and sees the redemption from Hashem. Rav Nachman writes that the last son refers to Yishmael who did teshuva before he died. As Rav Nachman explains, someone who does complete teshuva is as though he has no more questions to ask.

The four stages of galut and geula as outlined in the Maggid have with them the four languages of redemption. Each son, just like he has his own question, has his own method of redemption. The chacham, who is doing well in galut, needs "vehotzaiti" - "I will take you out." Just as a person has the ability to walk out of a room on his own, so too the chacham has the ability to walk out of galut if he so chooses. The next lashon, "vehitzalti" - "I will save you" belongs to the rasha, who is definitely in need of saving. Just as one who needs to be saved can't protect himself against his oppressors, so too the rasha who is feeling the brunt of the galut needs to be "saved" by Hashem. The tam, though, has merited being "redeemed" - "vegaalti." He cried out to Hashem and thereby deemed himself worthy of a redemption. Finally the last son, the last stage, who has lived to see the final redemption, watches as Hashem "takes" - "velakachti" and makes us His nation once more.

But where do we stand? At what stage are we? Perhaps we need to ask ourselves this question before we recite the Ma Nishtanah. Which question is ours? Do we notice the difference between chametz and matzah - the difference between exile and redemption - even if the distinction now may seem slight? Maybe we can only see the bitter herbs that we're commanded to eat, and long for regular vegetables. Possibly though, we can see the green vegetable that is dipped into the salt water of our tears - and is then taken out and enjoyed. We can see how the bitter herbs of our suffering are dipped into the cooling charoset - maybe the mortar of our future bais hamikdosh. Hopefully we will merit sitting back and witnessing the final redemption G-d willing, as we mimick on Pesach with our reclining.



[5] Devarim 26 (specifically verses 5-8)