

מִקְרָאֵי קֹדֶשׁ

MIKRA'EI KODESH

A Compilation of Pesach
Divrei Torah, Halakhot, and Guidelines



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Editors' Foreword

It is a positive commandment of the Torah to relate the miracles and wonders performed for our ancestors in Egypt on the night of the fifteenth of Nisan, as [Exodus 13:3] states: "Remember this day, on which you left Egypt,"... [The mitzvah applies] even though one does not have a son... When a person does not have a son, his wife should ask him. If he does not have a wife, [he and a colleague] should ask each other: "Why is this night different?" This applies even if they are both wise. A person who is alone should ask himself: "Why is this night different?"

(Mishneh Torah, Hilkhhot Hametz U'Matza - 7: 1-3)

We are happy to present the third issue of the 5th volume of the Mikraei Kodesh series. This project began with the Hanukkah edition 5 years ago, in the fall of 2017. Since then, our community has published a new booklet for every holiday, featuring the relevant halakhot as well as divre torah written by our very own Rabbanim and lay members.

The work of these past four years culminates with the edition that you are holding, which features all the articles on Pesach that have been published in the last four volumes. We have decided to publish this edition in a more permanent fashion, with the hopes that it can live on our bookshelves for years to come.

As the Rambam emphasizes in Hilkhhot Pesach (quoted above) – regardless of one's level of wisdom, regardless of the company he enjoys, a person is required to ask "why is this night different?" We hope that the halakhot and divre torah in this book add to our appreciation and understanding of the depth of Pesach.

**Wishing you a Chag Kasher Sameach -
The Mikraei Kodesh Team.**

Important Note: Please do not discard this publication into a normal trash can. It can be discarded in any of the geniza boxes located in our synagogues. Thank you!

Introductory Remarks

Morenu Nissim Bassalian

As Pesach approaches, Jews all around the world get ready to celebrate the anniversary of freedom from slavery and bondage, to better understand how we, the children of Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov, a tribe of shepherds, became a great nation, and till today remain, and will remain, be'ezrat Hashem, the chosen people of Hashem

I can remember those difficult days of preparation in galut (the Diaspora), when our rabbanim and wise elders were putting every effort to bring a kosher and safe Passover to every Mashadi house. A long process of getting the carefully watched (= 'shemura') wheat changed into flour, baking kosher matzah and distributing them to each family according to their needs, cleaning the houses, while not letting a trace of chametz to remain, and arranging a full Seder in every home. Additionally, all the holiday tefillot were to be in order and on time.

After the brutal attack to our houses on the 12th of Nissan, 1839, three days before Pesach, and again on the second day of Pesach in 1946, Pesach wasn't without fear, yet was still celebrated and observed with full emunah (faith) and dedication. The freedom and glory of today is not achieved cheap and easily. It is because of the heavy price paid by our fathers and mothers, that we are today standing proud and united together. We have to do our share to hand it untouched and unchanged to our next generations. Have a happy and kosher Passover anywhere you may be this Pesach. To you and to all of Am Yisrael – Chag Kasher VeSameach!

Laws of Pesach

The following is based on Rabbi Yosef Bitton's "Pesach Made Simple: A Guide for the Laws of Pesach"

I. The Eight Mitzvot of Pesach

In his introduction to Mishne Torah Hilkhos Pesach, Maimonides lists and describes a total of **eight biblical Mitzvot** related to Pesach. This list does not include the Mitzvot that have to do with the Pesach sacrifice (Korban Pesach).

There are **three** positive commandments and **five** prohibitions related to Pesach.

Three Positive Commandments:

1 - אכילת מצה

The first biblical positive commandment is to eat Matza on the first night of Pesach. In the Diaspora, this obligation automatically extends to include the second night of the holiday. For the rest of Pesach, it is forbidden to eat Chametz, but there is no formal obligation to eat Matza.

2 - והגדת לבנך

The second positive commandment is to tell our children the story of our slavery in Egypt and our miraculous redemption during the first night of Pesach. We do this during the Seder (once in Israel and twice in the diaspora). This story is narrated and explained in the Haggada of Pesach. This Mitzva includes many other Mitzvot and traditions, such as drinking the four cups of wine, eating the maror, etc.

3 - השבתת חמץ

The third positive Mitzva is renouncing the possession of our Chametz on the eve of Pesach that is the 14th of Nisan before noon.

Five Negative Commandments:

4 - איסור אכילת חמץ

The first prohibition is that of eating Chametz during Pesach (the next section defines Chametz). This prohibition also includes se-or, or natural yeast.

איסור אכילת תערובת חמץ - 5

The second prohibition is against eating any food containing Chametz or a combination of Chametz during Pesach. The Gemara mentions as examples of food containing Chametz the *Kutah haBabli*, a type of cottage cheese (cottage= כֹּתָה) which contained bits of bread, and *shekhar haMadi*, an alcoholic beverage made from grain, like beer.

בל יראה - 6

The third prohibition is that of owning Chametz during Pesach. This prohibition takes effect regardless of where the Chametz is found.

בל ימצא - 7

The fourth prohibition is of owning Chametz during Pesach. This and the previous prohibition are in fact identical, there is no difference between them and they apply in exactly the same way. This is an exceptional case in the 613 mitzvot.

איסור אכילת חמץ ערב פסח אחר חצות היום - 8

The fifth prohibition is that of eating Chametz from noon on Pesach eve. The rabbis extended this prohibition to two hours before noon, meaning that Chametz can only be consumed until the end of the fourth hour of the day. It is important to mention that these “hours” are not fixed “60 minutes” hours. They are *shaot zmaniyot*, “daylight hours”, which are obtained by dividing the daylight period of the day, from dawn to dusk, by twelve.

II. What is Chametz?

Out of the eight Mitzvot of Pesach we mentioned, six relate to Chametz. During Pesach we are not allowed to eat, benefit from or own Chametz.

What is Chametz?

Chametz is any fermented substance, solid or liquid, which comes from one of the following five grains: wheat, rye, spelt, barley and oats. These are also the five grains which are generally used to make bread, pastries, cakes, cookies, pizza, pasta, baked products, many candies, and other edibles.

Liquid Chametz

The fermentation process does not only affect products with “flour” that come from these grains. It also affects liquid types of Chametz. Beer for example, is made from barley grains, which are soaked in water to ferment. Beer (like whiskey and many other alcoholic beverages made out of one of these grains) is considered Chametz, although the grain was never converted into flour.

Other Fermented Foods

A fermented food which does not come from or contain any of these five grains does not become Chametz, even if it undergoes a fermentation process. For example, wine goes through a fermentation process, but it is not Chametz since it is made from grapes. The same applies to other alcoholic beverages. For example, sake (known in Japan as “rice wine”), is made from fermented rice and is not Chametz.

Non-fermented Bread: Matza

Finally, not everything that comes from these five grains is Chametz. In fact, Kosher Matza, which is considered a type of bread, should only be made from one of these five grains. Matza is called the “bread of poverty” or **להם עוני**. In English it is called “unleavened bread”.

III. How Do Chametz & Matza Differ?

1. Time

The fundamental difference between bread and Matza is time. Bread and Matza are made with the same basic ingredients: flour and water. The difference is that when preparing Matza, once the flour is mixed with water, the dough cannot be left to rest. The dough must be kneaded and baked in less than 18 minutes. If from the time the flour comes into contact with water it is left idle for 18 minutes or more, the dough undergoes a fermentation process. This fermentation is called in Hebrew “Chimutz”, and the product of this fermentation is called “Chametz”.

2. Water

If the flour made from one of the five grains is mixed exclusively with fruit juice, honey or eggs (without any water) fermentation/ Chimutz will not take place. Technically, if I make a dough by mixing wheat flour with pure fruit juice, and I bake

the dough, this will be called Matza Ashira, “enriched Matza”, and it is not considered Chametz.

3. Se-or

Yeast (Heb: se-or/ שאור) is part of the biblical prohibition of Chametz, even though yeast is not an edible food by itself but an additive. Today we mostly use commercial yeast which is bought in a supermarket and which many of us use mainly to bake Halot for Shabbat. Until a century ago, however, yeast was usually produced at home. How is yeast prepared at home? A mixture of flour and water is mixed and then kept for a period of four days. This mixture becomes sourdough, which smells like alcohol and is known as “natural yeast”. Sourdough is used as the catalyst for the process of fermentation in making home-made bread. In other words, when preparing bread, if we introduce some yeast into a simple dough, the fermentation process accelerates, and the dough grows bigger and spongier, resulting in a soft and tasty bread. All of the restrictions around Chametz regarding its use, possession and benefit, also apply to se-or, natural or commercial yeast.

IV. Rice & Kitniyot

Based on the definition of Chametz, it is clear that rice is not included in its prohibition.

The Talmud records a minority opinion from Rabbi Yohanan ben Nuri (First Century CE), a sage from Eretz Israel, who argued against consuming rice during Pesach. The Gemara also records the case of Rabbah, a famous Amora from Babel, who used to eat rice in the Pesach Seder in front of Rab Huna, perhaps to show that rice is completely allowed in Pesach. The Gemara concludes that rice is not Chametz and that it can be eaten in Pesach (Pesachim 114b).

The Ashkenazi custom, however, is to refrain from consuming rice on Pesach. This is not because Ashkenazi authorities consider rice Chametz but because it is fairly easy to visually confuse rice with wheat, in terms of ears, grains and flour.

Additionally, the fields where rice was harvested used to be near the same fields where wheat or barley was harvested. Because of this, some grains of wheat could be mixed in with rice. As will be discussed below, the prohibition of Chametz during Pesach is so strict that a single grain of wheat would turn a whole plate of rice into Chametz. All these elements contributed to the custom of abstaining from rice on Pesach.

Moreover, until a few decades ago, a century ago, food products were not sold packaged in the shelves of supermarkets or grocery stores. Food was sold in street markets by weight, and the seller would usually use the same pallets, bags, scales and areas to store and sell wheat or barley and rice and all other grains. Under these conditions, it was not uncommon to find grains of wheat which were accidentally mixed with grains of rice.

It is worth noting that prohibiting rice on Pesach is not an exclusive tradition of Ashkenazi Jews. Sephardic Jews are divided on the question of rice. Moroccan Jews and Jews from other North African communities (except Egypt) also avoid consuming rice during Pesach. Generally, Jews from Israel, Iran, Iraq, Syria and other Middle Eastern countries consume rice during Pesach. To avoid the possibility of the accidental presence of a grain of wheat in rice, the custom of Middle Eastern Jewish communities that allow rice on Pesach is to check it carefully three times before using it.

Ashkenazi tradition prohibits the consumption of many other things which are not Chametz such as legumes, beans, corn, etc. These foods are known as **Kitniyot**.

Rabbi Eliezer Melamed, a known Ashkenazi rabbinic authority in Israel and author of the book *Penine Halakha*, points out that although the Ashkenazi custom is to avoid the consumption of Kitniyot products during Pesach, this rule applies when the legumes are or constitute the majority of that food item (see *Mishna Berura* idem, 9). But if the kitniyot are present in a small proportion, and/or if the kitniyot are used as a food additive (like: corn fructose, corn starch, etc.) that food is not forbidden for consumption during Pesach, even for those who refrain from kitniyot during Pesach.

Now, even those who follow the tradition of refraining from consuming rice, corn and other legumes (kitniyot) during Pesach, can keep these products in their possession during Pesach. There is no need to discard or sell these foods before Pesach (*Shulhan Arukh*, Rama, 453:1).

V. Medicine & Non-Edible Chametz

Non-edible Chametz is permitted to own and use during Pesach. This includes any product that is not suitable for human or animal consumption, even if these products may contain Chametz. Examples of non-edible Chametz are: Cosmetics, glue, shampoos, deodorants, soaps, detergents or other cleaning products, etc. In all these cases it is not necessary to ensure an absence of Chametz in these products, nor do

they need to have a special rabbinical seal or certification for Pesach (Rabbi Obadia Yosef, Yalqut Yosef, 360: 31, 361: 68).

For Sephardim, it is also allowed to use drugs and medications that come in the form of non-chewable capsules or hard pills, that is, pills that are swallowed with water. The reason for this is that when a medicine comes in the form of a hard capsule or a non-chewable tablet, it is considered “inedible”. Therefore, even if that medication contains a Chametz element (like wheat starch, which is nowadays highly unlikely - see below), it can be consumed during Pesach (Yalqut Yosef Mo’adim, 362: 40).

Rabbi Eliezer Melamed explains that today many Ashkenazi rabbis follow an Halakhic criterion similar to that of Rabbi Obadia Yosef’s in this area (see Penine Halakha Pesach p. 102, 103). Additionally, on the subject of non-chewable pills Rabbi Melamed makes an important practical observation: nowadays, virtually all medical hard pills are made with potato or corn starch –whose consumption in Pesach would still be allowed even for the Ashkenazi criteria – instead of wheat starch. This is, among other reasons, because wheat protein, gluten, is harmful for those with celiac disease.

It is still advisable, when possible, to ask your doctor to prescribe medication in the form of non-chewable pills for consumption on Pesach. Needless to say, in the case of a serious medical condition, one should take any medication that is necessary.

Stricter Opinions:

Many prominent Ashkenazi halakhic authorities also say that any non-chewable medication should be allowed for Pesach. But in their opinion, vitamins should not be part of this category. According to these opinions, vitamins, even if they come in the form of non-chewable capsules or pills, cannot be used in Pesach unless one verifies that they do not contain Chametz. Some Sephardic Rabbis also agree with this criterion. Many Ashkenazi rabbis also adopt a stricter stance on the use of non-edible Chametz for Pesach (cleaning products or perfumes made from wheat alcohol, for example).

Liquid/Chewable Medicine

Powdered vitamins, food supplements or syrups should have Kosher for Pesach certification to be consumed on Pesach, or one must be absolutely sure that they do not contain any Chametz ingredient in their composition. Bear in mind that many dietary supplements and vitamins are made with elements that are 100% Chametz (eg, grain fibers, wheat germ, etc.).

Rabbis, Ashkenazi and Sepharadic, are also divided on the question of personal hygiene oral products that have a pleasant taste: If they have to be certified Kosher for Pesach. See the UMJCA Pesach List for a more lenient opinion.

VI. Chametz Mixed in Your Food

What is the difference between the prohibition of consuming Chametz and consuming any other non - kosher food? (For example, bread during Pesach vs. a non-kosher meat during the rest of the year).

One of the main differences relates to the percentage of Chametz that when mixed in a food render that food forbidden.

Normally, if a food contains a non-Kosher product in a proportion that is **less than 1/60** of that food, the food is still Kosher. For example: what is the status of a meat stew into which you accidentally drop a few drops of milk? If you assess that the milk that fell into the stew constitutes less than 1/60 of the total stew (less than 1.6%), then the stew is Kosher.

During Pesach, however, **any quantity of Chametz renders the food forbidden**. Even if one small grain of wheat or a little bit of flour falls into a large stew it renders the stew not kosher for Pesach. In other words, even if the Chametz elements are less than 1.6% of the food it renders it all forbidden.

As such, since even a minimal amount of Chametz can cause a large meal to become non-kosher for Pesach, the possibility of “accidental” Chametz contamination during Pesach is very real. Therefore, any meal that is made during Pesach must adhere to strict standards. Hotel and restaurants kosher for Pesach, for instance, make sure not only that all the food’s constitutive elements are Chametz-free but also, that none of the workers involved in food prep are bringing any Chametz to the premises where the food is being processed, etc. Even a small bread crumb that accidentally falls from a worker’s meal can render an entire kosher meal as non-kosher for Pesach.

Exceptions

For Sephardi Jews, the rule that we just mentioned applies in a situation where the Chametz element was mixed into the non-Chametz food **during Pesach**. However, when a food was made **before Pesach**, we go back to the normal Kashrut rule: the

non-Kosher for Pesach element must be present in a quantity above 1.6% to render the food as not Kosher for Pesach.

Before Pesach begins, therefore, we can purchase normal non-Chametz food, even without a specific Kosher or Pesach supervision certificate, and use it for Pesach. Obviously, fresh fruits and vegetables; fresh fish; fresh meat and poultry do not need any special supervision for Pesach. And we can also use during Pesach some simple processed foods like regular tea, pure sugar, regular salt, and many other foods that do not contain any Chametz ingredient in their composition.

In many Sephardic communities Rabbis write a list of common food products, like jams, coffees, potato chips, ketchup, mayonnaise, that were not made under a specific Pesach supervision. Through this list, which is a result of careful research, the community rabbis verify that no Chametz element in a proportion higher than 1.6% was used in the basic composition. Usually, the list would clarify that these products should be bought before Pesach.

All what we just said, it is according to the Sephardic tradition. According to the Ashkenazi custom, however, any food that is to be consumed during Pesach has to be prepared or manufactured under special rabbinical supervision for Pesach, because **even before Pesach**, any amount of Chametz renders that food as non-Kosher for Pesach (chozer ve'neor).

Chametz Machinery

Another major difference between Ashkenazi and Sephardic Halakhic approaches to Pesach concerns food that does not contain a Chametz ingredient in its composition and might have been processed in Chametz machinery. For Ashkenazim such foods are forbidden for Pesach and for Sephardim allowed.

Why? The Sephardic tradition follows the rule “*Noten Taam bar Noten taam DeHetera Mutar Lekhatechila*”. This means that when the (intangible) particles of a prohibited substance are absorbed in the machinery and then these particles get reabsorbed in the non-Chametz food, it results in a kind of a “Chametz cross contamination”. And if that substance was considered Kosher at the time that the absorption took place, since Chametz before Pesach is allowed, the final product is Mutar (permitted).

Because of the strict Biblical prohibition of Chametz, many Jews impose upon themselves extra restrictions or Humrot. It is important to know that these restrictions should be taken as an individual matter (*Iachmir leAtzmo*) and it is

forbidden to teach or instruct people to follow Humrot as if they were the actual Halakha.

This includes, for example, instructing Sephardic Jews to follow restrictions of the Ashkenazi Minhag or vice versa. Rabbi Obadia Yosef (Yechave Daat, Alef, 11) has written extensively about the severity of teaching extra restrictions, especially regarding the Laws of Pesach.

VII. Keeping & Owning Chametz

One of the elements that makes the Biblical prohibition of Chametz so unique is that, unlike any other forbidden foods, we are not allowed to **own** Chametz.

There are three Mitzvot in the Tora related to this prohibition:

1. **בל יראה** “Your Chametz shall not be seen in your property” (Exodus 13:7);
2. **בל ימצא** “Your Chametz shall not be found in your premises” (Exodus 12:19).
3. **השבבת חמץ** “You shall end [ownership of] your Chametz on Pesach eve” (Exodus 12:15).

The Tora sheBe’al pe, the authoritative (halakhic) Jewish tradition, explains that the first two verses, the two prohibitions, are considered one single restriction, that is: “having” or “owning” Chametz during Pesach. It is forbidden to own Chametz, even when that Chametz is not physically in your house or premises.

Maimonides explains this concept in his Mishne Torah: In Chametz u’Matza (4:2) he writes “Chametz [food] belonging to a Jew...even though it is buried, or located in another city, or is entrusted to a gentile, causes him to violate [the commandments]: “[Chametz] shall not be seen” and “[hamets] shall not be found.”

We also have a third Mitzva called “tashbitu” which our oral tradition interprets as actively disowning our Chametz before Pesach begins.

In sum, there are two identical prohibitions (a unique case in the Tora) and one affirmative commandment, virtually for the same matter: **the prohibition of owning Chametz** during Pesach.

Strictly speaking, (and following Maimonides’ opinion) these three Mitzvot would be fulfilled at once by performing one single act: the **‘bitul Chametz’**: verbally and

wholeheartedly renouncing the ownership of any Chametz that belongs to us, regardless of where that Chametz is located.

By declaring the Chametz ownerless, one fulfills the Mitzva of not owning Chametz and avoids transgressing two prohibitions. This is even if - accidentally - we have kept Chametz in our premises.

Why, then, can't we just declare all our Chametz ownerless through the 'bitul', and keep Chametz at our homes? Why do we still have to search and remove it from our homes? Our Rabbis in the Mishna instructed us to physically get rid of all our Chametz before Pesach begins, and to renounce the ownership of any Chametz we might still have and have not found ("bitul Chametz"). This is because there are some practical complications with just "declaring" our Chametz ownerless while keeping it at home.

First, if we possess valuable Chametz, such as expensive whiskey, we might not mean wholeheartedly that we renounce its possession. Secondly, Chametz is the most common food. So even if we declare our Chametz ownerless, while keeping it at home, we might end up consuming Chametz accidentally.

Following the Rabbis' instructions this is what we actually do:

(1) We should clean our home, cars, offices and any other properties before Pesach to **identify and remove** all Chametz from them.

(2) We run a **final and formal search** of all our properties to make sure that we have removed everything Chametz from them (Bediqat Chametz, the night before Pesach).

(3) We **physically dispose** of or get rid of any Chametz found in our properties before and during the search (Bi-ur Chametz). There are many ways to dispose of our Chametz: We can give our Chametz as a gift or charity to a non-Jew; or if we have bread leftovers, for example, we can throw it to the birds or to fish, or burn it or dispose of it in a garbage outside our premises.

(4) Then, after we get rid of our Chametz, we **recite the kal hamira** — that is the formal Bitul Chametz- saying: "whatever Chametz we may still own anywhere, which was not detected during the bediqa and/or was not removed by us, does not belong to us anymore, and from now on it should be considered ownerless (hefker) as the dust of the earth."

VIII. Selling Chametz

In general, you only have to get rid of Chametz which is suitable for human or animal consumption. In terms of food items, one can keep anything so long as one makes sure that it does not contain any of these five grains: wheat, barley, oats, rye, spelt (note that anything which contains gluten, is Chametz).

You do not need to sell your pots and pans, or anything that might contain “invisible” Chametz (Chametz balua’). Just put those utensils away during Pesach. Medical pills, perfumes, cosmetics or any non-edible items could be kept, regardless of their composition. Nowadays, most communities, Ashkenazi and Sephardic, arrange a Chametz-selling system in which community members give their rabbi a power of attorney to sell their Chametz. This procedure is a Halakhic leniency done in order to avoid the loss of expensive Chametz items like expensive whiskeys, etc.

Historically, Sephardic Jews did not practice a mekhirat Chametz (=selling of Chametz) procedure. They simply got rid of their Chametz before Pesach. The only exceptional case in which Sephardic rabbis authorized selling the Chametz was the case of a food-store owner, to avoid a very significant loss. In this case, a non-Jew would make a down payment for the total of the merchandise and from the moment the non-Jew made that payment, the Chametz merchandise would belong completely to the buyer.

IX. A Simple Guide to Making Your Kitchen Kosher for Pesach

During Pesach we do not use the same utensils or the same dishes we use throughout the year for Chametz. Although the utensils in which we cook might be completely clean of Chametz, without any visible remaining food, the surface’s pores of these utensils absorb the flavor of the foods cooked in them. For example: if I cook meat and then in the same pot (even after I clean it) I boil eggs, the eggs would absorb some of the taste of the meat. Likewise, when we cook something in utensils used for cooking Chametz, some Chametz flavor will be reabsorbed in the food we prepare for or during Pesach.

It is customary and recommended, therefore, to have a set of dishes, plates and utensils to be used exclusively for Pesach.

When this is not possible, and especially this year under our extraordinary circumstances, we might use for Pesach the same utensils we utilize throughout the year for Chametz, after they go through a process known as hag’ala, (a kind of

sterilization) to remove non visible residual Chametz that may be absorbed within the walls and pores of these utensils.

Before making the Hag'ala we need to make sure that those utensils are thoroughly cleaned of any visible of Chametz (חמץ בעין). The Hag'ala then ejects the Chametz absorbed (בלוע) in the walls of the utensil. Eliminating these adsorbed particles takes place under the same conditions the absorption of these substances occurred (כבולעו). The pores of a metallic surface open up when exposed to heat, and that is when absorption occurs. Consequently, the expulsion of these particles would also occur by exposing these utensils to heat.

Now, when a utensil is used throughout the year to serve or prepare cold Chametz food, it can be used during Pesach after cleaning it thoroughly from any visible rests of Chametz. These utensils don't need to undergo the Hag'ala process since absorption of Hamatez only takes place at high temperatures. Examples of these types of utensils are: plastic cups and containers, and trays that are used mainly (רוב שימוש) to serve cold food. One should not do Hagala for meat and dairy utensils together. They should be done at separate times.

Examples of hag'ala:

Metal: For metal cutlery such as spoons, forks, or knives, it is preferable to purchase a separate set of utensils for Pesach. If that isn't an option, then:

Spoons & Ladles: must be first cleaned of all visible residue of Chametz. Then, they must be immersed in a pot of boiling water. Then we wash them with cold water, and they may be used for Pesach. Hot water opens the metal pores, allowing the ejection of any absorbed Chametz. The cold water closes the pores again.

Forks: Forks are difficult to kasher, and therefore it is best to purchase separate forks for Pesach. If one would like to kasher forks with Hagala, one must be careful to clean very well between the tines to make sure there is no residue before kashering with Hagala.

Knives: Only knives with metal handles that are the same material as the knife can be kashered. If the knife has a handle of different material such as a hard plastic handle or a wooden handle, the knife cannot be kashered.

Glass: According to the Sephardic tradition, glassware, cups, plates, etc, used throughout the year for Chametz, should be washed thoroughly and can be used for Pesach without having to undergo the Hag'ala process. Glass is sterile, and it does

not absorb any food substance through its pores, and therefore there is no Chametz to remove from its walls. This applies even for those glass utensils that are used at high temperatures for cooking or serving hot Chametz food.

Notice that this Halakha is very different in the Ashkenazi tradition. Some Ashkenazi rabbis like the Rama say that since glass is made from sand, glass utensils should be regarded as clay utensils, which are not susceptible to Hag'ala, and therefore cannot be used on Pesach because Hag'ala is useless for them. Other Ashkenazi Rabbis allow a Hag'ala process for glassware. Consult your community Rabbi.

Clay utensils, pottery and porcelain (Kele Heres): If these items were used for Chametz, they cannot be used for Pesach, because they are not susceptible to Hag'ala. The Rabbis explained that unlike metal or other utensils, clay utensils eliminate the substances absorbed in their walls in an erratic and inconsistent way. That is, sometimes they would expel an absorbed flavor and sometimes they will not. Because we cannot rely on the Hag'ala process to sterilize these types of utensils completely, they cannot be used for Pesach.

Most contemporary rabbis believe that regular porcelain utensils should be considered of the same category as clay utensils. However, there are many other considerations to take into account which can allow for exceptions to this. Some factors which might indicate a more lenient opinion in time of need are: whether these utensils were used for cooking or for serving food; the temperature of the food served; whether the china was not used for a long time; whether it is common porcelain or glass coated, etc.

If you have further questions about this and other types of utensils that are mentioned in this brief section, please consult your community rabbi.

Sink and countertops: The sink, metal or porcelain, should be cleaned of any food residue and then pouring on it boiling water. Countertops and tables, if possible, should be cleaned and have boiling water poured on them. If pouring hot water is not possible because of the material they are made of (a wood table or countertop, for example) they should be cleaned and covered for Pesach. If you are using a regular table, clean it carefully and then place on it a Pesach or a new tablecloth.

Dishwasher: Preferably, the dishwasher machine should be cleaned well (including the grease trap) and the racks should be replaced for Pesach. If it is difficult to replace the racks, one may clean and wipe down the dishwasher as much as possible (including the grease trap). Then wait 24 hours and run two empty cycles with soap.

Oven: The oven should be cleaned thoroughly and then not be used for 24 hours. If it is a self-cleaning oven, it should go through one self-clean cycle, and then it becomes Kosher for Pesach. If the oven does not have a self-cleaning feature, after it is thoroughly cleaned it should run on its highest temperature setting for one hour (including the oven racks). Following this the oven is Kosher for Pesach.

Microwave: Fill a microwave-safe bowl with water and some detergent. Insert it in the microwave and turn it on until the microwave walls are filled with its steam. The vapor penetrates the walls rendering the microwave Kosher for Pesach. A microwave that is also used as a convection oven to bake foods should be kashered in the same manner as a regular oven.

X. Erev Pesach - Bedikat Chametz (Searching for Chametz)

As we've explained, one of the biblical prohibitions of Pesach is to own Chametz. To prevent this, we clean our houses and other properties (car, office, etc) before Pesach and remove any Chametz found. Then, the night before Pesach, when the first stars come out (**this year, 2022, Thursday April 14th, at approximately 8.15pm**) we do the Bedikat Chametz. Bedikat Chametz is a formal search of our properties to look for any Chametz food that might have been left inadvertently.

How do we do the Bedikat Chametz? Customarily, we hold a candle or a flashlight and we search every place where we could have brought, eaten or stored food. We should pay special notice in our search to the kitchen and all food storage spaces, such as the pantry, refrigerator, freezer, etc. Remember that our mission is to look for "Chametz food": sweets, wafers, cookies, pastries, frozen foods, fiber drinks, cereals, and alcoholic drinks made from grain (beer, whiskey, most vodkas, etc).

Before beginning the search, we say this berakha:

**בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו
וְצִוָּנוּ עַל בִּיעוּר חָמֶץ**

"Barukh Ata A- donay, E-lohenu Melekh ha'Olam Asher Quiddeshanu beMitSvotav veTsivanu Al Bi'ur Hamets"

Then we say the first Kal Hamira, the formula to formally and legally renounce the possession of any Chametz that belongs to us and we have not found in the Bedika. The text (for Sephardic Jews) is as follows:

כָּל חֲמִירָא דְאִיכָא בְרִשּׁוּתִי, דְּלֹא חֲמֵתִיה, וְדִלָּא בְעֵרְתִּיהּ,
וְדִלָּא יִדְעָנָא לִיהּ, לְבָטֵל וְלֹהוּי כְּעֶפְרָא דְאַרְעָא.

“Kal Hamira Deika Birshuti, Dela Haziteh Vedela Biarteh, Libtil Veleheve Hafquer Ke’afra Dear’a.”

“All Chametz or leavening substance that belongs to me, that I have not seen or eliminated, should be considered ownerless as the dust of the earth”

At the end of the bedika we keep in a safe place the Chametz that we are going to consume or discard the next morning.

What happens if you spend Pesach out of town?

When one spends Pesach away, the searching for *Chametz* at home should be done the night before leaving home. This early Bedikat Chametz should be done without reciting any blessing. Upon arriving at your new Pesach residence (usually, your hotel room), you should search for Chametz once again, on Thursday, April 14th at nightfall. For this second search you should recite the blessing “...*asher qiddeshanu bemisvotav vesivanu 'al bi'ur hames.*” You should search for Chametz in your room (even if it is clean), your suitcases, your bags, making sure to go carefully through any snacks in your room, or those you might have brought, etc. In a hotel room, we recommend using only a flashlight for the search.

XI. Erev Pesach - Ta'anit Bekhorot (Fast of the Firstborn)

On the eve of Pesach, which falls out on **Friday, April 15th** in the morning, we will observe the fast of the firstborn. Firstborn men who are in good health should fast as a recognition of the protection of HaShem, who guarded the Jewish firstborn when all the firstborn of Egypt died. Since this is not a mandatory fast (it was not promulgated by the Tora or by the Rabbis of the Gemara), many avoid it by participating in a festive religious ceremony (for example a Berit Mila or a Pidion). Since these occasions cannot be anticipated, it is customary for communities to organize a Siyum Masekhet, a conclusion of a Talmudic treatise, Mishna or Gemara. This *siyum* is considered a festive event and meritorious enough to avoid this fast. After participating in this *siyum* the first-born may eat on the eve of Pesach.

XII. Erev Pesach – Biur Chametz (Getting Rid of Chametz)

On the morning of Passover eve (**Friday April 15th**), we are permitted to eat Chametz until the fourth hour of the day (**in the Mashadi community in Great Neck we set this time every year at 10:00 a.m.**). Once we finish eating our Chametz, we collect any leftovers and combine it with any Chametz found during the previous night's Bedika. Next, we proceed to “eliminate” it. The traditional way of disposing of the Chametz is by burning it. But this can also be done by throwing the Chametz to the birds or to the fish, or disposing it in a garbage bin outside our home.

After we disposed of the Chametz we proceed to verbalize its last annulment, a more detailed declaration:

**כָּל חֲמִירָא דְאִיפָא בְּרִשּׁוּתִי, דְּחִזִּיתִיה וְדָלָא חֲזִיתִיה,
דְּבַעֲרִיתִיה וְדָלָא בְּעֲרִיתִיה, לְבָטִיל וְלִהְיוּ כְּעָפָרָא דְאַרְעָא**

“Kal Hamira Deika Birshuti, Dehaziteh Vedela Haziteh, Debiarteh Vedela Biarteh, Libtil Veleheve Hafqer Keafra Dear’a”

“Any Chametz or leavening substance that belongs to me, that I have seen or have not seen, that I have eliminated or that I did not remove, should be considered without owner as the dust of the earth”.

The elimination of Chametz and the verbalization of this declaration must be done before the fifth hour of the day (**in the Mashadi community in Great Neck we set this time every year at 11:00 AM**).

XIII. The Pesach Seder – Step by Step

KADESH

We start the Seder by consecrating the Holiday of Pesach and inaugurating it through the Kiddush. Upon concluding the Kiddush and the blessing of Shehecheyanu everyone drinks their first cup of wine, while reclining towards their left side. Throughout the Seder we have to drink four cups of wine. Each cup symbolizes a sort of “Lechayim” parallel to the four expressions that the Tora used to describe the unfolding of our freedom from Egypt. If one cannot drink wine or diluted wine, grape juice can be used instead.

U'RCHATZ

We wash our hands without saying any Berakha. This is in order to eat the Karpas, which is dipped in vinegar or salted water. In ancient times it was very common to have an aperitif (celery or another vegetable) before the meal to induce the appetite. Our sages instruct us to dip the karpas twice during the Seder to stir the curiosity of the children and stimulate their questions. These questions are integrated into the famous text: *Ma Nishtana*. The first question refers to the dipping of the Karpas.

KARPAS

We take a small piece of Karpas, (celery) and we dip it in salt water or vinegar to remind us of the tears our ancestors shed in captivity. Before eating the Karpas we recite the blessing for vegetables, *Bore Peri haAdama*. As we have explained all these deviances from the ordinary dining habits are deliberate and focused toward one single goal: to motivate the children to ask questions in order to ensure their active participation during the Seder.

YACHATZ

We take the middle Matza from the three Matzot on the table and split it into two unequal parts. The smallest portion is returned to its place, between the two whole Matzot, and the biggest portion is kept for the Afikoman.

MAGGID

Now we start to recite the Hagada, the story of our foreparents' enslavement in Egypt and their miraculous redemption. It is recommended to translate and explain the Hagada in English if Hebrew is not understood by all. Several people can participate in the reading of the Hagada. The most important thing is to encourage the children's participation; they are the true protagonists of this night. The questions of "Ma Nishtana"; the symbolism of the four sons; the songs of Had Gadya and Echad Mi Yodea': all these elements of the Seder are directed to the youngest participants. **The Seder should not become an adult's monologue but rather an intergenerational dialogue.**

The purpose of the Hagada reading is not to recite a text as if we were saying some kind of a prayer. If we do not make the meaning of what we are reading understood, the educational message of the Hagada is lost. Parents should feel that we are transmitting the keys for Jewish continuity to our children on this night.

After finishing the Hagada, we drink the second cup of wine reclined on our left, without saying any additional Berakha.

ROCHTZA

We wash our hands in the traditional way, pouring water on the right hand and then on the left hand. Before we dry our hands, we recite the blessing *Al Netilat Yadayim*. This washing is not merely for hygienic purposes. *Netilat Yadayim* means: the elevation of the hands. Through this Mitzvah our hands and the food they touch acquire a spiritual dimension that elevates them.

MOTZI MATZA

We take now the three Matzot – the two whole Matzot and the broken one in the middle – and we recite the blessing: *baMotzi Lechem Min haAretz*. Then, we place down the bottom Matza and, holding the one and a half upper Matzot we pronounce the Berakha: *Al Akhilat Matza*.

We use now the broken Matza because the Matza is *Lechem Oni*, the bread of the poor, and a poor person usually eats pieces of food. After the Berakha is said everyone should eat Matza, leaning to the left. For the first two nights we use “Matza Shemura”

MAROR

We take a portion of Maror, the bitter vegetable, usually lettuce. We dip the Maror in the Charoset (Haligh), and before eating it say the blessing *Al Akhilat Maror*. The Maror reminds us of the bitterness of our slavery in Egypt, and the Charoset resembles the bricks we had to make from mud and straw in our forced labor.

Remembering our suffering in Egypt stimulates our sensitivity toward other human beings that live in oppression. The Tora commands us to be sensitive to people in pain, since we have experienced it in our own flesh: “*And you shall love the stranger* (the paradigm of the oppressed) *for strangers you have been in the land of Egypt*” (Shemot 22, 20). No one understands suffering better than the one who has experienced it.

KORECH

We take the third Matza and we make a sandwich with Maror and Charoset inside. We eat it leaning on the left. This food is in remembrance of the Pesach sacrifice that used to be eaten in the Bet haMikdash in Jerusalem, together with Matza

and Maror. That is why before eating it we say: *Zekher laMikdash keHillel*, etc, this is a remembrance of the Temple's service.

SHULCHAN OREKH

Now it is time for the dinner of Pesach. We should make every possible effort to create an environment of harmony, joy, and thanksgiving to the Almighty for our liberation from Egypt. We ought to be aware that parents are planting in their children's little hearts the seed of faith in the Almighty and the pride of belonging to the Jewish nation. Tonight we, the adults, must become teachers of Jewish history, knowing that it's up to us to transmit the memories of our past to the future generations.

TZAFUN

After finishing the meal, we eat the Afikoman dessert (or after meal), leaning on our left. This is the Matza we saved from the beginning of the Seder (see Yachatz). The Afikoman remind us of the sacrifice of Pesach that used to be eaten at the end of the Seder, as a kind of a dessert, when everyone was already satisfied. It is a tradition for the children to search for the Afikoman, hidden at the beginning of the Seder, and it is customary to give a present to the child that finds it. In this way, children will want to stay awake until the end of the Seder.

BAREKH

After finishing the Afikoman, we recite the *Birkat HaMazon*, the blessing after the meal in which we thank God for the food we just had. In this blessing we acknowledge The Almighty who sustains every living creature, we thank Him for the land of Israel that He bestowed us, and we ask Him to quicken our redemption and the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem.

Upon concluding Birkat HaMazon, we drink the third cup of wine, leaning to the left, and reciting the berakha *Bore Peri haGefen*.

HALLEL

Lastly, and to bring the Seder to its conclusion, we read a series of Psalms and songs of praise to God, known as Hallel. We thank the Almighty for having been our Protector throughout our history and for saving us from the hands of all the tyrants that pursue our annihilation. As in every other Tefila, it would be useful to have a translation available to understand and better concentrate on the meaning of what

we are saying. At the end of the Hallel we drink the last of the four cups of wine, leaning to the left, without saying Bore Peri haGefen.

NIRTZAH

We end with the eternal Jewish wish to be “Next year in Yerushalayim!”

XIV. FAQ

The following are some of the questions I received in previous years. I hope the answers will shed some light onto things that were not discussed at length in the Guide for Pesach.

Q: Am I allowed to use the tablecloths and dish towels that I usually use during the year after I wash them or it is better to use new ones?

A: You can use them after washing them.

Q: In the Pesach Guide you said that we can use our glass dishes for Passover after we wash them thoroughly. Are we allowed to use all kinds of glass even if they have cuttings on them like crystal (glasses that don't have a smooth surface on them)?

A: If they are thoroughly washed, you are allowed to use them because there is no absorption/expulsion of any Chametz particles at the level of glass walls.

Q: If our domestic worker has Chametz in her room for herself is that OK?

A: We should instruct all people who work at our house or office not to bring anything Chametz during Pesach. Now, if the housekeeper or any of your employees brings something anyway, despite your warning and without your knowledge you are not accountable for it and you are not liable for the transgression of possessing Chametz during Pesach, because, although the Chametz is located in your premises it does not belong to you. Still, you have to be very careful that not leftovers of their Chametz food will be in contact with any of your food.

Q: Can Saffron be used for Pesach?

A: Pereg Saffron (Israel) can be used for Pesach, even without the Kosher for Passover sticker. Any other pure 100% Saffron, like Spanish and Persian Saffron, could also be used.

Q: Bottled water that we use with a water dispenser is OK to use for Pesach?

A: Yes, any mineral water is OK for pesach. Clean the dispenser thoroughly.

Q. At the moment of bedikat Chametz, are we allowed to talk between saying the Berakha "al biur Chametz" until doing the search and burning the bread?

A: Talking is allowed between the Berakha AL BIUR CHAMETZ and the BITUL (KAL CHAMIRA etc) only if you need to say something related or needed for the Bedika.

Q: I understand it's best to have wine for the Seder night, and if someone is diabetic, they can dilute it with water. I wanted to know how much of the cup has to be wine and how much can be water?

A: More than half of the cup should be wine. Make sure the wine you use is 100% wine and does not already have any added water (Some wines are made with a lot of added water!)

Q: Would someone who just had a baby boy have to fast for their first-born son on Erev Pesach?

A: According to the Minhag in our community, the father needs to fast for his first-born son.

Q: I'm a female firstborn, what does the Halakha say I should do for Taanit Bekhorot? I heard the first born is not supposed to eat Chametz, but I am not sure if that is for girls as well as guys.

A: In our community, the fast known as Taanit Bekhorot is only customary for first-born males, not females. Yet, many families in our community have the tradition that males – after they break the fast – and first-born females, do not eat Chametz during Erev Pesach.

XV. The Pesach Seder: How Much Do I Eat?

Compiled by Eliyahu Ebrani

Brand	Kezayit Matsah
Average	
Handmade	1/4
Machine	1/3
Elite Shmura	1/4
Haredim	2/5
Papau Tseleim	1/5
Yehuda Machine	1/3
Geula Machine	1/3
Jerusalem Machine	2/5
Soft Yemenite	1/8

Seder	Number of Kezayits of Matsah
Motsi/Matsah	2
Korech	1
Tsafun/Afikoman	1

Maror	Kezayit	
Romaine Lettuce	1-2 Large Leaves	3-4 Medium Leaves
Endives	½ Endive or 4 Leaves	

The Wise & the Wicked

Adapted from the lectures of Rabbi Eliyahu Ben Haim

The Haggadah famously describes to us the 4 different types of sons that we have at the Pesach Seder – the wise, the wicked, the simple, and the one who doesn't know how to ask. In describing the wise son and the wicked son, the Haggadah says:

חֲכָם מָה הוּא אוֹמֵר! מָה הָעֲדוּת וְהַחֲקִים וְהַמִּשְׁפָּטִים אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ אֲתָכֶם.
וְאִם אֶתָּה אָמֹר לוֹ בְּהִלְכוֹת הַפֶּסַח: אֵין מִפְּטוּרִין אַחֵר הַפֶּסַח אֶפְיוֹמָן

What does the wise [son] say? "What are these testimonies, statutes and judgments that the Lord our God commanded you?" (Deuteronomy 6:20)" And accordingly you will say to him, as per the laws of the Pesach sacrifice, "We may not eat an afikoman [a dessert or other foods eaten after the meal] after [we are finished eating] the Pesach sacrifice. (Mishnah Pesachim 10:8)"

רָשָׁע מָה הוּא אוֹמֵר! מָה הָעֲבוֹדָה הַזֹּאת לָכֶם. לָכֶם – וְלֹא לוֹ. וְלִפִּי שְׁהוֹצִיא אֶת עַצְמוֹ
מִן הַכָּלל כְּפָר בַּעֲקָר. וְאִם אֶתָּה הַקָּהָה אֶת שְׁנָיו וְאָמֹר לוֹ: "בַּעֲבוּר זֶה עָשָׂה ה' לִי
בְּצִאתִי מִמִּצְרַיִם." לִי וְלֹא לוֹ. אֱלֹו הִזָּה שָׁם, לֹא הִזָּה נִגָּאֵל

What does the evil [son] say? "What is this worship to you?" (Exodus 12:26)" 'To you' and not 'to him.' And since he excluded himself from the collective, he denied a principle [of the Jewish faith]. And accordingly, you will blunt his teeth and say to him, "For the sake of this, did the Lord do [this] for me in my going out of Egypt" (Exodus 13:8)." 'For me' and not 'for him.' If he had been there, he would not have been saved.

The Rabbis ask the following question: The wise and the wicked son both use similar language. The wicked son asks “what is this worship to you (לָכֶם)”, while the wise son asks “what are these testimonies, statutes and judgments that the Lord our God commanded you (אֲתָכֶם)? The wise son uses the language of “you,” yet, we come down very hard on the wicked son for doing the very same thing! Why?

The Rabbis offer a beautiful answer. It's one thing for a person to ask questions with a sincere desire to learn and understand – that is what the wise son does. He asks about the laws and the practices that we are performing. The wicked son, however, is not asking to learn about our laws or our practices - he uses the word “work.” He refers to the Torah as a difficult burden. By asking “what is this work that you are doing,” he is essentially mocking us for taking this difficult burden on ourselves.

The Dubner Maggid tells over a beautiful mashal to illustrate this point. He says there was once a man who stayed at an inn. He asked the bellboy to take his luggage upstairs to his room. When he met the bellboy there, he saw that the bellboy was huffing and puffing after dragging his heavy luggage up the stairs. The bellboy then went over and asked the man for a tip. The man responds "I am not giving you any tip. The fact that you are huffing and puffing shows that you brought the wrong bag. The bag you brought is not mine, because I know that mine is not heavy."

Shlomo HaMelekh describes the Torah in Mishle:

דרכיה דרכי נועם וכל נתיבותיה שלום

"Its ways are ways of pleasantness, and all its pathways are peace"
(Proverbs 3:17).

The Torah that Hashem gave us - if observed the proper way - is not meant to make our lives difficult. The opposite is true! The Torah is meant to make our lives more enjoyable and pleasant. If a person treats the Torah as too difficult and like a burden - Hashem says "that's not my luggage" - we know that there is a problem. And this is why we criticize the wicked son.

We should take this lesson with us into Pesach. We should learn from the wise son to always ask questions in order to learn Torah and enrich our lives, because that is why Hashem gave it to us. Chag Sameach!

The Four Sons

Adapted from the lectures of Rabbi Eliyahu Ben-Haim

On the first night of Pesach, we have a mitzvah to tell over to our children the story of Yitziat Mitzrayim - the exodus from Egypt – and the miracles Hashem performed for our ancestors.

מִצְוַת עֲשֵׂה שֶׁל תּוֹרָה לְסַפֵּר בְּנִסִּים וְנִפְלְאוֹת שֶׁנַּעֲשׂוּ לְאַבוֹתֵינוּ בְּמִצְרַיִם בְּלֵיל חֲמִשָּׁה
עָשָׂר בְּנִיסָן שְׁנֵי־מָר "זְכוֹר אֶת הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר יָצָאתָ מִמִּצְרַיִם..." "וּמִנּוּן שֶׁבְּלֵיל
חֲמִשָּׁה עָשָׂר תִּלְמֹד לומר "וְהִגַּדְתָּ לְבִנְךָ בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא לֵאמֹר בַּעֲבוּר זֶה

It is a positive commandment of the Torah to relate the miracles and wonders wrought for our ancestors in Egypt on the night of the fifteenth of Nisan, as [Exodus 13:3] states: "Remember this day, on which you left Egypt" ...from where [is it derived that this mitzvah is to be fulfilled on] the night of the fifteenth? The Torah teaches [Exodus 13:8]: "And you shall tell your son on that day, saying: 'It is because of this'..." (MT Hametz U'Matza 7:1)

The Torah records the commandment to tell over the Pesach story four times, in four different places, each time in a different style:

כִּי-יִשְׁאַלְךָ בֶּנְךָ מָחָר, לֵאמֹר: מָה הָעֲדוֹת, וְהַחֲקִים וְהַמִּשְׁפָּטִים, אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְהוָה
אֱלֹהֵינוּ, אֲתָכֶם

When, in time to come, your children ask you, "What mean the decrees, laws, and rules that the LORD our God has enjoined upon you?" (Devarim 6:20)

וְהִנֵּה, כִּי יֹאמְרוּ אֲלֵיכֶם בְּנֵיכֶם: מָה הָעֲבֹדָה הַזֹּאת לָכֶם

And when your children ask you, 'What do you mean by this rite?' (Shemot 12:26)

וְהִנֵּה כִּי-יִשְׁאַלְךָ בֶּנְךָ, מָחָר--לֵאמֹר מַה-זֹּאת

And when, in time to come, your son asks you, saying, 'What does this mean?' (Shemot 13:14)

וְהִגַּדְתָּ לְבִנְךָ, בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא לֵאמֹר: בַּעֲבוּר זֶה, עָשָׂה יְהוָה לִי, בְּצֵאתִי, מִמִּצְרַיִם

And you shall explain to your son on that day, 'It is because of what the LORD did for me when I went free from Egypt.' (Shemot 13:8)

Our Sages teach us that these four instances represent four different types of sons:

כנגד ארבעה בנים דיברה תורה בן חכם בן רשע בן טיפש בן שאינו יודע לשאול.

*Corresponding to four sons did the Torah speak: one who is wise, one who is wicked, one who is simple, and one who doesn't know to ask.
(Yerushalmi Peschim 70b)*

Each of these four sons asks a different question, relates to his Jewish heritage in a different way, and warrants his own unique response from his father:

מִצְוָה לְהוֹדִיעַ לְבָנִים וְאֶפְלוּ לֹא שְׁאַלוּ שְׁנֹאמַר "וְהִגַּדְתָּ לְבִנְךָ" - לְפִי דַעְתּוֹ שֶׁל בֶּן אָבִיו מִלְמַדוֹ

It is a mitzvah to inform one's sons even though they do not ask, as [Exodus 13:8] states: "You shall tell your son." A father should teach his son according to the son's knowledge. (MT Hametz U'Matza 7:2)

Our Sages are teaching us an important lesson in Jewish education. Each child is a unique creation of Hashem that learns in his own unique way, and should be taught accordingly.

When we look at the order that the four sons are listed in - "wise, wicked, simple, and one who doesn't know to ask" - a question arises. Why isn't the wicked son listed last? By what merit is he listed ahead of the simple son and the one who doesn't know to ask?

The order our Sages listed the sons in was deliberate, and they are teaching us another important lesson. A wicked son who asks good questions is preferable to one who can't ask good questions, or one who can't ask at all. When a child has a hostile attitude to Judaism but is still asking questions, it shows that the child is still interested and has the capacity to learn, but just needs to be shown the right path.

Let us take this lesson to heart and use this Pesach for the strong educational tool it is, to teach our children of our rich history and the wondrous miracles our ancestors experienced in Egypt, and how Hashem's providence still protects us today.

Chag Sameach to all!

Hametz: A Lesson in Humility

Rabbi Yosef Bitton

Take wheat flour. Mix it with water. Leave the dough to rest. After a few minutes you will notice that the dough has begun to rise and swell. This phenomenon is called "himutz" in Hebrew, that is to say, leavening. The leavened dough is called hametz.

During Pesach, Jews are strictly forbidden to eat any food that is or contains hametz. Why? Beyond the well-known historical reason, our Rabbis saw in hametz a very meaningful symbol: In the Talmud, the Hakhamim compared hametz with arrogance and vanity. Our Rabbis saw the dough that rises by itself as a representation of the individual that lets his own ego expand. Just as the dough naturally swells without anything added to its contents, the arrogant person elevates himself without any true basis for doing so. Both arrogance and hametz are mere air, an illusionary inflation of the self!

But not every person is exposed to the threat of arrogance. A Jewish slave in Egypt, for example, did not have the luxury to be at risk of being arrogant. Self-pride is only relevant if you are a free man. Modern society, in its relentless efforts to turn us into good consumers, contributes a great deal to the feeding of our pride. It trains us in being more egocentric and hedonistic and to think that we should have everything we want as long as we are able to afford it. And when someone has all of what he wishes, he possesses a power that can easily deteriorate into arrogance.

Pesach is an intensive lesson in humility. In the same way we take care to eliminate every crumb of hametz from our homes, we should make every possible effort to erase every trace of self-centeredness from our hearts.

What is humility? The Matza – a flat, thin and unpretentious bread – represents selfless humility. To have humility does not mean to degrade or humiliate ourselves. Humility means that we should assume our true dimension in life by becoming aware of our narrow space and brief momentum in this world. Humility means to know our limits and to recognize that we are totally dependent on God. To remind ourselves that He is the One who has given us everything we have.

Humility is also the essence of a healthy self-esteem, and a condition for being in peace with oneself. The arrogant individual is insecure and needs to seek the approval of the others – sometimes desperately – in order to compensate for his low self-esteem. He is in permanent need of public praise. Only the humble one – the one that does not need other people's approval to make him feel better – is truly free. He

is able to change and constantly improve himself. The arrogant is constantly adapting himself to his own shortcomings; hence, all that he does is perfect in his own eyes. Such a person denies to himself the freedom of making mistakes and recognizing the need to change. For him, there will always be a good excuse to justify misbehavior.

There will always be a justification in order to avoid admitting that he was wrong. Arrogance is a Pharaoh that tyrannizes our lives, condemning our personality to stagnation. The arrogant individual is egocentric; a slave of his own interests and when he cares for others, it is only because of a self-motivated reason. Humility means also to recall that in our fellow man there is a human being equal to us who deserves dignity and respect, and has the right to be listened to.

Humility teaches us that our place concerning our Creator: This world is a grain of sand in the infinite universe, and a human being, a grain of sand in this enormous land. Arrogance is the main barrier between man and God: The arrogant human being cannot tolerate the presence of The One who teaches him "what he should do with his life". Arrogance is a layer of silver behind a glass: it only mirrors our own image. It does not allow us to look beyond our own interests.

During Pesach, we commemorate our freedom from physical slavery, bearing in mind that we, as free individuals, could easily fall prey to a different kind of slavery, mental self-enslavement, a sort of addiction to the inflatable aspects of the self. During Pesach, to celebrate freedom, we realize the need to get rid of every particle of that "spiritual hametz" from our lives.

Pesach in the Bet HaMiqdash

Rabbi Yosef Bitton

Pesach was a very happy and intense holiday in the times of the Bet-haMiqdash. Hundreds of thousands of Jews would walk to Yerushalayim from all towns of Israel, ready to make the qorban Pesach (a lamb which was sacrificed in the afternoon, roasted and consumed at night).

Those who came from outside of Yerushalayim were staying with relatives or acquaintances, or many times, at a stranger's home. In general, all houses in Yerushalayim were open for all who needed a place to stay, and when there was no more room available, a red cloth would be hanging above the door.

People gathered in family groups called "Haburot" (singular "Habura"). Each Habura, which could consist of 50, 60 and up to 100 people, shared one qorban. The lamb was taken the evening of 14 Nisan to the Bet haMiqdash by one or two representatives from each Habura, and was sacrificed there. Then the animal was roasted in one piece. At night, 15th Nisan, people would have the Seder, much like we have it today. They read the Haggadah, the Ma Nishtana questions were asked, a lot of food was served, including other qorbanot as Hagiga, and all accompanied, of course, by Matsa and maror. People sat reclined on cushions and pillows, like noblemen and aristocrats. Four cups of wine were served to celebrate our salvation, our redemption, our freedom, and our assignment as God's chosen people. Finally, dinner was served and before midnight, the qorban Pesah was eaten as afiqoman (last meal, or "dessert"), when people were already full. The roasted lamb was distributed among all members of the Habura. Everyone had to eat from that qorban at least a piece the size of an olive (kazait). After eating the qorban Pesah, the Habura recited the Birkat Hamazon, the blessing to thank HaShem for our food.

Around midnight, everyone went up to the terraces of Yerushalayim, and from there, looking at the Bet haMiqdash, which was lit by a full moon, the entire Jewish people sang together the Hallel, the Psalms of Tehillim recited in gratitude to HaShem for having taken us out of Egypt. The voices of millions of Yehudim singing the Hallel, all at once, filled the city with an unparalleled melody. The Gemara says that those voices were so powerful that people felt that the terraces of the city were shaking.

After the destruction of the Bet haMiqdash, we have the tradition to put on the tray of Pesah, or que'ará, a shank-bone (among Ashkenazim, a chicken leg) to remember the preparation of the qorban Pesah. At the end of the Seder, we also eat an additional portion of Matsa, the Afiqoman, in memory of qorban Pesah, saying: "[We

eat this Matsa] in remembrance of the qorban Pesah, which was eaten once one is satisfied.” And we also recite the Hallel, at the end of the Haggadah, after eating the Afiqomán. We recite the Hallel twice: first in the synagogue, in remembrance of the Hallel that was recited by the entire Jewish Nation, and then at home, after Birkat haMazon.

There is a beautiful tradition that very few people still practice today, which was made in remembrance of that famous Hallel that was recited in the Bet haMiqdash. People used to bake the Matsot that were used for the Pesach Seder on the 14th of Nisan, Pesach eve, in the afternoon. Exactly when the qorban Pesach was sacrificed. And while preparing the Matsot on the eve of Pesach, people used to sing the Hallel! Today, this tradition is virtually lost, except in some Jewish communities in Yemen and Kurdistan.

Why Recline to the Left?

Rabbi Yosef Bitton

One of the most important Mitzvot of Pesah is the celebration of the Seder. This occurs on the night of Nisan 15 and 16. The Seder is a very special celebratory dinner in which we perform certain gestures, physical and material, in order to recreate the experience of slavery and freedom.

We do this following the indication of the Sages who said “...in every generation we should feel as if we ourselves had left Egypt.” The Pesah Seder, therefore, abounds in symbolisms related to experiencing as much as possible “physical” slavery and freedom.

Today we will deal with one of those symbols, one that expresses freedom (herut) known in Hebrew as haseba, (i.e. leaning/reclining). The Talmud, Maimonides, the Shulhan Arukh and practically all the rabbis indicate that it is an obligation to eat the Matsa, drink the four glasses of wine, etc. leaning on the left side.

Let’s now see the origin and history of this custom. In ancient times common people would sit on the floor, around a table, to eat. The slaves, who in Athens or Rome constituted around 80% of the population, ate standing up. And the nobles, the royalty, the aristocracy, ate in a triclinium, especially when at a celebratory banquet.

The triclinium consisted on three or six couches organized in a U-shaped manner, which were “wide enough to accommodate three diners who reclined on their left side on cushions.” The tables, where the food was served, were small semi-individual tables inside the U. People used their hands to bring food into their mouths. And why would they recline on the left side? Simply because most of the diners used their right hand to eat.

Now we can understand a little better the symbolism of the haseba. The Sages of the Talmud established that to feel free on this night we should recline as the nobility and the aristocracy do. Even poor Jews, who were the great majority, should feel that night as free, important and well-off people, reclining comfortably on the left when eating (according to some rabbinic opinions, if one reclined on the right side he also risked choking).

We can now understand better that when the Sages said, for example, that the table should be “lifted” (עוקרים את השולחן) in order to awaken the attention of the children,

they literally referred to lifting and removing the individual small tables where the food was served.

Over time the habit of eating in the triclinium fell into disuse. And some rabbis, like the Raaban (Abraham ben Nathan de Provence, France, 1155-1215), proposed to interrupt this custom, since in Europe the nobles sat on chairs, around the table. The vast majority of the rabbis, however, opined that we should not discontinue this ancient custom. And that if we do not recline while eating the Matsa or drinking the glasses of wine, we will not be fulfilling our obligation to its fullest. Some rabbis justified the permanence of this tradition by reassigning it to a different category: shinui, that is, those unusual gestures and actions we do in the Seder of Pesah to awake children's attention and questions.

Another issue that was discussed for centuries is whether women also had to recline while eating. The Talmud says no. And this is better understood when we take into account that at that time, this was not part of the protocol. The Talmud, however, mentions some exceptions, such as isha hashuba, an important woman. In the Roman Empire there were some women who belonged to the elite and were known as "roman matrons", (matronita in the Talmud).

Some rabbis of the Middle Ages, especially in Europe (Tosafot, Rema, etc.) thought that in their times (12-16 century) all women should recline, since "all our wives should be considered important women" Who can deny that?

In this case, the original view of the Talmud was readjusted, and today men and women, in virtually all Jewish communities, are equally obligated to the haseba.



"The triclinium consisted on three or six couches organized in a U-shaped manner, which were wide enough to accommodate three diners who reclined on their left side on cushions. The tables, where the food was served, were small semi-individual tables inside the U."

Pesah, Matsah, & Maror - But Why?

Rabbi Joshua Maroof

One peculiar feature of the Haggada stands out year after year:

Rabban Gamliel used to say: Anyone who fails to mention three things on the night of Passover has not fulfilled his obligation. And what are they? The Paschal Sacrifice, Matsa and Maror.

The simplest interpretation of Rabban Gamliel's statement is that he is referring to the commandment to tell the story of the Exodus on the first night of Passover. Rabban Gamliel informs us that, unless the mitsvot of the Paschal offering, Matsa and Maror are discussed, one has not discharged one's obligation to speak about the Exodus. It is imperative that we identify the purpose of each one of these rituals on the Seder night.

This, however, poses an obvious problem. The mitsvot we are doing on the Seder night are not a part of the story! If Rabban Gamliel had insisted that anyone who forgets to mention the Ten Plagues has not done justice to the Exodus narrative, we would understand why. If he had ruled that anyone who fails to draw attention to the harshness of Pharaoh's oppression or the swiftness of the redemption had not captured the essence of the dramatic tale, we would accept it.

But explaining the commandments that we are about to perform on the night of Pesah - though important - is not a component of telling the story. Why should skipping that part of the Haggada invalidate our discussion of God's deliverance of His people from bondage?

Fascinatingly, this difficulty is not limited to the statement of Rabban Gamliel. There are several noteworthy instances in which the Haggada appears to value the discussion of the mitsvot of Passover more than the discussion of the Exodus itself. For example, consider the Haggada's instructions on how to respond to the query of the Wise Son:

You shall tell him the Laws of Passover that we do not have dessert after the Paschal offering.

What happened to the story of the Exodus? Why are we entering into a conversation about the rules and regulations of Pesah, when it seems we should be focused on gaining insight into the most fundamental event in our nation's history?

(Another memorable example is the discussion of the Rabbis in Bene Brak, which revolves around a practical halachic issue only tangentially related to Pesah).

I believe that the answer to this basic problem is surprisingly simple. It is contained in the language of the Torah itself:

When your son asks you tomorrow, saying, 'What are the testimonies, the statutes and the ordinances that Hashem our God commanded you?' And you shall say to your son, 'We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, and Hashem took us out of Egypt with a strong hand. And Hashem placed signs and wonders - great and terrible - in Egypt, against Pharaoh and his entire household before our eyes. And we He took out from there...And Hashem commanded us to do all of these statutes, to fear Hashem our God; for our benefit all of our days...

A close examination of the Torah reveals that the mitzvah to retell the story of the Exodus is always mentioned in conjunction with the performance of the commandments of the Torah. A parent is typically portrayed as justifying his commitment to the halachic system based upon the historical experience of oppression and redemption in Egypt.

This indicates that the function of discussing the Exodus on Passover is not to entertain the family with historical trivia or midrashic tales. The Seder is not meant to transport us into the ancient past so that we can reminisce about a bygone era. Rather, the objective of Passover night is to draw from history so as to shed light on the reasons for our current observance of Judaism.

This is precisely the message Rabban Gamliel is sending us. Our exploration of the Exodus must revolve around deepening our sense of commitment as Jews in the here-and-now. Otherwise, the dramatic narrative is reduced to an historical relic. The ultimate goal of Pesah is to revitalize our dedication to God each year through the performance of the mitzvot of the holiday. In order for this to happen, we must delve into the historical genesis of these commandments and reflect upon their relevance to the experience of our ancestors in Egypt.

The offering of the Paschal Lamb represented the Jews' rejection of the idolatrous worldview of the Egyptians, who worshipped the sheep as a god. The consumption of unleavened bread was a demonstration of our forefathers' rejection of the materialistic value system of Egypt. The Egyptian culture revolved around bread, the staple food of the wealthy man who lived luxuriously. Slaves, on the other hand, were sustained by unleavened products that were easier and less time-consuming to

prepare. Through eating the "bread of affliction", our ancestors expressed their desire to live a life of service to God rather than a life of self-indulgence. Although free, they still saw themselves as dedicated to a purpose nobler than that of sensual gratification.

However, when all is said and done, this historical background must serve as a springboard for us to understand the significance of the mitsvot for our families today. What modern forms of idolatry must we liberate ourselves from in this day and age? What are the symptoms of our own attachment to the decadence of Western culture and its deification of pleasure, wealth and power? What steps can we take to root it out?

If we walk away from the Seder table with beautiful new explanations of the Haggada text but without a better sense of why the Paschal Lamb, Matsah and Maror are relevant to our lives, then we have not fulfilled the mitzvah of discussing the Exodus. The experience has entertained us but has not transformed us.

This is why the more advanced a child is, the more we divert our attention from the story and spend time analyzing the Laws of Passover in depth. A wise youngster who is capable of appreciating the beauty of the mitsvot and their purpose will discover that the concepts, values and ideals expressed in the Exodus narrative manifest themselves in the mitsvot that we perform on Passover and all year round. The themes of the story are not vague philosophical notions about God or platitudes about freedom; rather, they are profound, highly practical ideas that are translated into rigorous halachic form and "lived" in realtime. A child who is the beneficiary of such a sophisticated Seder will have a qualitatively different experience of Pesach observance and of Jewish life in general.

The upshot of this analysis of the Haggada is that the ultimate aim of the Seder is the enrichment of our observance of Judaism. We cannot allow the annual retelling of our ancestors dramatic Exodus to be reduced to an historical study. Our goal should be to utilize the Haggada as a means of enhancing our family's appreciation of the eternal significance of the mitsvot of Pesah.

Pesah, Sukkot and Sefirat HaOmer

Rabbi Joshua Maroof

The two seven-day festivals instituted by the Torah, Pesah and Sukkot, both address elements of our physical existence. Pesah changes our staple food from conventional bread to matsah. Sukkot alters our dwelling from a permanent house to a Sukkah. Both holidays are also followed up by one-day celebrations that revolve around the intellectual or spiritual dimension of Jewish life – Shavuot and Shemini Atseret, respectively.

One of the unusual features of Pesah is the “intrusion” of the counting of the Omer. Immediately after the first day of Passover, we begin the process of moving toward Shavuot. We don’t even wait for the seven-day festival to conclude before setting our sights on the next holiday in the calendar. Indeed, the Torah commands us to harvest the Omer offering – and, hence, to begin the count – right after the holiday, on the “morrow of the rest day.” This is taken to mean that we should not even wait until the next morning; harvesting and counting start as soon as the first day of the festival is over. What is the rush? Why can’t we complete the celebration of Pesah before hastily transferring our focus to Shavuot?

The noteworthy starting point of the Omer count highlights a more general quality of Pesah as contrasted with Sukkot. Sukkot is the epitome of a joyous holiday in the Torah. Every one of its seven days has a distinct set of sacrifices that are to be offered. We say a blessing each time we dwell in the Sukkah. The four species are taken every day with a blessing and full Hallel is recited for the duration of the holiday. The Jewish people are, at least ideally, bidden to remain in Jerusalem and “celebrate before Hashem for seven days.” The eighth day, Shemini Atseret, ushers in a whole new level of holiness that warrants a distinct sacrificial order, special blessings, prayers and an additional element of joy.

In the case of Pesah, on the other hand, all of the positive mitsvot – the paschal sacrifice, eating matsah and maror, telling the story of the Exodus and reciting the full Hallel – are fulfilled on the first night and day of the festival. Thereafter, observance of Pesah manifests itself only as the abstention from hametz for the entire week. The sacrifices offered in the Temple on the seven days of Pesah are all identical. The Jewish people are not especially encouraged to remain in Jerusalem after the first day of the holiday; indeed, the Torah states (with regard to the Paschal sacrifice) “and you shall roast it and eat it in the place that Hashem, your God, will choose, and in the morning, you may turn back and return to your tents. For six days shall you eat matsot and on the seventh day shall be a day of assembly dedicated to

Hashem, your God; you shall do no work.” The implication is clear that, unlike the days of Sukkot, the final six days of Pesah are of lesser significance than the first. Even the seventh day, with its prohibition of work, does not have its own identity, blessings or special sacrificial order; it is more like a day of Hol Hamoed that has been promoted than a bona fide holiday in its own right.

What is the reason for the stark contrast between the respective structures of Pesah and Sukkot? And how can this explain our premature commencement of the counting of the Omer? I believe that Pesah and Sukkot represent two opposite orientations to the material world. Pesah is about breaking our attachments and addictions to the luxuries of physical life. We distance ourselves from idolatry through the Paschal sacrifice and embrace matsah, the bread of servitude, as our staple food. In essence, though, our observance of the holiday is reflected in the negative, through privation. We define ourselves on Pesah by what we are not – we are not Egyptian sheep-worshippers. We are not hedonistic pleasure-seekers. We are prepared, by virtue of our disentanglement from these alternative lifestyles, to begin the process of receiving the Torah and serving Hashem. This is why the first day of Pesah stands apart from the remaining days. It is on the first day that, through sacrificing the Pesah offering and adopting matsah as our bread, we clearly demonstrate our non-Egyptian character as a nation and our readiness to pursue a transcendent purpose. The six subsequent days make the impact of this demonstration manifest, but do not contribute anything to its content. Our observance of Pesah consists, then, of a major “event” on the first day, followed by mere abstention from hametz for the other six.

This fits beautifully with the lesson of another fascinating verse in the Torah that I have addressed in the past, “do not eat on it [the Paschal sacrifice] hametz; for seven days you shall eat matsot – the bread of affliction – on it.” We are only permitted to eat the Paschal sacrifice on the first night of Passover. Why does the Torah command us to eat matsah “on it” – that is to say, with the Paschal offering – all seven days? The answer is simple. The Torah means to draw our attention to the fact that by abstaining from hametz/eating matsah seven days, we are carrying the message of the Pesah offering forward; it is still with us, we are still reacting to it. The revelation of Hashem’s presence represented by the sacrifice has inspired us to take up the bread of servitude but to devote our energies to the service of the true King – Hashem – rather than the service of man.

We can now see why Pesah seems to stop short after the first day; as soon as it no longer expresses itself in positive activity, it no longer warrants full Hallel, new sacrifices, special blessings or an extended stay in Jerusalem. There is nothing novel

to be had on the subsequent days, only a continuation and consolidation of what has already, at least essentially, been accomplished. Even the seventh day, which commemorates the splitting of the Sea, really just drives home the principle of the futility of the worship of human beings and/or idols and the ultimate sovereignty of Hashem. It is a reflection back on the implications of the Exodus and the significance of our week-long observance of the holiday rather than the introduction of any new theme.

Sukkot, on the other hand, is about establishing a home in the framework of service of Hashem. Unlike Pesah, which is about extricating ourselves and moving upward and away from materialism, Sukkot is about transitioning downward from the transcendence of Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur to the gritty realities of life. This is no simple matter; living in the Sukkah day by day brings us ever closer to the ideal of integration and harmony of the material and intellectual elements within us. Our success in progressing toward this ideal is celebrated joyously on Shemini Atseret.

Because every day of Sukkot embodies another stage of progress toward a desired goal, every day has its own sacrificial service, a full Hallel, Lulav and Etrog, etc. The joy of Sukkot extends to all seven days, waxing rather than waning as we build up to the culmination of the process on Shemini Atseret. Unlike Pesah, which expresses itself in the creation and sustaining of a negative (i.e., the avoidance of hametz), Sukkot is a holiday full of constructive and positive commandments, where every day is a milestone worthy of celebration.

This approach to Pesah can also help us explain why we begin counting to Shavuot as soon as the first day of Pesah is concluded. The break away from Egypt leaves us in an intellectual and moral vacuum; we know what we are not, but the mitsvot of Pesah do not provide us with the means to express what we are. For this, we must wait for Shavuot, the occasion of the giving of the Torah. So even as we are still abstaining from hametz to demonstrate the pervasive impact of the message of the first day of Pesah on our lives and households, we are simultaneously preparing ourselves, day after day, to stand at Mount Sinai as true servants of Hashem. The latter six days of Pesah form a part of this transformation, but six more weeks are necessary before we ascend to the pinnacle of spiritual development commemorated on Shavuot. And the desire to fill our inner emptiness with Torah substance is so powerful that we cannot help but initiate our countdown to Shavuot as soon as the first day of Pesah is over! Hag Kasher V'Sameah to all. After the holiday, I hope to further expand on some of these themes.

Directing Our Attention to the Hidden Miracles

Rabbi Adam Sabzevari

וַיּוֹצֵאנוּ ה' מִמִּצְרַיִם בְּיָד חֲזָקָה וּבִזְרֹעַ נְטוּיָה וּבִמְרֹא גָדֹל וּבְאֹתוֹת וּבִמְפֹתִים :

*Hashem took us out of Egypt with a strong hand and with an outstretched arm, with great awesomeness, and **with signs and with wonders** (Deuteronomy 26:8).*

One of the most undeniable and remarkable aspects of *yetziat Mitzrayim* is the wondrous **open miracles** that Hashem performed every step of the way. From the very moment that Moshe returned to Egypt and approached King Pharaoh, Hashem instructed him to perform open miracles to demonstrate His infinite strength. When Pharaoh declined to let the Jewish people leave Egypt, God struck the Egyptians with 10 powerful plagues, all of which were indisputable miracles, while protecting the Jews from harm. This, too, was an undeniable proof of Hashem's existence and His involvement in our lives. After leaving Egypt, He split the sea, saving the Jewish people and drowning the Egyptians in their pursuit, once again performing an obvious miracle to save His beloved children.

Although *yetziat Mitzrayim* was filled with open miracles, that is not how God typically runs His world. God created the laws of nature and typically does not defy them. Instead, He acts *within* the laws of nature. To some extent, if God were to constantly perform open miracles, that would strip humans of our free will. Frequent open miracles would force us to choose the ways of the Torah, but God wants us to make decisions on our own.

During the Exodus from Egypt, Hashem deemed it necessary to perform open miracles because the Egyptians completely rejected belief in Hashem. As Pharaoh arrogantly states:

וַיֹּאמֶר פַּרְעֹה מִי ה' אֲשֶׁר אֶשְׁמָע בְּקוֹלֹ לְשַׁלַּח אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא יָדַעְתִּי אֶת־ה' וְגַם אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא אֶשְׁלַח :

*Pharaoh said, "Who is Hashem that I should listen to Him and let Israel go? **I do not know of Hashem**, nor will I let Israel go." (Exodus 5:2).*

God's response was to ensure that Pharaoh and the rest of the world *get to know Hashem* through unquestionable open miracles.

The Ramban (Nachmanides, 1194–1270) explains, however, that God will not perform open miracles every time some heretic denies God's existence. It is for this

very reason that we must transmit the Passover story from generation to generation. We must always remember the open miracles that we witnessed to reinforce and support our belief in His existence. In the Ramban's own words:

ובעבור כי הקב"ה לא יעשה אות ומופת בכל דור לעיני כל רשע או כופר, יצוה אותנו שנעשה תמיד זכרון ואות לאשר ראו עינינו, ונעתיק הדבר אל בנינו, ובניהם לבניהם, ובניהם לדור אחרון והחמיר מאד בענין הזה... והכל להיות לנו בכל הדורות עדות במופתים שלא ישתכחו, ולא יהיה פתחון פה לכופר להכחיש אמונת האלקים (שמות יג:טו)

And because the Holy One, blessed be He, will not make signs and wonders in every generation for the eyes of some wicked man or heretic, He therefore commanded us that we should always make a memorial or sign of that which we have seen with our eyes, and that we should transmit the matter to our children, and their children to their children, to the generations to come, and He placed great emphasis on it... All these commandments are designed for the purpose that in all generations we should have testimonies to the wonders so that they should not be forgotten and so that the heretic should not be able to open his lips to deny the belief in [the existence of] G-d (Exodus 13:16).

To conclude his commentary, the Ramban takes it one step further. While the open miracles help reinforce and strengthen our belief in Hashem's infinite capabilities, there is another subtle yet critical purpose of constantly retelling the open miracles. **The open miracles of the past direct our attention to the hidden miracles that we experience in our everyday lives in the present.** Once again, to quote the Ramban's beautiful words:

ומן הנסים הגדולים המפורסמים אדם מודה בנסים הנסתרים שהם יסוד התורה כלה, שאין לאדם חלק בתורת משה רבינו עד שנאמין בכל דברינו ומקרינו שכלם נסים אין בהם טבע ומנהגו של עולם (שמות יג:טו)

Through the great open miracles, one comes to appreciate the hidden miracles, which constitute the foundation of the whole Torah, for no one can have a part in the Torah of Mosheh our teacher unless he believes that all our words and our events are miraculous in scope, there being no natural or customary way of the world [without God's involvement in them] (Exodus 13:16).

This Pesach, as we retell the story of *yetz'iat Mitzrayim*, may we use it as an opportunity to find the hidden miracles in our lives today. *Chag Kasher Same'ach!*

A Little Less Conversation, a Little More Action Please

Yaakov Bitton

The *Seder* night occurs at two parallel levels. There are many things we *do*, and many things we *talk about*. This is not a coincidence. It has to do with the very essence of Judaism. Judaism is about actions as much as, if not more than, it is about ideas. (Certainly, actions should always come before ideas.) Jewish identity can be compared to a lit lamp. Practice will build the structure, the actual lamp. Theory is the flame. “*For it is [like] a lamp, the Mishva; and the Tora, [is like] a flame*” (Proverbs 6). A flame without a lamp will not last. Knowing *about* Judaism does not guarantee a Jewish identity. In fact, knowing *about* Judaism without practicing it is a fairly safe way of ensuring a short-lived flame; a spark that will not last for long. Rather, a strong and lasting identity is achieved by first having a solid lamp, on which the flame is lit later.

In some ways, Judaism resembles Eastern, rather than Western, tradition. And this is why the notion of leading with the *doing* is not straightforward to us, living in 21st-Century Western Civilization.

Eugen Herrigel¹ (1884–1955) is an example of a person who realized the difference between the Western and Eastern approaches. Herrigel traveled to Japan to try and master the ancient Japanese art of archery. As a well-educated Westerner, Herrigel put all of his efforts in trying to abstract the *theory* of archery. He wanted to understand exactly what he was supposed to do, for what purpose, and what his end-result should look like. However, the Japanese master insisted on the *practice*, and actually considered problematic any conscious effort by Herrigel to first try and understand what he was supposed to. As it turns out, practice (just doing something) wires the brain in ways we are not aware of; but only if we don’t interfere with the process by having our conscious mind try and supervise it. Action, repetitive and disciplined action, is transformative of our brain in a way that thinking alone can never be.

Judaism, too, is based on practice, first and foremost. And we actually trust that our Creator, and the Jewish sages over the ages (the wisest individuals our wise nation ever produced), devised practices that have a profound effect in aspects of our

¹ Zen in the Art of Archery (1953). It is alleged that Herrigel was an Anti-Semite and Nazi sympathizer. If so, I am sure nothing would infuriate him more than being cited to elucidate a Jewish concept in an effort to make the most Jewish of all nights even more effective in preserving Judaism forever.

psyche, in ways we are not aware of. In the famous movie *The Karate Kid*, Daniel-san painstakingly applied wax, on and off, Mr. Miyagi's car. Without realizing it, he was disciplining his muscle and brain memory in a manner that, later, his own conscious mind could appreciate. So too, *Halakha* (the habits and acts prescribed and proscribed under Jewish law) has the effect of wiring the mind to think like a Jew and the heart to feel like a Jew.

Most clearly, this is true regarding actions which we more naturally identify with "practice," like eating *Maṣṣa*. However, this is also true regarding how we study the Tora. If one approaches Tora education as a Zen master approaches archery, then this Tora education will wire the mind and the heart in the most Jewish of ways so that one is equipped to later analyze and interpret the Tora like a true Jewish master. In fact, the way Tora used to be taught until a few generations ago (a method we should all aspire to reconnect with), was exactly like that.

At first, a Jewish child should be introduced to sounds and routines that may seem mindless. *Pesukim*, *Ta'amim*, *Mishnayot*... Reading, reciting, memorizing and repeating. Between the ages of five and ten, recitation (with the traditional intonation) of the *Tanakh*. At this stage, the point is not to teach the meaning of what is being read. All the focus is put in having child read precisely and carefully: rigorously pronouncing every syllable with the correct intonation.

Between the ages of five and ten, the child, now having mastered the *reading* of the *Tanakh*, is introduced to the world of Rabbinic texts. The main work to be taught at this age is the *Mishna*, which the child is supposed to memorize.¹ At this stage, the meaning of what's being recited is not what matters. Like with Zen archery, trying to abstract what's being done (meaning, trying to delve into the meaning and reasons of what the child is reciting) may actually be counterproductive.

Unlike Zen archery, however, once the "action" is mastered, Tora education calls for a further stage. And so, once this "more-doing-less-thinking" foundation (in the form of recitation aloud, memorization and otherwise) has been grounded, comes the time for theory. At the age of fifteen, the Jewish teenager is finally introduced to the *Talmud*, and is called upon to engage in more abstract forms of analysis on sources he is presumably already fluent on.

¹ On a personal note, I will be forever indebted to my father, *Mori veRibbi*, for investing incredible effort, time, attention and resources to ensure that I received during my childhood something very similar to what I am describing.

So to be more precise, Judaism demands a foundation of practice *before* engaging in theory. Few civilizations, if any, can claim an intellectual tradition as rich, rigorous and sophisticated as the Jews. But, in Judaism, intellectual pursuit should only occur after having established a solid foundation of practice. The lamp precedes the flame. The “wax-on, wax-off,” comes before the lesson on how to effectively strike.

To wit, as the famous story has it, Ribbi ‘Aqiba started his journey to Jewish erudition at the age of forty (!). Now, let’s think about this for a second. How would Hollywood tell this story? Had this same story been told in a culture other than the Jewish one, the 40-year old ‘Aqiba would start his journey by reading all books, and attending all lectures he could find, *about* Judaism (as an outsider), and then proceed to obtain a Ph.D. from an advanced institution with a fancy name. The Hollywood movie would be about someone acquiring the flame, not the lamp. As it happened, however, Ribbi ‘Aqiba started like a little child. No shortcuts. Repeating aloud letters, and then chanting verses, of *Vayigra*. He then went on to become one of the brightest and deepest intellectual luminaries in Jewish history.

“Knowing” is no substitute for “doing.” And one’s identity cannot be formed any way other than through practice (at first, mindless practice; and only later, with more understanding). You could read all the books in the world about Japanese archery, but you will never become a Zen master. So to, you could read all theories, and listen to all the lectures you can find, about Judaism: but this alone will not make you a proper Jewish lamp. Any fire you have may be more like a short-lived spark than like a lasting flame grounded on a solid lamp. As we all know, a Ph.D. on Judaic Studies from Harvard will not guarantee your Jewish identity. Or your children’s Jewish identity.

And given that tonight we are engaged in fomenting a strong Jewish identity, it stands to reason that the order of *Practice > Theory* should be a recipe for the *Seder* as well. And it is! The two main themes of the night are **(A)** behaving as if we were slaves who are now free men (for example, reclining, having four cups of wine, starting the meal with a fresh herb, and generally acting—literally—the part of an Israelite after the Exodus), and **(B)** telling, and discussing, what in fact happened.

The *Seder*, as the name implies, offers a structure (“seder” in Hebrew) based upon certain acts that we *do*. It is tonight’s lamp. On this structure, we kindle rich discussions and ideas in the form of the *Haggada*. This is tonight’s flame.

Because the tendency of modern man is to insist on the ideas and the theories, we must remind ourselves quite adamantly that the deeds are as important, and must

always precede, the ideas and theories. Insist on *doing*, first and foremost. Especially for the little ones, whose identity we are trying to shape.¹ Let the things we *do* tonight lead, and have the stories we *tell* and explanations we give only follow as a response to the curiosity that all of this doing created.

¹ In fact, I always thought that teaching toddlers *about* the *Seder* before they actually *do* it, is counterproductive. It makes the act feel artificial, and prematurely quenches that curious impetus which should indeed rule the night. Let the young ones be surprised by what they see and do. And if they learned about certain things, do and make them do things they do not expect.

Free to Follow Rules

Yaakob Bitton

Imagine two young men. Arthur and Bryan.

Arthur is not what you'd call a nice guy. A few years ago, he embezzled millions from his employer. He wasn't caught, and now likes to live without limits. He has no regard for the law, for others, or even for his own wellbeing. He lives "dangerously" and is a free spirit. Arthur has never taken "no" for an answer and seems to always get his way, without anyone getting on his way. He goes where he pleases, does what he wants, with whomever he wants, and takes orders from nobody. Nothing and nobody has ever managed to settle him down. He is successful, has access to all the pleasures this world has to offer and shows no restraints to his hedonistic impulses.

Bryan is a family man. He is a model citizen who would never jaywalk, even if there are no incoming cars. He never travelled much, and tends to live a predictable and boring, even if productive, life. He lives frugally, and never feels quite tempted to obtain all the nice things this world has to offer. More than once, he gave up opportunities to get richer quickly because he did not want to be required to bend his own principles. He is honest to a fault, and you could say that his values sort of hold him back. His friends think that his life is weighed down by chains of responsibility.

Most people would say that Arthur is freer than Bryan. After all, Arthur seems to live as he chooses, while Bryan is constrained by a set of rules and principles that limits his options.

And this is the story of 'Am Israel.

Let's think about it with an open mind: were the Hebrews freer in Egypt, where they could very much do as they pleased, so long as they obeyed their Egyptian masters from 9 to 5? Or were they freer in the desert, where suddenly they couldn't as much as eat a piece of meat without obeying a strict, complex and at times seemingly arbitrary multi-step process to make sure it was Kosher? Many Israelites expressed their frustration with this new order. "Zakharnu Et HaDaga Asher Nokhal BeMisrayim Hinnam!" They complained to Moshe about the desert conditions: we still remember the fish we would eat for free in Egypt. For free? Whereas the Man--the heavenly bread--was in fact free of charge, whatever the Israelites got to eat in Egypt was nothing more than a handout from the Egyptian masters to their slaves.

Had the Israelites forgotten the toil and slavery to which they were subject? Did they miss it? Was such free fish such a great deal, once you factored in the hard labor? Hakhamim elucidated this point with a very sharp observation: the fish eaten by the Israelites in Egypt imposed no responsibilities upon them. But the food in the desert (even the Man), now that the Israelites were bound to the Tora, did. It wasn't "free" anymore.

On the other hand, from the point of view of the Tora, we certainly were "freed" from Misrayim and from slavery. This is precisely the motif of Pesah. Not only that, but Hakhamim posited that "...SheEn Lekha Ben Horin, Ella Mi SheYosehev ve'Oseq BaTora" ("...for the only free man is the one who acts within the bounds of the Tora.") The celebrated Jewish sage and poet, Rebbi Yehuda HaLevi, expressed this very explicitly: "Avde Zeman, 'Avde 'Avadim Hem. 'Eved HaShem, Hu Levaddo Hofshi." ("Those subservient to the times, they are slaves of slaves. Only he who is subservient to God can be said is free.")

Similarly, the very first of 'Aseret HaDevarim (the Ten Statements) makes this point too: firstly, God states He is our Lord ("Anokhi, HaShem E-lohekha"); second, God reminds us He freed us from Egypt ("...Asher Hossetikha MeEress Missrayim..."); third, God adds that He also redeemed us from being slaves ("...MiBet 'Avadim..."). The order is deliberate. We can only be free, and can only truly escape Egyptian enslavement, after we accept that God is Lord over us.

So how could it possibly be said that the Tora makes a person free? It depends on what "freedom" means to us.

If talking about Arthur's kind of "success," we actually know of one certain individual who was the most "successful" person ever in the history of mankind. He was adored by his society: literally worshipped. He could have had whatever he wanted, with total impunity. Wealth beyond the wildest dreams. Power, honor, loyalty. Everything Arthur could only fantasize about. He was the Egyptian Pharaoh. Pharaoh was absolutely "free" to achieve earthly success. And yet, in the story of Pesah, he ends up being the least free of all. Facing a most obvious decision, to let the Hebrews go and spare his nation the calamities that were otherwise sure to befall them, the Tora tells, Pharaoh was incapable of choice.

Let me mention two other characters in the story of Pesah. They were women, which at the time was a social disadvantage. They were Hebrew--enslaved by Pharaoh and the Egyptian ruling class. Not only were they Hebrew women, but they were mere assistants to other Hebrew women. Probably the lowest echelon of Egyptian society.

Their names were Shifra and Pu'a. And yet, something amazing happens. Pharaoh issues these two poor ladies a direct command (to kill the Hebrew babies). And they refuse. They disobey a direct order! Why? "...Ki Yareu HaMeyaledot Et HaElohim..." ("...for the midwives feared God..."). One can imagine that Shifra and Pu'a were likely deprived of many opportunities in Egyptian society. They would never be "free" to climb the socio-economic ladder and achieve the kind of "success" that characterized Pharaoh. But they were absolutely "free" to choose, to truly choose. They were free to resist the overpowering weight of a royal command.

King David describes a principled person as a tree whose roots reach deep into the water-drenched soil ("Ke'Ess Shatul 'Al Palge Mayim"), and a wicked person as chaff that is easily carried by the wind ("KaMoss Asher Tiddefennu Ruah"). The tree does not have too many options in terms of mobility. It cannot waver too far from its roots. However, it is free to withstand external pressure, winds that seek to tell it what to do and where to go. Chaff, on the other hand, is very mobile: one day here, one day there. But while it may feel as though it is ending up in various places because this is what it wants, in reality the chaff moves at the whim of external forces: winds that tell it what to do, what to believe, what to feel.

The Tora, principles, accepting God's sovereignty, all can admittedly hold one back from reaching Arthur's kind of success. And no Jew has nor will ever become as successful as Pharaoh. But then again, Pharaoh, with all his success, lacked freedom. Arthur may have a nicer car than Bryan; yet he is also far likelier than Bryan to act impulsively pursuant to clever marketing campaigns. He is less likely than Bryan to be able to stand up to peer pressure, or even to form his own independent opinions. For Arthur's dreams, the Tora could be an obstacle. Like the prophet Hoshea' famously said "Ki Yesharim Darkhe HaShem, veSadiqim Yelkhu Bam, uFoshe'im Yikashlu Bam" ("As God's ways are straight, and the righteous ones run on them, while transgressors stumble on them"). A fellow who seeks to walk in a crooked manner will find that the straightness of a path is a hindrance.

The Tora is a recipe for attaining the ability to choose, as a free individual. No other system is as pro-choice as the Tora! And being pro-choice means being pro-responsibility. The Tora, with the structure and responsibilities it prescribes, is a formula that lets us grow roots that will withstand all kinds of winds. A principled person is less susceptible to social and other pressures. In that sense, only a person who acts consistently with the Tora can be said to be free.

Pesach - Humble Beginnings

Rabbi Meir Gavriel Elbaz

As the Jewish nation prepares vigorously, sometimes for months in advance, to sit around their Seder tables, there are several discrepancies that must first be resolved. On this most uplifting of nights, which serves as the cornerstone and foundation of our faith in the Almighty, we exhibit several paradoxical behaviors, sometimes unbeknownst to us. On the one hand, the grandeur of the evening is clearly apparent manifested through the opulent manner in which the table is set with the finest dishes, drinking superb wines in a reclining position like royalty, and families comprised of Jews of all ages sitting beside one another singing Hashem's praises and basking in the sanctity of the holiday.

On the other hand, there are several things we do during the Seder which invoke anything but glory and magnificence. Eating the Karpas dipped in salt water in commemoration of the Jewish nation's tears in Egypt, munching on Matzah, the unleavened poor man's bread, and partaking of bitter Maror dipped in Haroset as we remember the punishing Egyptian bondage, are just some examples. Indeed, our Sages taught (Pesachim 116a) that in the context of fulfilling the positive Torah commandment of recounting the story of the Exodus from Egypt, "We begin with disgrace and conclude with glory." The Sages of the Talmud (ibid.) disagree regarding the interpretation of "beginning with disgrace." According to Rav, this refers to the Jewish people's spiritual disgrace in that we descended from such wicked idolaters as Terah and Lavan. Shmuel, however, maintains that this refers to the Jewish nation's despicable physical state as slaves in Egypt. Practically speaking, we begin the Hagaddah with both ideas in the form of the passages of "We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt" and "In the beginning, our forefathers were idol-worshippers." Nevertheless, the question that begs to be asked is: What is the true message of the Pesach Seder? Are we supposed to be focusing on the splendor of the Jewish nation's freedom as a result of Hashem's incredible miracles or bemoaning our terrible past as slaves in Egypt?

In order to explain these seemingly contradictory practices, the Sefer "El Ha'Milu'im" offers an insightful parable that sheds some light on this issue:

Once, a powerful king went out on a hunting expedition along with some ministers and servants. Suddenly, the king laid eyes on a young shepherd boy sitting in the field and playing his flute ever so beautifully. The king was spellbound by the sweet notes he played and even more so by the lad's pure demeanor. The king approached the boy and after some conversation, he realized that the boy was extremely intelligent

and astute. The king took this boy into his home and the boy quickly picked up on the unwritten codes of nobility and etiquette. The king was extremely satisfied with the young man's progress and eventually, he appointed him as Finance Minister.

All the citizens of the kingdom loved this young man as he was good-natured and kind and he would constantly implement tax cuts and other economic benefits for his constituents. His success caused great jealousy among the other ministers in the royal cabinet and they began slandering him to the king by claiming that he was growing wealthy by stealing from the royal coffers. At first, the king shrugged off all these accusations but when the rumors would not stop, the king finally had no choice but to summon the young man to an urgent hearing where he was to give an exact accounting for all of his personal finances. The minister was easily able to deflect all accusations and he provided documentation attesting to the integrity of his personal wealth. Nevertheless, the Justice Minister, who was the personal enemy of this young man, turned to the king and requested that the king and all of his ministers perform a surprise search of the Finance Minister's home in order to ascertain the truth of his words. Only then would they all believe him. Since all the ministers agreed with this proposition, the king complied.

When the royal entourage arrived at the Finance Minister's home, they were surprised to find a modestly furnished home; it was certainly nothing as ostentatious as what they had imagined. Finally, they reached what had appeared to be a locked and private room. The young man then fell at the king's feet and begged him not to make him open the door. At this point, even the beloved king's suspicion was aroused and he commanded the minister to open the door immediately. Left with no other recourse, the minister unlocked the door and when they all walked in, they were confused about what they saw: The room contained only the stick, satchel, and flute which belonged to the young man when he was still a shepherd.

The king ordered the minister to explain. The young man exclaimed, "Your majesty, from the day you chose me and took me from my flock to your palace, I have not allowed myself to grow haughty or conceited. Every day, I enter this room in order to remember my previous life and where I came from so that no arrogance creeps into my heart. I sit here for a few minutes each day playing my flute in order to remind myself that I was once a shepherd and by the grace of G-d, I found favor in your eyes and reached my current stature." When the king heard the innocence, humility, and honesty in the minister's voice, he hugged and kissed him and said, "You are truly deserving of all of the honor you have achieved." Even the once-jealous ministers approached the young man, offered him a warm handshake, and apologized for the ordeal they put him through.

Based on the above parable, we can understand the somewhat cryptic Midrash Rabbah (Parashat Lech-Lecha) which states, “King David’s reputation spread throughout the world: His stick and satchel from one side and the Tower of David from the other. Mordechai’s reputation spread throughout the world: A golden crown from one side and sackcloth and ashes from the other.” The Midrash actually means to portray the righteousness of both David and Mordechai in that even when Hashem helped them and raised them to tremendous heights of honor and glory, they never forgot their previous status and they remained humble and unassuming.

This same idea can be applied to the seemingly clashing themes of the Seder and of the holiday in general. On the one hand, we refer to the Pesach holiday as “Zeman Herutenu,” the time of our freedom when Hashem smote the Egyptians, redeemed us from the house of slavery, and took us out of utter darkness and delivered us into great light. On the other hand, so that we do not grow arrogant as a result of our exalted stature, we likewise refer to Pesach as “Hag Ha’Matzot,” a reference to darker days when we ate poor man’s bread as we were subjected to back-breaking labor at the hand of the Egyptians. The fusion of these two recurring ideas help us to better appreciate the goodness and bounty Hashem showered upon us as a nation then and continues to bless us with in every generation while keeping those less favorable memories of the origins of our nation alive so that we always remember where we came from and how far Hashem, in his ultimate and unlimited love and kindness for the Jewish nation, has brought us. Tizku Le’Shanim Rabbot Ne’imot Ve’Tovot!

The Exodus & The American Experiment

Rabbi Jonathan Livi

I have long been fascinated by America. Why has it been such a good friend to Israel? Why is it so hospitable to Jews?

To the student of history, America stands out as quite an anomaly. Good societies are rare. *Very* good societies are non-existent. And America is a *very* good society.

Much of the goodness to which I refer is now taken for granted. Equality before the law, mobility within the social hierarchy, free speech, freedom of religion, a reliable justice system---are all hallmarks of a very good society. We take them for granted because they are all we know. We take them for granted because we cannot imagine a society structured in any other way.

But for all of history, such freedoms and luxuries were non-existent. Social hierarchies were fixed, and usually immutable. Justice systems were corrupt. Speech was allowed only if it was accepted by those in power, and those in power, often religious regimes, dictated exactly which religion could be practiced, and which could not.

Where then did America come from? When persecution and oppression were the norm, how did America learn to be so decent?

In a brilliant essay titled “The Universal Story,” the late Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks A’H explains exactly where this unique American “goodness” comes from. Unsurprisingly, his conclusion is that this goodness, this “American Ethos,” rests firmly and securely on the teachings of the Hebrew Bible.

I will quote from the essay liberally to make the point:

“In a square in the center of Philadelphia, in front of Independence Hall, where America’s Declaration of Independence and Constitution were drafted, stands one of the great symbols of the nation, the Liberty Bell, visited by more than a million tourists each year. Around the top of the bell are words taken from the twenty-fifth chapter of Leviticus: “Proclaim liberty throughout the land to all the inhabitants thereof” (Leviticus 25:10). The presence of this

biblical quotation is no coincidence. It exemplifies the close relationship between the Hebrew Bible and America's founders.”¹

Referring to the Jubilee year, this verse from Leviticus demands the proclamation of liberty for all the indentured servants in Israel.² By making this verse a core value in the nation's founding, it is no wonder that America has remained the freest and most hospitable country in the world for over two centuries.

But more than anything, the “American Ethos” was built on the story of the Exodus:

“In 1776, in Philadelphia itself, Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson met to design a seal for the new United States. Franklin proposed that it should bear a picture of Moses lifting his staff to divide the Red Sea, together with the motto ‘Rebellion to tyrants is obedience to God.’ Jefferson preferred a less aggressive design: the Israelites in the wilderness being led by a cloud by day and a pillar of fire at night (Ex. 13:21).”³

The American founders saw themselves as inheritors of the Israelite mission. We Jews wrested our freedom from Pharaoh. The American Founders were to wrest their freedom from the British Empire. We used our experiences in Egypt as an example of how *not* to build a society. The founders used their experience under tyranny to build a society based on universal human rights, and the decentralization of power.

Seeing themselves as inheritors of the Israelites' mission, the founders grew to love Jewish ideals, and were ready to admit that these ideas were *not* their own:

“No one expressed more fulsomely the debt owed to the story of Israel than America's second president, John Adams, who in 1809 wrote to a friend: I will insist that the Hebrews have done more to civilize men than any other nation. If I were an atheist, and believed in blind eternal fate, I should still believe that fate had ordained the Jews to be the most essential instrument for civilizing the nations. If I were an atheist of the other sect, who believe or pretend to believe that all is ordered by chance, I should believe that chance

¹ “The Universal Story,” Essays from the Jonathan Sacks Haggadah

² It is amusing to note that of all the books in the Bible, the founders picked a verse from Leviticus. It shows that their knowledge of the Bible was thorough, reaching even the books that are less known in popular culture.

³ “The Universal Story,” Essays from the Jonathan Sacks Haggadah

had ordered the Jews to preserve and propagate to all mankind the doctrine of a supreme, intelligent, wise, almighty sovereign of the universe, which I believe to be the great essential principle of all morality, and consequently of all civilization.”¹

It should now be clear why America is so unique. It should be clear why America is so hospitable to Jews. Why it is so good. Free. And decent.

America is unique, because America was founded as the most “Jewish” society in human history.² Not in terms of religious affiliation, for its founders were Christian, but in terms of *values*.

All the great ideas and ideals that laid the foundation of this country were taken from the Bible. The founders excitedly reenacted the exodus from Egypt in their dealings with tyranny. They looked to the Jubilee for inspiration towards liberty, and to G-d as the official arbiter of morality. You may even say that they observed Passover, in their own special way.

Perhaps this is also why America has avoided the pitfalls of Antisemitism. Could the society which glorified the Jew as G-d’s gift to the moral world come to hate the object of their affection? Could the society which benefited so much from the wisdom of the Bible come to hate the very people who brought the Bible to all of mankind? So far, it has not.

What are we to learn from all of this? First, we are to be proud. G-d gave *us* the Torah. Due to our ignorance, we take it for granted. Due to our ignorance, we fail to see the genius behind it.

But maybe the fact that others, gentiles for that matter, found it to be a source of eternal wisdom should give us pause. Why are we so quick to write it off? Why are we not investing our time into really understanding the depths of the book? If a group of 18th century men with no connection to the Jewish faith found it to be a source of eternal wisdom, should we, the original recipients of the divine word, not be obsessively and jubilantly proud of the gem we have in our possession? If *they* took the time to study *our* book, would we not be remiss to avoid studying it ourselves?

¹ Ibid.

² Not including the founding of the State of Israel, in 1948.

But there is something else we could glean from this analysis.

America has been welcoming to Jews because it was built on Jewish values. However, that goodwill will only remain so long as America clings to those Jewish values upon which it was built.

We are living in an era in which it seems like America is straying from the path of its forefathers. It is straying from the Biblical values that made it great, and leaning towards the base and materialistic values that resemble pagan Canaan and ancient Egypt.

And with that comes concern for the future. Concern that this country may not be the America of old, and the love we received from our neighbors may not continue to hold still for decades to come.

We are right to be concerned. And that concern should lend revitalized importance to the words we will say on the seder night.

“Next Year in Jerusalem.” Hag Sameach.

When Groups Unite & Become a Nation

Ronniel Levy

It is not often that we Jews have the privilege of being reminded of what truly holds us together. How we once were, how we are now and what we should be.

Here we are, year 5780, confined to small groups- and tragically for most of our elderly, in total solitude. During the holiday most designed to bring closeness among families and guests, to bridge the gap between young and old, and to reinforce our beliefs, we are told to give up what is most dear to our survival: a sense of family and community.

Anyone with a sense of theological tradition has to ask: “How will this affect my or my children’s connection with God?” and, “How will we properly observe the holiday dedicated to inviting others into our home and spreading the story of our nationhood while in solitude?”

Are we not required to open our doors to the prophet Eliyahu and, to all that seek nourishment, as we proclaim those famous words "כל דחפין יתי ויכול" *all that are hungry come partake and eat*? And yet we are alone. We are unable to invite others to fulfil these great commandments of unity that are synonymous with the Seder night.

To teach, is to show by example and this year, there is little action to support our teachings.

To add irony to tragedy, our elders, the most effective purveyors to our children of the story of our birth as a nation, are now secluded, unable to influence young ears. To believe that this is all for naught would be to deny that one of the most theologically cataclysmic events in over 2000 years – forced family separation during the holiday most designed for discussion, would have no meaning. And I can’t accept that.

As Jews, we are trained to query how every world event affects us. Is this not the holiday of history and questions? And so, I postulate that there must be something incredibly special about this Pesach that resembles the method of our observance of Pesach over 2000 years ago. The resemblance is ironic, haunting and elating all once. Perhaps, it is an opportunity for us all.

The resemblance I am referring to, are the articulate set of Mitzvoth, both positive and negative, which formulate how the Pesach offering was offered during the Temple Eras. During both Temple times, observance of Pesach was not done by large groups at once or at homes with large gatherings. Rather, the Pesach offering was actually only given by “multitudes” of small, solitary groups. And yet, those years were the closest Jews were to one another. They were also the closest we ever were to God. Allow me to explain.

The earliest set of mitzvot that we are ever presented with (after the 3 mitzvot in the book of Bereishit) are those that relate to the Pesach offering. Even the obligation to count the new month, was provided so as to establish baseline from which to start counting days until the proper time for giving this offering—the late afternoon of the 14th day of Nissan.

The general procedure by which the nation gave the Pesach offering was as follows:

First, many small groups were established. Each group, was referred to as a **הבורה**, by our sages, and they actually had to “stick together”. Each group was often just a single family or extended family and a neighbor. The group would have to be small enough to satiate everyone in *that* group and, just large enough to complete eating the lamb that was offered. Once a proper lamb, a male, unblemished and under one year of age was selected, it would be brought by the group up to the Temple for sacrifice.¹

This meant that there were many groups. Too many to offer at once. Our sages record in great and unusual detail the seamless assembly line of Kohanim that served at the Temple to exchange vessels for the various processes relating to the offering². But here’s the catch – ***each group had to remain together until completion of the meal***³.

Because of the multitude of “groups”, they were divided into three sets comprised of many groups each set. They would take turns giving their Pesach offering, waiting

¹ ספר החינוך מצוה ה, מצות שחיטת הפסח...וענין המצוה הוא, (ב) שמתקבצין אנשים מישראל לחבורות, ולוקחין מן השוק או מביתם גדי אחד או שה, תמים זכר בן שנה, ושוחטין אותו בעזרת בית המקדש ביום ארבעה עשר בניסן בין הערבים, ואחר כך לערב אוכלין אותו בין כולם אחר מאכלם, שמצותו לאוכלו על השובע.

² משנה פסחים, ה:ו-ח.

³ ספר החינוך מצוה ו...דיני המצוה, כמה חייב כל אחד לאכול ממנו לכל הפחות, והנמנין עליו איך יתנהגו עד שיאכלוהו, שלא לצאת מן החבורה, ושלא ישנו, ויתר פרטיה, מבוארים בפסחים.

for the Shechitah (sacrifice) and then waiting for its completion in being roasted. All during this process the Levites were singing the Hallel in full glory. Hence the reason that we recite the Hallel *at night* in Synagogue and then at home, *at night*. The *only* Hallels sung at night! It is recorded that sometimes the Levites would finish singing early and then would repeat it. Everyone working in unison and each “group” working on its own, towards a common goal.

And now come the negative commandments. The Pesach offering could only be eaten by the *specific group* that offered it. None could be cut away and given to guests, friends or relatives. They had to eat their own offering *within their own* groups. One had to avoid breaking its bones in the process. The offering could not be eaten raw or cooked, only roasted.¹ Apostates were not permitted to participate in the eating process.² And, while we were often told to treat non Jewish dwellers in our land favorably, a non-Jew, even a righteous one that accepted upon himself not to worship idols, was also prohibited from participating.³

No portion of the meat could be left over for the next day or given to others ⁴– not even to a stranger or a convert as all those that were eligible had to find their own group.

But most important, no portion of the Pesach offering could be “removed from the home of the group that brought it.” This commandment is provided explicitly in Exodus 12:46.⁵

Why the solitude? Why the rules and regulations? The answer lies deep within the purpose for these commandments that gives them meaning. All were designed to remind us of the miracles that occurred in Egypt. Performing the mitzvot as intended reminds us that this “method of small groups” is how we lived our last night in Egypt. It is the story of our survival.

During the apocalyptic plague of the first born, which was to kill each family’s eldest son, it was the blood from the Pesach offering that marked the front door of each home to remind that angel of death that a small group God fearing people dwelled in solitude behind those doors. Those people were saved.

¹ ספר החינוך מצוה ז, שלא לאכול הפסח נא ומבושל.

² ספר החינוך מצוה יג, שלא נאכיל מן הפסח לישראל משומד.

³ ספר החינוך מצוה יד, שלא נאכיל מן הפסח לגר ותושב.

⁴ ספר החינוך מצוה ח, שלא להותיר מבשר הפסח.

⁵ ספר החינוך מצוה טו, שלא להוציא מבשר הפסח חוצה.

Together, in seclusion, the Hebrew believers survived. While doing so, they also ate in its entirety, one of the most significant fake gods of the Egyptians – a lamb. On the streets, for all Egypt to witness were the skeletal carcasses of their dead gods, accompanied only by the melancholy cries of the ancient Egyptians who suffered death in every home the same death they wished on the Jewish first born males just a generation earlier. God was present and we all knew it.

In the solitude of their homes a people was being freed and a nation comprised of groups was being forged into one by the experience. The sole factor uniting them: an unyielding belief in the service of the Almighty. Not in their knowledge of what's in store- because they did not in fact know the details yet – but in their belief that the Maker of Miracles that has seen them through to date will see them through to the future.

And so it was in the Temple era. The Passover seder the way it was to be. In the solitude of small interpersonal groups that mimicked the exact methods by which it happened the first time that our eldest were spared.

With all the different tasks during the Temple service, the many Kohanim with their varied services, the Levites singing songs of praise and toiling with their service, the groups stepping in unison to give their offerings – with all of it, one thing united them: Belief of the divine provenance of the Almighty.

As separate groups, we were united. ***As a nation however, we were alone in a cold and contagious pagan world.*** This Pesach offering gave our Temple visiting ancestors a chance to remember how we got here – and now we are given a chance to relive it once again. Share it with our children.

I hear many musings of how this tragedy, the tragedy of 5780, has separated us into something that weakens us - as something that makes us the furthest we will ever be. But I like to see this event as something that is more theologically relevant.

I look at it as the closest we have ever been. The question arises, what's the connection between the Pesach sacrifice and freedom or unity or even nationhood? There is an oft recited joke that the summary of all Jewish holidays goes something like this: They tried to kill us. We won. Let's eat!

That mantra started with Pesach. It is, after all the first holiday of the first month of the year. We can easily explain it as some of the Midrashic traditions do, which note that the lamb of a deity of sorts for the Egyptians and leave it at that. That response is “good enough” to start eating.

Those who have been to my Shiurim however, know that I don't let "good enough" go unchecked. There were way too many aspects of the first Pesach offering that beg for answers. Why did the Jews have to find and keep their sacrificial lamb for several days before the 14th of Nissan when they were slaughtered? What is the relevance of the sacrifice to the Jewish story of freedom? How does the celebration at home, as individual groups, signify freedom? How does it perpetuate the moral mission of Israel as a nation?

One of the greatest Jewish scholars of the 19th century, a man who all but predicted the character by which the nation of Israel would eventually rise to re-claim its promised land, Rav Shimshon Refael Hirsch, z'l, provided some excellent insights, in his commentary to the Chumash. His words are chilling and concepts logical, oft taken straight from Torah verses. (*Translation and explanations taken in parts from Hirsch Chumash, Feldheim Publishing*).

So how did God free men from the above acts? ***Slaves have no individual personality. They have no property. They have no family.*** (See, Kedushin 16a, Yevamot 62a and Pesachim 88b). So how would God create a nation from those that are stateless?

The answer is, by swiftly reversing each of the attributes of slavery and bestowing upon the people, rights of free people. Without reversal of these stigmas of slavery, one is still a slave despite that the shackles have been broken.

The verse that commences the commandment to begin counting a new month so that the calendar of events, and thereby the Pesach offering, can be established states:

לְבֵית־אָבֹת שָׁה אִישׁ לָהֶם וְיִקְחוּ הַיּוֹם לַחֹדֶשׁ בַּעֲשָׂר לְאָמֹר יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל־כָּל־עַדָּת דְּבָרָו
לְבֵית שָׁה

meaning, "speak to the whole community of Israel saying, on the tenth day of this month, they shall take each for himself a lamb for each parental home, a lamb for **each house**."

From the start, the term עֲדָה is used, which shares the root יָעַד meaning to "appoint", connoting a sense of community and common purpose.

Then, four days later, on the 14th of Nissan, the families slaughtered their lamb. Blood from this lamb was then spread on the door posts and the meat was eaten roasted and whole. So what does sacrificing a lamb have to do with creating free minded people? How did this reverse the bonds of slavery?

Free as Individuals

The first step was creation, by God, of individual status. Giving each Jew a sense of independence (rather than dependence on a slave owner), a sense self and a sense of self respect. A right to chose and a right to appoint. This was accomplished by giving all Jews the right to “designate” another person who is head of their household to sacrifice the Pesach offering on their behalf. Slaves can’t vote and cannot appoint an agent. Free men can. Giving each Jew the right to choose was necessary because free will is required in the service of God. Self-identity is also accomplished by enabling the head of the household to “accept” that responsibility, which no slave owner can take away from him.

Free to Own Property

The second step, the acquisition of the lamb and open ownership of it, was also a remarkable act of defiance against the Egyptian slave owners. Everyone knows that slaves can’t own property. Taking it is one thing. Tying it to your bed post is another. And so, the Jews became owners of property that they could chose to do what they want with.

The Family Unit

By allowing family members to depart from their masters’ tasks and to connect with one another, the family unit was also re-established. Son recognized parents and parents recognized, and welcomed home, their children. These acts may seem minor as compared to the grand plan of the Jewish Exodus, but the Egyptians, much like the Nazis of the 20th century, knew that the strength of the Jews lies in the sanctity of their family unit. Hence why these nations took every measure to undermine that unit. Placing individuals and households firmly on their own feet and securing them against intrusion from the outside, required an act of God.

The Families become a Nation

So how do separate families become a nation that serves a single God? What is necessary to bind these families together into nationhood? In the secular world it is necessity that creates nations. Because small groups need things like roads, structure, and protection, groups form societies which then form countries. Society in the secular world, therefore, is nothing more than common need and greed. A particular group of people with a similar belief system need to stay together so as to gain mutual benefit for themselves, such as armies, infrastructure and so on. These are beneficent purposes but they are not enough.

Israel would always need more in order to survive as a nation. After all, the above factors only ensure survival of a nation for so long as it has its physical land. Once it does not have it, the secular nation dissolves. Where would the nation of Israel have been if, 2000 years ago, the only thing that held us together were the roads, farms and bridges of a land from which we were now exiled?

The nation of Israel, would have to endure with or without its land – so that it could always come back to *it* as a nation. Therefore, God wanted something in addition to the need for survival that held us together.

The result was God's mandate that his followers follow a religion based on "giving". In Judaism, it is not the poor that need the rich, because we believe that God can always take care of the Poor! It is the rich that need the poor in order to fulfill their many mitzvot relating to the requirements to give. In Jewish law, therefore, it is abundance and excess that ties us together. Not the need for more.

The Pesach offering rules weren't just the first set of mitzvot. It was the first time that Jews were required to first recognize their excesses and give from that excess to their fellow Jew. God commanded us that, if a family determined it would have "excesses," or left overs, from the Pesach lamb offering, they first be required to seek a neighbor or friend that was not already part of a Pesach group and "invite" that person into their group for the sacrificial service. ויכול יתי דהפין כל - all that are hungry come partake and eat.

While any free people can form a nation to safeguard their personal needs, God's nation would be built on the necessity to give, not the necessity to receive.

The Jewish state therefore (ironically, both then and now), was not built on personal need, but on the sense of duty, or mitzvot – the need to help others. The Jewish "right of return" was never just a physical one, it's a spiritual one too. Hence ingrained in so many of our laws are mandates such as setting aside tithes, and making offerings, and providing from your first harvest to the Temple offerings. Our religion is replete with giving. To take is purely physical; but to give, fills a spiritual void that God knew makes us whole together, and, that would make us worthy of His protection.

And so, on Pesach we open the door and invite others in and we offer *to give*. It's not just something we do as a family. It's something we do as God's nation.

Nissan - The Head of All Months

Dr. Robert Rahmani

The Pasuk in Parshat Bo (12:42) states: “It is a night reserved (Leil Shimurim) for Hashem to take them out of the land of Egypt, it is the night - this one - unto Hashem; reserved (Shimurim) for all the Children of Israel for their generation.”

The Ohr Hachayim Hakadosh wonders about the repetitive nature of the Pasuk as it relates to the word SHIMURIM, and infers that the Pasuk alludes to several significant events throughout history, the five wondrous miracles whose appointed time is the night of the fifteenth of Nissan.

The first of these miracles happened in the times Avraham, when he defeated the Four Kings, as the Pasuk says, “And he with his servants deployed against them at night and struck them.” The night mentioned was the fifteenth of Nissan. The second of these miracles was the Exodus from Egypt, about which it is written, “it was at midnight that Hashem struck every first born in the land of Egypt.” The Pasuk refers to the midnight of the fifteenth of Nissan. The third of the miracles occurred in the time of King Chizkiyah, when the Angel Gabriel struck the camp of Sancherev King of Assyria, an episode about which it is written (II Malachim 19:35), “and it was at that night: an Angel of Hashem went out and struck down one hundred eighty five thousand people of the Assyrian camp.” “That night” refers to the fifteenth of Nissan. The fourth of these miracles occurred in the time of Mordechai and Esther, as it is written (Esther 6:1), “That night the King’s sleep was disturbed.” “That night” refers to the fifteenth of Nissan. (Parenthetically, the Gemara in Megilla 15b teaches that the phrase “the King’s sleep was disturbed” refers to Hashem, the King of all kings, Who on that night was aroused to save the Jewish nation.) The fifth and final of these miracles will be the future Redemption in the time of Mashiach, which will also take place on the fifteenth of Nissan.

The Arukh Hashulkhan (429:2) asks “why was the month of Nissan chosen to be such an auspicious month, including the time of redemption from Egypt?”

It is because the Egyptians worshipped sheep, and the sheep represents the zodiac symbol Aries, the most prominent of the twelve symbols. The month of Nissan corresponds to Aries, since that constellation rises at sunset during that month. Pharaoh relied on the ascending power of Aries to protect him from G-d’s punishment. Therefore, although he was completely broken into submission by the destruction of the hail, he gathered enough confidence to the point that he threw Moshe and Aharon from his presence when they came and warned him about the

impending disastrous invasion of the locusts. Later on, knowing that the month of Nissan was about to begin, his confidence and haughtiness rose even more, that he warned Moshe that he dare not come to see him again.

All this was due to the fact that Pharoah felt that the stars were aligned in his favor during Nissan, more than any other time. In response to this, Hashem told Moshe (Shemot 12:2), “This month (Nissan) is for you the head of all months.” This month, in which Pharoah has placed all his misplaced confidence and trust, is indeed the chief of all months, but it is FOR YOU, not for him. During this very month it will be proven that the so-called powers of astrology are false, that G-d is the sole power in the universe above and on earth below and that He has chosen the Jewish nation as His treasured nation. Therefore, it is the first and foremost month FOR YOU. Aside from being the anniversary of our redemption from slavery, the month has special significance in other ways. According to Rebbi Yehoshua Ben Hananya, our forefathers were born during the month of Nissan. Furthermore, the month of Nissan is a period of joy and celebration. This is the meaning of the Mishna (Taanit 29a) “once the month of Adar begins, we increase our joy fullness.” The increase in joy continues through the month of Nissan as well, as Rashi explains, “this is the period when miracles were performed for the sake of Yisrael during Purim and Pesach.” The previous month of Adar is the month that “was switched from mourning to joy for the people of Yisrael, from sadness to celebration” (Esther 9:22).

The celebration is for the hidden miracles that we recognized only in hindsight. The miracles of the month of Nissan, however, are overt wonders totally beyond the laws of nature, including the ten Makot.

The month of Nissan is rooted in the word NES, meaning miracle, alluding to the miracles performed for our ancestors during that month. May we celebrate the next Pesach in the month of Nissan in Yerushalayim.

Why I am Proud to be a Jew

Emil Ben-David

Based on a shiur by Rabbi Leeor Dahan via TorahAnytime.com

There is a fundamental question that every Jew should ask themselves and really think about, as well as discuss with their children and grandchildren. The question is: What makes us so special? Why are we unique? Why are we better than the other nations?

To understand the answer to this we must go back, way back, to the very first Jew; Avraham Avinu. Avraham found Hashem on his own. He lived his life to do the will of Hashem and follow in His ways. Because of this Hashem made a covenant with him. The covenant known as “Brit Bein Habetarim.” In this covenant Hashem promises Avraham many children, forming an eternal nation, who will inherit the land of Israel. Fantastic! Avraham Avinu found Hashem and followed in His ways, which merited him the covenant and future reward. Avraham was certainly special and deserving. But what about us? How does being a descendant of Avraham affect us today, in 2019? How does the “Brit Ben Habetarim” influence our lives today?

The Gemara in Masechet Nedarim 32a asks:

אמר רבי אבהו אמר רבי אלעזר מפני מה נענש אברהם אבינו ונשתעבדו בניו
למצרים מאתיים ועשר שנים

Rabbi Abbahu said that Rabbi Elazar said: For what reason was Abraham our Patriarch punished and his children enslaved to Egypt for 210 years?

A few answers are given, but one which I would like to focus on is the answer given by Shemuel. He says:

שמואל אמר מפני שהפריז על מדותיו של הקב"ה שנאמר במה אדע כי אירשנה
(בראשית טו, ח)

Shemuel said: Because he greatly examined [hifriz] the characteristics of the Holy One, Blessed be He, as it is stated: "Whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?" (Genesis 15:8).

Shemuel, is in essence saying that the whole reason we, as nation, were enslaved in Egypt was because Avraham asked a question. Due to this question Hashem responded and said:

וַיֹּאמֶר לְאַבְרָם יָדַע תֵּדַע כִּי־גֵר | יִהְיֶה זְרַעְךָ בְּאֶרֶץ לֹא לָהֶם וְעַבְדּוּם וְעָנּוּ אֹתָם אַרְבַּע
מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה :

And He said to Abram, “Know well that your offspring shall be strangers in a land not theirs, and they shall be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years; (Genesis 15: 13)

Does this seem fair? You are telling me that 210 years of being slaves and suffering in Egypt was because of a question? Furthermore, we know that Avraham was able to pass 10 unfathomable tests to show his level of trust and belief in Hashem. How could he ask such a thing? What is this question and what is this response?

While going through the Torah we find many different attributes of Hashem. In our words, he is sometimes passionate and merciful, sometimes angry and sometimes slow to anger. But there is one attribute of Hashem that is always absolute, and that is Emet (Truth). As the Gemara in Masechet Shabbat 55a states:

אמר רבי חנינא חותמו של הקדוש ברוך הוא אמת

Rabbi Hanina said: The seal of the Holy One, Blessed be He, is truth [emet]

This attribute of Hashem is constant and is how the world is always being orchestrated. Avraham understood this attribute of Hashem in the highest degree and so he asked a very basic question. Avraham understood that he deserved the covenant and reward Hashem promised and so he asked; how will You keep this promise if in the future my descendants will not follow in Your ways? If they abandon Your ways, the attribute of Emet will dictate that they should not be deserving of the covenant and reward. On the one hand Hashem is “bound” to keep His covenant, but on the other hand He “cannot” go against the attribute of Emet.

Now we can understand Hashem’s response. “Know well that your offspring shall be strangers in a land not theirs, and they shall be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years.” Hashem is answering Avraham that the time will come where your descendant will abandon My ways and they will try to be like the other nations. When that happens, the attribute of Emet will “force” Me to bring upon them challenges and suffering so that I can fulfill my covenant and promise to you. The Midrash tells us that after Yosef and his brothers died the Jewish people abandoned the mitzvah of Brit Milah. They did not want to be perceived as different, rather they wanted to be like the Egyptians. It was in response to this that Hashem was “forced” to put us through 210 years of slavery. Uniquely, the way the world {in the past, present, and future} is orchestrated, is that when the Jewish nation does not do Kiddush (i.e.

follow the ways of Hashem), the other nations of the world will be sure to do Havdalah (i.e. differentiate/separate themselves).

If you stop and think about it, the slavery in Egypt was not really a punishment for our action, rather the way of the world. Hashem never really punishes us, nor does He cause us to suffer, if not for our own benefit. What would have happened if we would not have become slaves? If Hashem decided to let things be and not get involved? There is no question that we would have completely assimilated, and Judaism would have been lost. There would be no remembrance of Avraham Avinu and no fulfillment of the promise.

The Gemara in Shabbat 5a tells us:

רבי שמעון בן יוחאי אומר שלש מתנות טובות נתן הקדוש ברוך הוא לישראל וכולן
לא נתן אלא על ידי יסורין אלו הן תורה וארץ ישראל והעולם הבא

Rabbi Shimon ben Yoḥai says: The Holy One, Blessed be He, gave Israel three precious gifts, all of which were given only by means of suffering: Torah, Eretz Yisrael, and the World-to-Come.

What does this come to say? That we must go through suffering in order to obtain Torah, Israel, and The World to Come? What if we are righteous and deserving? Seemingly, we would still have to go through suffering. The answer is, yes! We do have to go through suffering in order to merit these precious gifts. But in reality, there are two types of suffering in which we can choose from. The positive suffering, like Avraham Avinu chose, where he lived his life to do the Will of Hashem or the negative suffering of potential slavery and oppression.

It is not easy being a Jew. It is not easy to keep Shabbat, keep kosher, keep family purity, and it is certainly not easy to clean for Pesach! But by doing all of this (and many more) we are choosing to go through positive suffering. However, when we as a nation, do not follow the will of Hashem and we choose to abandon His ways, we will inevitably have to go through the negative suffering. In either case, the end result will be the same. Hashem's promise with Avraham will be fulfilled and we will forever merit to receive the Torah, Israel and The World to Come.

We should all be proud to be Jewish and part of such a special nation, whose actions directly reflect the course of life in the past, present, and future.

Foundations of Experience

Daniel E. Dilamani

Introduction

In Parshat Yitro, we read about one of the most important episodes in our nation's history, Ma'amad Har Sinai - the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai. After living in Egypt for over two hundred years, God redeemed the Jewish people from slavery and struck down Egypt - the largest empire in the world. He then led us through the desert to Mount Sinai, where we gathered at the foot of the mountain to receive God's direct revelation for the first time (as opposed to the messages we received through Moshe). This is Hashem's formal introduction to Am Yisrael, the only mass revelation in history, and He begins by saying:

"I am Hashem, your Lord, Who has taken you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of slavery." (Exodus 20:2)

These are the first words of the Ten Commandments - words that are etched into our nation's memory for eternity.

Question

Something seems off - why does Hashem choose to introduce Himself to us (and be remembered) as the one who took us out of Egypt? Would it not make more sense for God to identify Himself in more general terms - as either the "Creator of the Universe" or maybe the "Master of all"? Why does He describe Himself in such a specific way: as our redeemer from Egypt?

This question has bothered me for quite some time. I think that there are two different approaches one can take to answer this question, and both answers teach us of the importance of the Pesach story in our people's memory.

Approach #1

We have to remember who Hashem was speaking to. The approximately three million Jews gathered at Har Sinai were not present to witness the creation of the world. Although Hashem's creation of the universe was an awesome event, it was not something that these Jews could relate to. On the other hand, the exodus from Egypt was something they could relate to, as they had experienced it themselves. Through witnessing all that Hashem had done to save them and destroy Egypt, they understood that Hashem is not only the Creator, but also the sole Master of the

universe. This gave them the most solid foundation for their faith in Hashem - a foundation of experience. Foundations of experience are always stronger than foundations of blind faith.

Approach #2

The second approach is a little deeper, and focuses on understanding the context of the Jews of those times - we have to understand their mentality. They had just been released from more than a century long bondage in Egypt. Not only had they been born into slavery, but so had their parents and even grandparents - the life of slavery was all they knew. They were entrenched in what is referred to by many as a “slave mentality” - having no concept of what it means to be free.

The goal of taking the Jews out of Egypt was for them to receive the Torah and go on to conquer Eretz Yisrael. The problem was their mental state did not allow for them to achieve either of these goals.

They did not have the proper mindset to enter a covenant (a mutual agreement) with Hashem and accept the Torah. They could not understand that Hashem was offering them a choice, as they had no choices in Egypt. That is why Hashem reminded them of the fact that He had took them out of Egypt. He was saying “Before we enter this mutually agreed upon covenant, understand that you are not being forced into this - you do not have to say yes to this like you would have under Pharaoh.” *“I am Hashem, your Lord, Who has taken you out of the land of Egypt”* - you are free, get rid of your slave mentality!

They also were not able and ready to enter Israel and fight together as a free and unified nation, as mentally, they were not free, even if they were no longer physically subjugated by their Egyptian oppressors. It requires a free mind to organize together and fight for a greater purpose.

Rabbi Rafi Peretz, former Chief Rabbi of the IDF, summarized this idea well when speaking to a group of IDF soldiers:

“The gift of freedom and independence was not given to us on a silver platter. The exodus from Egypt obligated us to free ourselves from the mentality of slavery, and to adopt the consciousness of a free people. The continuation of the journey, in the desert and even within the land of Israel, required both natural and personal sacrifice. Fighting enemies of the state requires self-sacrifice...Maimonides elaborates and says that the essential difficulty of the

transition from slavery to freedom was the willingness to take up arms and fight for freedom.”

That is why when Hashem took the Jewish people out of Egypt, instead of taking them the short way - through the land of the Phillistines (where they would have to fight them) - He took them through the long and lonely way - the desert. As the pasuk states:

“Now when Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them by way of the land of the Phillistines, although it was nearer; for God said, “The people may have a change of heart when they see war, and return to Egypt.” So God led the people roundabout, by way of the wilderness at the Sea of Reeds.” (Exodus 13: 17-18)

Conclusion

So, which approach is the correct one? Which answer helps us to better understand our original question? The beautiful thing about our Torah is that it is multi-layered with meaning - there are many ways to understand any part of the text. We do not have to choose one answer over another, rather both answers can live together in harmony.

The Talmud teaches us that: *“In every generation a person is obligated to regard himself as if he had come out of Egypt” (Pesachim 116b).* We must all feel as if Hashem has freed us from slavery and work towards achieving mental freedom, just as our ancestors before us.

May each and every one of us internalize the fact that God is the Creator of the universe and Master of everything that happens in it. And may we all have a deep and meaningful Pesach.

The Bitter Herb of Emunah

Lior Kashimallak

Pain and suffering are an integral part of our lives. Too often we try to avoid or deny it. On Passover night we are all obligated to eat Maror (Bitter Herbs). Our Rabbis teach us that if one swallows Maror without chewing it, he has not fulfilled the mitzvah as it is necessary to taste the bitterness of the herb (Orach Chaim 475:3). For this reason, one of the essential elements of Passover night is the partaking of Maror and accepting the pain and suffering of our past - "by chewing the Maror, we sweeten its bitterness and experience a taste of the Divine" (Pri Etz Chaim 21:7). Furthermore, we must have Emunah (faith) in Hashem during hard times in order to experience our own personal salvation.

It may seem like the Jewish nation is no longer under the rulership of Pharaoh and he has no dominion over us anymore. However, the Talmud says that, "In every generation a person is obligated to regard himself as if he personally left Egypt" (Pesachim 10:5). We might have never stepped foot in the land, or experienced actual slavery, yet every year we are all required to remember the pain and suffering that our ancestors faced. In addition, one must keep in mind their own personal hardships on this night. "For everyday that passes, the forces of darkness increase" and our challenges have grown harder throughout time (Sotah 49a).

Likewise, Rebbe Nachman of Breslov says, "The root of all our struggles today is simply due to a lack of Emunah (Likutey Moharan 7:1). When mentioning Emunah to others, it seems to be the least of their worries. As a result, they struggle to let go of their limited understanding of Hashem. In fact the Hebrew word for Egypt, Mitzrayim, is related to the word Meitzar, which means limitation. Our limited understanding creates artificial barriers that stand between us and the Holy One, blessed be He. This does not mean we should stop using our minds or asking questions. Instead, Emunah is meant to clear any doubt we might have towards Him, as it is stated, "Israel was redeemed from Egypt as a reward for their Emunah (Mechilta, Beshalach 14:31). When Amram from tribe of Levi heard Pharaoh's decree, "Every son who is born you shall cast into the Nile", he separated from his wife Yocheved. The reason was to prevent having a son that is destined to be killed. However, Miriam their daughter, insisted that her parents should conceive for the survival of the Jewish nation. She demonstrated Emunah during difficult times. Therefore, Hashem had mercy upon them and they bore Moshe Rabbenu to save the Jewish nation.

During the Passover seder we can all practice Emunah. This can be done when combining the Matza together with Maror, as it is written, "They shall eat it with unleavened bread [Matzot] and bitter herbs [Maror] (Numbers 9:11)". Before explaining the contrast between both, we must understand their hidden meanings. The simple explanation behind Matzah may be understood by comparing it to chametz (leaven). Matzah remains flat and simple-looking which reflects humility. Chametz gets bloated as it rises, symbolizing self-inflated pride and ego, the antitheses of Torah. Therefore we must seek to be like Matzah which the holy Zohar compares to "the bread of Emunah" (Vol. II, p. 183b). By achieving a state of humility we can achieve Emunah in Hashem.

Maror on the other hand, signifies hardship and suffering in our lives. In the same way, everyone must labor both physically and spiritually in order to achieve Emunah. Finally, once we reach our goal, a great state of satisfaction enters our minds. Yet, we must be careful and understand that success does not come without bitterness and hard work as it is written, "By the sweat of your brow you will eat bread (Gen. 18-19)." That is why we combine the Maror together with Matzah. In other words, through the labor of overcoming obstacles and having Emunah in Hashem, we will succeed in leaving our personal Egypt. Just like Hashem hinted to Avraham in Parashat Lech Lecha, "They will enslave and oppress them... and afterwards they shall leave with great wealth." (15:15).

The following story is written by Rebbe Nachman of Breslov which can be shared with friends and family during the Passover Seder:

"Two homeless men, a Jew and a Gentile traveled together. The Jew told the Gentile to pretend he was a Jew (which he could do since their language is similar to Yiddish), so their hosts would have pity on him. Since Pesach was approaching, the Jew taught him how to behave during the Seder. He outlined the stages of the Seder: First Kiddush is made, then hands are washed, etc. However, he forgot to tell him about the bitter herb.

They went to the synagogue the first night of Pesach, and they were invited to two different homes. The Gentile was very hungry and looked forward to the fine foods that had been described by the Jew. However, first they gave him a piece of celery dipped in salt water, and other things served at the Seder. Afterwards they began to recite the Haggadah; he sat there longing for the meal. When the matzah was served, he was very happy because that was the sign the main meal was about to begin! But to his astonishment they gave him the bitter herb — a piece of horseradish. It was so bitter, and he thought

that this was the entire meal. He bolted from the table, fuming and hungry, saying to himself, "Cursed Jews! After all that ceremony, that's all they serve to eat!" He went to the synagogue where he had arranged to meet his friend and fell asleep.

After a while, the Jew arrived, happy and full from a good meal. "How was your Seder?" he asked. The other told him what had happened. "Fool!" replied the Jew. "If you had waited just a little longer, you would have had a lavish meal, as I had."

The same is true regarding Emunah. After all the effort everyone goes through in order to come closer to Hashem, we are "served a bitter herb". Unfortunately, some may think that bitterness is all there is to it when it comes to religious observance, and they run away. But if we endure for just a bit longer and apply Emunah, then everyone can experience all types of spiritual desire for Hashem.

Understanding the Importance of Prayer Through the Plague of Frogs

Michael Livi & Ryan LeVian

The ideas expressed in this essay were adopted from Rabbi Eli Mansour

Pesach is arguably the most important Jewish holiday we have on our calendar. During Pesach, the entire Jewish Nation looks back at their history in Egypt with hopes of learning and relaying the story of their ancestors over to the next generation of Jews. Through this process, Jews worldwide relive the amazing miracles that Hashem did for our ancestors that were living as slaves in Egypt.

Towards the beginning of the story (before the second plague of frogs to be precise), Hashem tells Moshe for the second time that he must speak to Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, saying that Pharaoh must let Bnei Yisrael leave Egypt, and if Pharaoh refuses, Hashem will cast upon Egypt **מַכַּת צְפַרְדֵּי** (which most commonly translates to the plague of frogs). Pharaoh refuses to let Bnei Yisrael leave Egypt. Moshe then tells his brother Aharon to go raise his staff over the Nile River and Hashem will bring **מַכַּת צְפַרְדֵּי** upon Egypt. Unlike the common understanding, this plague caused an enormous disturbance to Pharaoh's palace and kingdom. These frogs weren't like any regular frogs. Not only did they swarm the Nile, they also encroached upon every inch of Egyptian property; from the kitchen in Pharaoh's palace to the common Egyptian's oven and kneading bowl. Due to their abundance, the frogs would not allow for any Egyptian to sleep at night and they could be found in any Egyptian meal, giving Pharaoh and the Egyptians a very hard time. The best way for our modern society to understand what this plague was like for the Egyptians is through the following parable: Imagine after a long, tiring day at work you finally get into your bed when you suddenly hear a car alarm go off. To make matters worse, the alarm continues to blast for 45 minutes. The frogs in Egypt are compared to thousands of car alarms blasting at the same time for seven full days (instead of only 45 minutes). You can understand how badly the Egyptians wanted the plague to end.

As the 7th day of the terrible plague arrives, Pharaoh calls in Moshe and Aharon asking them to end the plague. Moshe responded by asking Pharaoh a very interesting question: When do you want this plague to end? Pharaoh tells Moshe to stop it tomorrow. Now, why would Pharaoh tell Moshe to end this plague tomorrow if he and his kingdom underwent so much distress? Our Sages explain that Pharaoh's sorcerers had told him that there would be a plague that will last seven days and Pharaoh realizes that he is speaking to Moshe on the seventh day of the plague. Once

this is going through Pharaoh's mind, he decides to tell Moshe to end the plague tomorrow, which is the eighth day of the plague, to prove that Hashem wasn't actually behind all of this. He was so deeply invested in trying to disprove Hashem's involvement in the plague that he agreed to cause an extra day of suffering throughout the entire kingdom.

Picture a scenario where a friend of the king walks into the king's palace in need of a huge favor. The man explains to the king that his brother is supposed to get married in a week, but he does not have the necessary funds available to pay for the wedding. He requests from the very wealthy king if he would be willing to lend him two hundred thousand dollars to cover the costs of the wedding. This seems like a very reasonable request from the wealthy king's friend, but before the king had a chance to respond, his friend added that he would also need the money in cash because that's what the caterer requested. Lastly, the friend added that he is going out of town for five days and will need the money to be ready in exactly six days so he can give it to the caterer on time. At first, the friend was just asking the king for a small favor, but by the end, it became a huge request with many conditions.

Usually when a friend asks someone, especially a king, for a favor, he does not give him conditions. Now that Pharaoh told Moshe to stop the plague tomorrow, Moshe had to go and pray for this plague to end. Although this seems like something Moshe would do, instead of praying for the plague to end immediately, he prays for the plague to end tomorrow. He needed the plague to end tomorrow to prove to Pharaoh that Hashem is really behind all of this. Using the logic from the story, we would assume that Hashem, the King of the universe, would not answer to a request with such a big condition. Nevertheless, this is the exact point where we are mistaken. The difference between Hashem and any human king is that Hashem always listens to our prayers. Additionally, our prayers will always be answered when Hashem sees through divine understanding that our requests will only benefit us. The main lessons we learn from Moshe praying for the plague to stop "tomorrow" is that not only does Hashem answer our prayers, but we are able to ask him for whatever we want in any manner that we choose.

Who are the Four Boys?

Reuben Ben-Yehuda

The Haggadah describes 4 types of children, referencing a passage from the Torah.

As a child I have always struggled (and I am still struggling) with this definition of four different types of children.

Is there really such a thing as a child that is only “wise”? How can there possibly be a child that can be only “wicked”? Is there such a thing as a “simple” child that doesn’t have any personality? Have you ever seen a child that “doesn’t know how to ask”?

One may claim that the “4 types of children” are not 4 different children, rather they really represent 4 stages of one’s childhood. A sort of a “childhood circle of life” in an exact reverse order from how we found them on the Haggadah.

Shelo Iodea Lishol (שְׂאִינוּ יוֹדֵעַ לִשְׁאֹל) – The one who “doesn’t know how to ask”. This is our default state as human beings when we are first born. Babies when they are first born cry for “no reason”. They are not yet able to understand what they need and even if they do, they are not able to ask or differentiate one cry from another.

Tam (תָּם) – The “Innocent”. This is the second stage of our life. At this point, we are still young, but we don’t have an opinion, a personality, or ego. We are simple and innocent and all we ask for is for our primary necessities in order to survive. We ask for our primary necessities but we don’t have an understanding yet of what else might be available there.

Rasha (רָשָׁע) – The Wicked. Not to be taken in the literal sense, but all of us, growing up, we reach a point of our childhood where we “want”, and very easily this “want” gets transformed into a request. That request can easily evolve into an egoistic and self-centered demand to our parents.

Chacham (חָכָם) – The Wise. As times goes by, our wisdom increases by learning Torah, starting from the Shema Israel, to the 10 Commandments to the 613 Mizvot and more. This wisdom allows us to understand more of what is right and good for us versus what is evil. The epicenter of that is our Bat/Bar Mizvah where we are finally entitled to fully enter the Community as a full member.

According to this interpretation, the 4 types of children are really representing everyone's childhood and our evolution from newborns into full members of "Am Israel".

A second interpretation to the concept of the 4 children could be that the term "banim" in the Haggadah is not necessarily implying children, but is being used, in a Biblical manner, referring to the Jewish Nation collectively as "Bnei Israel". Also, here one might claim that "four types" are really representing four character traits that we all have, and not four distinct types of people.

A good part of our everyday personal prayers and Tefilot is related to asking Hashem and making requests. In fact, the epicenter of our prayer is the "Amida" – which is made of many requests. For this reason, I think that these four character traits are really referring to *how* we pray to Hashem, how our questions are asked and not to the type of person we are.

Similarly to the first interpretation, in this case we are also talking about four personalities that are in each and every one of us, and each of them prevails in a different time of our life. In this case I am following the order from the Haggadah:

Chacham (חכם) – The Wise. In this case the Wise is representing our ability to detach ourselves from the material world and ask primarily what really matters and for what we are not necessarily able to control, even in part. For example, when we pray for health, protection and wisdom and we do so with real and sincere Kavana. An example of this is Shlomo Ha-Melech. When Hashem offered him "anything he wanted" he asked for only one thing, Wisdom.

Rasha (רשע) – The Wicked. I think that there is a little "Rasha" in all of us, which is called Yetzer Ha-Ra. When praying it is part of our natural instinct to ask for material things, personal benefits or even in some cases making requests for the wrong thing or purpose. We are all aiming to minimize this trait about our personality but in today's society it is inevitable that at least we get at least tempted to take this direction from time to time.

Tam (טם) – The "Innocent". This is our state of mind when we don't pray with any particular effort, Kavana, but rather just passively without an actual purpose or effort. This is more true for example when we rush our tefilot or just read as quickly as possible as opposed to reflecting on our words.

Shelo Iodea Lishol (שְׁאֵינוּ יוֹדֵעַ לִשְׁאֹל) – The one who “doesn't know how to ask”. This is applicable to when we want to pray, but we don't know what is the right way to do so. This is not only related to our lack of familiarity with the siddur or the text that we are reciting, but also to not knowing what we should be praying for and how to ask.

The point of this second interpretation is that we all have a bit of the four types of “personalities” in all of us. We have to be smart in reminding ourselves when we pray who we are and why we are doing this and always aim for the collective good and not our personal benefits. In fact, the requests in the Amida are always in plural because as a single nation, we are to protect one another and help each other in achieving a collective goal and not egotistically only for ourselves.

I'd like to conclude by saying that Pesach is often regarded as the “Rosh Hashana” of the Torah.

Looking back at this past year, this has been a very unusual year for us. Covid led many of us to change our habits, our routines, reinvent our profession, think about what is important to us and how to get there.

May the worst be behind us, and may the light at the end of this tunnel illuminate our lives bring us soon to a “new normal”. Nothing will be the same after Covid and for this reason I hope that we will take this opportunity to reflect on the year that we just concluded and think on how we can let the “רָקֶם” in us prevail and inspire us to think good, ask the right questions and allow us to think of which one of the four types of children we want to inspire to be.

Leshana Habaa BeYerushalaim!

The Root of Mitzrayim

Giacomo Bassal

What is the root of the word Mitzrayim (מצרים)? It is Metzar (מצר), meaning to restrict, border, bound, or limit. Tzar (צר) can mean suffer, distress, or narrow. Many of these connotations can describe the time the Jews spent in Egypt. Much can be learned from the name of this nation that will be discussed here.

To describe the Nation of Egypt in a nutshell, it is said to be a foreign land to the Jews. The people were Idol Worshipers, they were promiscuous and immoral. Most of their acts did not abide by the 7 Noahide laws let alone the Jewish laws. In a passuk from parashat Lech Lecha which is read on the night of the seder, G-D says to Abraham “וְיָדַע תְּדַע כִּי-גֵר יִהְיֶה וְרָעָה בְּאֶרֶץ לֹא לָהֶם,” That his seed will be strangers in a foreign land. Many can understand this passuk to be talking about Egypt and the seed being the B'nei Israel. There was much Egypt had to offer at the time, as far as agriculture, medicine, architecture and art. Jews found much appeal there and were immersed in the nature of the society. 80% of the Jews in fact were never able to leave Egypt and were left behind during the exodus. Many ideas as to why they stayed back surround this. Chazal say some Jews perished during the plague of darkness. G-D simply didn't differentiate them between the Egyptians when he brought down the plague. They had assimilated to such an extent that they were targeted together with the Egyptians.

The Talmud discusses a great point that gives perspective on the times of the exodus to the generations living now in the year 2020. The Tanna speaks on the Mishna in Masechet Pesachim “בְּכָל דּוֹר ודּוֹר חַיִּיב אָדָם לִרְאוֹת אֶת עַצְמוֹ כְּאִילוֹ הוּא יָצָא מִמִּצְרַיִם” - Every generation needs to look at themselves as if they left Egypt. One can look at this literally or can see it as a mentality or a state of mind. To explain the Tanna further here, we have to understand that every generation is susceptible to the society around them. The Tanna wanted to make a point of this and instill it in the generations to come. Examples can be seen in the times of Channukah with the Greeks, The Spanish Inquisition and Nazi Germany. All these nations had implemented laws to consume the Jewish neshamot. Some fled the opposition and others were lost.

In 2020 the Jews are still dealing with a society that has them bound to it. Through the internet we are even more exposed to the immorality of a modernized Egypt, that is America. The luring objects of our society can keep us narrow sighted and unable to identify with the truth, that is G-Ds will. This can be compared to a generation that's living in a modern day Mitzrayim and experiencing “מצר”.

We read the Hallel prayer on Rosh Chodesh and the Moadim, which is a praise to Hashem. There is a line that states “מִן הַמִּצָּר קָרָאתִי יְהוָה” - “from my distress, I called out to you”, “וַעֲנֵנִי בְמִרְחֵב יְהוָה” - “And G-D answered me with expansiveness.” During the holidays we praise Hashem for the Joyous moment, thanking him for bringing it to us. The Jewish people have said this in every moment in their history no matter the circumstance. Showing us there is always a reason to be grateful. The Jewish people use struggle to elevate themselves. As mentioned by Chazal and many influential figures: “A life without struggle is a life with no growth”.

As difficulties surround the people of today via the Coronavirus, much can be gained from it. Not being able to leave the house or spend time with the family for Pesach can be heartbreaking for most people. The desert that our ancestors set out for in Egypt was not much easier either. We can use this time as a springboard to bring us closer to the redemption which we are told to anticipate every day. Through concentrated prayer, learning and a little more effort in engaging in acts of kindness it can be possible. The opportunity is there for everyone to come together through desire of being together and the appreciation we have for one another can bring us closer to that. It has been taken away from us and therefore we thirst for the brotherhood even more. We shall be free from this “מִצָּר” soon enough. With the help of G-D we will see the Moshiach and he will bring us to celebrate Pesach in the Holy Land speedily in our times. I hope this finds my community members well and I look forward to seeing everybody very soon for happy occasions.

Chag Pesach Kasher V'Sameach!

The Psychological Seder – 15 Steps to Freedom

Taraneh Kohanim

One of my favorite lectures about Pesach is given by Rabbi YY Jacobson in a deep, two-part class called “Your Psychological Seder” (available on Youtube). In it, he explains that Pesach is a night of freedom, and he describes beautifully the “energy of liberation” - a special energy on the night of the seder that can be harnessed for self improvement. Mitzrayim (Egypt) is not just a geographical location that we escaped from all those years ago; it is a state of mind, a condition, a voice in our brain that tells us we are stuck in a doomed path - it is our constraints, our confinements, our fears that can hold us back and embitter us.

The 15 steps of the seder can liberate us from our ‘mitzrayim’ and free our hearts and souls in a profound way. He goes on to explain how the 15 parts of the seder represent a ladder with 15 rungs: when you climb the ladder, you can reach an emotional, psychological, spiritual state and move towards inner and outer freedom and emancipation. If you focus on the physical parts of the seder and their technicalities alone, you could miss the full experience and the internal spiritual significance of each step that can help you soar up this ladder. Here is a very brief summary of the deep psychology behind each of these steps, as explained by Rabbi Jacobson.

1. **Kadesh** (kiddush): Kadesh comes from the word kedusha which means to sanctify or designate. Our first step should be designating ourselves as a wave of holiness, with infinite potential and endless possibilities. We should designate space in our minds and in our hearts and time in our day to focus on our feelings, on inner growth and on our relationship with Hashem.

2. **Urchatz** (washing hands): Clean hands represent living an honest, pure life. We should examine our lives and see if we are living a dirty life, entangled in a maze of distortion or deception where there is no room for growth. We need to be able to look in the mirror with a clear conscience (clean hands) in order to reach our full potential.

3. **Karpas** (dipping a vegetable): We say borei pri ha’adama on the dipped vegetable. Adama means earth/ground but also comes from the word adam (man) - it represents not only the vegetable that comes from the ground but also the human being. But adam also comes from the word domeh which means similar/ likeness - we are similar to or close to Hashem. So we have an intrinsic dichotomy within us in

that we are both from the earth AND a reflection of the truth and the harmony of Hashem. “Adam is a noun; how i interpret it - that’s my choice.”

According to another interpretation, the body represents adama (karpas) and the soul represents domeh - we must cherish our karpas, our body, and work with it by dipping it into water, which represents our life force - Torah, in order to elevate it to a higher plane.

4. **Yachatz** (breaking the middle matzah): In life, there is no real growth if we are not ready to break our matzah - to develop vulnerability and humility. We have to acknowledge pain, imperfection, failure and uncertainty in order to be real and accountable, humble and open. When we expose those ‘cracks’ in our broken matzah (our vulnerabilities), we can allow light to come in and shine.

5. **Magid** (telling the story): Challenging ourselves and expanding our horizons through learning is a huge step towards our liberation. “Ignorance breeds apathy; wisdom broadens horizons.” We can get stuck sometimes on a fixed perspective when we don’t allow ourselves to learn something new. Magid allows us to explore new ideas and discover expanded perspectives.

6. **Rachtzah** (washing hands): Now that we have learned something new, we have to wash again to make sure we don’t become arrogant with our newly acquired knowledge. If we aren’t refined and our hands are not clean, intellectual and spiritual development can be dangerous - it can become a tool to cover up fear, insecurity and shame instead of enabling humility and growth.

7. **Motzi** (blessing on the matzah/ha’motzi): Motzi literally means to extract or take out. We need to learn how to extract divine sparks and opportunities in the material world. “Everything in the world exists because of the divine energy that gives it life. That divine energy represents its ultimate purpose and constitutes its innermost design.” Every physical and material component in life has a divine purpose and we can extract that spiritual energy when we have the right perspective.

8. **Matzah** (eating the matzah): Matzah is deflated or unleavened bread. It represents humility and dignity. You can extract opportunities in everything (motzi) but it should be done in a humble way (matzah) without flaunting or being dishonorable to your true self. The balance between motzi and matzah is crucial to a fully liberated life.

9. **Marror** (bitter herbs): Marror is supposed to represent the bitterness of Egypt. But why did the Jews in Egypt need to eat marror on the night before they were going to leave? Why did they need a reminder of something that was so fresh in their minds? There are two approaches to trauma or pain - suppressing (silent denial) and verbalizing/expressing. One extreme can lead to many problems down the road where the emotion builds up until it explodes, and the other extreme can leave you overwhelmed and consumed or stuck in the emotion. Marror is a symbol of the balance of these two extremes: there is room for the pain - a dedicated time in the Seder where we are asked to feel it and honor it, but then we need to move on and continue living our lives.

10. **Korech** (sandwich): The three parts of the sandwich are pesach, matzah and marror. Pesach is roasted meat - a royal delicacy full of taste and aroma; matzah is bland and tasteless; marror is supposed to be bitter. These represent the three types of experiences in life, three dimensions of the day, or three types of people: rich and prosperous (inspiring and unforgettable), bland/neutral (forgettable or unremarkable), and difficult/bitter (pessimistic or negative). Korech represents the ability to create perspective for each of these states and to see opportunity for growth among each part of the sandwich.

11. **Shulchan Orech** (prepared table): This step represents the ability to look at our lives and see that everything is all 'set' by Hashem - we can sit and enjoy what has been prepared for us or be hospitable to others at our table because we are now free and have the power to give and to share.

12. **Tzafun** (eating the afikomen): Tzafun means hidden. We hide the afikomen and the children retrieve it. What does this symbolize? When we hide things in our subconscious, when we repress and sweep under the rug our past trauma, our children will bring it to the forefront and have to deal with it. We need to take the afikomen from our children and learn from them to delve deeper in our psyche to shine a light and deal with that which was once concealed or hidden.

Tzafun also represents the broken, hidden piece of afikomen - it symbolizes the wandering Jew that is often splintered and separated from Jewish observance. The afikomen must be brought back to the table to complete the seder. Similarly, we are all parts of the whole matzah and we will always have a place at the table and complete it together.

13. 14. 15. **Barech/Hallel/Nirtzah:** **Barech** (grace after meals) represents showing genuine gratitude for our blessings. Hallel means praise - we should live life without taking things for granted and bring out the light in others through praise. Nirtzah (conclusion of seder) means desirable - after all the work involved in the 14 previous steps, we could ask ourselves, “what’s the point?” Instead, we must realize that ultimately, the purpose of Creation is for Hashem to have an intimate relationship with each of us. The end result of these steps is a fulfillment of our mission in life, a fulfillment of Hashem’s desire and craving (nirtzah) to have a relationship with us, vulnerable and frail as we are, “...and to create together a fragment of heaven on Earth.”

B”H we should all be able to escape the bondage of slavery this year - the confines and restraints of our Mitzrayim, the voice in our head telling us we don’t deserve redemption and freedom. We should overcome the Pharaoh in us, escape our prisons, and realize that we are representatives of Hashem and are aligned with His infinity. We are full of possibility and promise and our circumstances do not define us; with Hashem’s help, they can guide us to focus our energy in the right direction - towards our true spiritual purpose and divine essence.

A Toast to Personal Freedom

Ilana Levy

We all believe in freedom, but how many of us understand it?

Is freedom the ability to do what I want when I want? Is it speaking my mind or expressing how I feel? Or is it having the ability to believe what I think is true without contradiction? What is freedom?

On Pesach we retell the journey of our people from slavery in Egypt to freedom. But what was their freedom? Was it solely not having to work back-breaking labor for Egyptians? Was it leaving a land that did not welcome them? Yes, but it is more! Freedom for them was leaving a position and place in which they did not belong and finding exactly where to go.

No longer slaving for Pharaoh, each person was able to look within and find what they were good at, where their talents lie, and incorporate that into the developing nation.

Without the oppressing dictatorship, they were able to practice and worship as they wished, to find a truth to follow and believe in. So yes, freedom is doing what you want when you want it, it is feeling and speaking and believing without prosecution, but it is more than that- it is looking WITHIN yourself to find your purpose, what you feel, and what you want to say. It is searching for your truth and living it, expressing it, believing it.

In Pesachim 116b we are commanded to celebrate personal freedom as it states:

בְּכָל דּוֹר וָדוֹר חַיִּיב אָדָם לִרְאוֹת אֶת עַצְמוֹ כְּאִילוֹ הוּא יָצָא מִמִּצְרַיִם

"In every generation, one must look upon himself as if he personally had gone out of Egypt".

The Haggadah adds on to this idea and even demands that we must imagine what it means to cross the sea to freedom and summon the courage to make it happen. In particular, the women at that time did that. Each woman looked within themselves, found their talents and pushed their husbands and children to believe and live their truth. They believed in the freedom and that it was coming, expressed it, and strived for it. They created tambourines and sung songs of praise and eventually were an integral part in the process of our freedom. This was a big step of us becoming a nation. When we each individually seek for our own freedom, Hashem combines our efforts to make us a unit and experience freedom as a nation.

As I am writing this, I think to myself that questions at the Seder aren't just meant for the children to ask. We need to look within our soul and create our own questions for self improvement and that is when one is truly free. The goal is to use the tools we have been given to make this happen in the context of our own lives. This Pesach, as you sit around the Seder table, ask yourself- what's really holding me back from my own freedom? Where am I not taking full responsibility for my life? What am I enslaved to that is holding me back from achieving my potential? What are the blockages, constrictions and limitations that stand in the way of accomplishing my goals in any area of my life? Am I a slave to my physical appetites? Does my professional life overtake my time and erode my relationships? Am I imprisoned by my need for approval from others? Am I constantly seeking more or newer or better without appreciating what I already have?

Picture what life would be like with those blocks removed in order to set yourself free. Before each of the first three cups of wine, ask Hashem to take away the things that are holding you back. Then before the fourth cup of wine, ask Him to take you to a place of freedom and utmost bliss. And as you eat the matzah, break through the shackles of your excuses and taste freedom.

Freedom is finding who you are and where you can be at the best of your ability. It is not only finding a home, but creating one too. We may not be slaves today, we may not be trapped in a land unwelcome, but we may still not be free. Every Pesach we have a golden opportunity — a launch window — to connect with this reality, the reality of freedom. We must remember that one can not be truly free unless one knows who he really is, what he really wants and what he is meant to do. We should use this chag as a reminder to keep searching for our personal freedom and tap into our inner self every single day. Detach from what is not us, and search for what is. Find where you belong, create your home, and find your freedom. As mentioned in the musaf prayer of festivals:

והשיאנו ה' אלוקינו את ברכת מועדיך

"We should carry over the blessing of the holiday into the holy year."

May the spirit of true freedom permeate our lives this Pesach and throughout the year, and may it carry us to the day when the entire world will know true freedom, with the coming of Mashiach speedily in our days. Amen!

Conversations for the Seder Night

Compiled by the Women of Rabbanit Bitton's Parasha Class

On the holiday of Pesach, we must take our job as educators seriously. Especially this night with the mitzvah, "vehigadta lebincha," to tell your children. As important as it is to clean and remove all the chametz, on Pesach we focus mainly on passing the torch, on reinforcing our Jewish identity as well as our childrens. We check that our values at home are on the right path. What is our stance on Jewish education or assimilation? As Pesach is approaching, we prepare for the Seders in which we "pass-over" the importance of our freedom to our children, teenagers, and even ourselves.

Here are some conversation starters and ideas compiled by the women of Rabbanit Bitton's Parasha class. These are great ideas to discuss with our families around the Seder table!

These conversation starters can apply to children, teenagers, and adults:

- ❖ Compare ourselves to Moshe Rabbenu. If someone with a lisp can become the Jewish nation's spokesman and leader, we must trust ourselves and put away our insecurities and we can accomplish a lot! Ask: We all have fear and insecurity. What are some things we're holding back from because we are insecure? How can we empower our children?
- ❖ Despite the fact that Moshe Rabbenu was the biggest leader of all time, he was humble enough to take advice from his father-in-law, Yitro. No matter how smart we are, we can always learn new things from others and grow. We just have to listen.
- ❖ Moshe and Aharon's sibling love is a great theme to share with them, especially after the siblings we learn about in Bereishit that did not always get along.
- ❖ Are there people going through exile or being treated like strangers? How does it make them feel? Examples: our exile from Iran, Spain, etc. Ask your parents/grandparents to speak about their exile from Iran. Where did they go after? How was the transition for them? What was it like being a stranger in a new land?!
- ❖ Ask ourselves-who needs our help, charity, food? Discuss the concept of giving. Ask: How can we give our time? (i.e. Hatzalah volunteers, Tomchei Shabbat)

How do we give our money? (i.e. Discuss the organizations we donate money to).

- ❖ Women who make a mark like Miriam and Yocheved should not go unnoticed. Women play a big part in our history, too. Ask: How can we empower our daughters to feel confident with themselves?
- ❖ Mention the people who refuse to do something wrong, like the women delivering the babies in Egypt who were supposed to kill the children but didn't. Ask: How can we do the right thing, even when it's hard?
- ❖ What is freedom? Are we free to think what we want? There are values being dictated in school and on the news that we might disagree with. Are we able to be respectful and consider people's opinions? Are we able to stay strong in our values even though we might be going against the beliefs of those around us?
- ❖ Dayenu: recognizing that one thing would have been enough but Hashem has given us more. Being grateful for each and every thing we have. Pray that we should always be able to do things to help people. Ask: are we givers or takers? How can we train ourselves to give, and not expect in return?

Chag Kasher v'Sameach!!

Breaking Free from the Shackles

Daniella Livi

Based on the teachings of Rabbi Chaim Rosenfeld.

Every Pesach, as we approach the end of our Seder, we are expected to feel as though we just personally left Egypt. How are we supposed to feel like this when we are not slaves, not in Egypt and weren't at the splitting of the sea? How can we connect to our Jewish history of the past and bring it into the present?

In Hebrew, the root of the word Egypt (Mitzrayim - מצרים) contains the word "narrow" (tzar - צר). Egypt was a place that limited human potential and enslaved the will. Today, in many different ways, we face our own personal "Egypt." There is always something that we want to do, but we get held back by the slave mentality of "I can't do it," or "I'm not good enough." We are all "slaves" to something. It is my belief that Pesach is a time to look deep into ourselves and think about what we are personally "slaves" to, and with the appropriate steps, free ourselves from our invisible shackles.

Something I've personally been struggling with is the amount of time I would spend on Instagram. At the end of each week, I would get a report on exactly how many minutes (or hours, I should say) I was spending on Instagram every day. The time added up each day, hours and hours. Constantly checking for a new post or story, I didn't want to miss out on the artificial world I had beneath my fingertips. I was wasting a tremendous amount of time every day, but it was too difficult to simply just stop. A friend of mine reached out to me about starting a social media cleanse and asked if I wanted to join. No long-term commitment, just for 40 days. I started out by just telling myself I wasn't going to open the app, but as this was obviously ineffective, I decided to altogether delete the app off my phone.

The first week, I found myself itching to go on Instagram, feeling like I could never accomplish this goal. Slowly, however, I was seeing the positive effects of this. By week three, when my alarm clock would go off, I would simply get up and start my day. In the past, I would say Modeh Ani with one hand ready to go on my phone. After such a long time of feeling controlled by a device, it was liberating not to let it control me.

Now, when I have a free moment, instead of wasting the minutes on Instagram, I try to use the precious time Hashem graciously grants me to do something productive. I found myself checking the small things I never got around to on my to-do list and

being able to focus on my life, as opposed to constantly checking on others. Making this small change enabled me to break free of the “shackles” of Instagram and gave me a taste of the freedom my ancestors felt when they left Egypt.

Let’s make it our goal this Pesach to identify what is enslaving us, formulate a plan, and ultimately reach the goal to free ourselves.

Chag Kasher ve Sameach!!

Freedom in Terms Relevant to Our Daily Lives

Daniella Livi

This article is adapted from an article by Sivan Rahav-Meir, a popular Israeli media personality and World Mizrahi Scholar-in-Residence.

The holiday of Pesach is called זמן חרותנו, “the time of our freedom.” What are we chained to in today’s society? The ultimate theme of Pesach is freedom, but how do we achieve that in modern times, where our lives are so different from the times where the Pesach story took place?

Here are some practical ways to achieve freedom relevant to our daily lives:

Freedom - is to choose what’s good for us, not what we think others want from us.

Freedom - is to live in the moment, and not post that precious moment on social media waiting for people's approval. To be able to be private and assess our value not by what others think, but by the good things we’re doing.

Freedom - is being able to make real, palpable connections, like choosing to spend time with people who are uplifting and genuine.

Freedom - is letting go of achieving that perfect Nun Taftoon and making the cake from a box.

Freedom - is to become familiar with the “off” button on our phones and connect with the people in our real life.

Freedom - is to be content with what we have, and not look to others when assessing our standards of happiness.

Freedom - is the capacity to give benefit of the doubt to the person driving really slow in front of us.

Freedom - is the capacity to remain silent in moments where we want to blow up.

Freedom - is the ability to strive to find the good in every situation and to find a way to use our struggles to ultimately lift ourselves up. To look positively at the reality of our lives and not to fall into the pit of complaint and discontent, rather to be grateful and make the best of our reality.

Freedom - is to work on our internal attributes that define a person's true worth, rather than our physical appearance. Both are important, but which are we prioritizing?

Freedom - is the ability to see each individual and be truly happy for them, not ponder what it would be like to live their life, but be happy with our own lives.

Freedom - is to uplift and support the people around us, rather than seeing their accomplishments and wishing we could have the same.

Rabbi Yehuda Halevi wrote: 'Slaves to time are abject slaves; only the slaves of Hashem are free.' What an idea! Only when we are עבדי ה' "Slaves of G-d," then we are truly free, because we are living for something much greater than ourselves.

Freedom - is Pesach!! How are you going to free yourself this Pesach? The sky is truly the limit. Freedom is just a word, until we give it meaning!

Have a Chag Kasher v'Sameach and may we all achieve true freedom in every sense of the word.

Bye, Bye Chametz

Robin Rendel

We all heard it before and most of us know it to be true, “money can’t buy happiness”- but do we really live like that? Do we spend more time at work making money or more time with our families? Do we spend more time online or more time being present? Do we spend more time acquiring more things or more time enjoying the things we own?

Do we spend more time Pesach cleaning or more time wondering why we have so much stuff?

Self-quarantining during this unprecedented time in history, has ultimately revealed to us that our values were mixed up all along. Pesach is here for us to recognize and appreciate what it means to be free. Our Exodus from Egypt was the essence of freedom.

Rav Zelig Pliskin (citing the Ohr Hachayim) points out that the Jewish people were physically freed the day they left Egypt, but the Torah records it later, after the sea split, “On that day, Hashem saved Israel from the hand of Egypt, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore” (Exodus 14:30). Freedom is not a physical state of being- it’s an emotional state of mind. The Jewish people were liberated only once they saw their enemies dead. The freedom was no longer just a physical release from bondage, it was an emotional freedom in their hearts.

We may be physically free after the quarantine is over (G-d willing soon) — but will returning back to our “normal lives” with sports, shopping, social gatherings, and work allow us to really be free? Do we feel free with so many obligations? So much to buy, so much to do? What if being free means choosing to say “no” sometimes? No to that extra hour at work away from our families in pursuit of money to buy more stuff, or no to our phones constantly buzzing for our attention. Living free is living with intention and purpose. Living free is forgoing screen FaceTime for actual face-time with the people we are closest to. It is consciously choosing to do what you truly value and love more: answering texts or listening to your spouse talk about his or her day at the dinner table? Scrolling on Instagram or reading a meaningful book before going to sleep? Pesach reminds us how to be free, by letting go of the excess in our life. Chametz represents these things.

There is a positive commandment in the Torah to remove all chametz from one’s home, “For a seven day period shall you eat matzot, but on the previous day you

shall nullify the leaven from your homes” (Exodus 12:15). Later, there is an additional commandment to eat matzah and not to have chametz in one’s domain, “...in the evening you shall eat matzot...leaven may not be found in your homes...” (Exodus 12: 18-19). The Torah could have plainly told us not to possess any chametz, but instead commands us first and foremost, to remove the chametz then a second time not to possess it. Why the redundancy dealing with chametz? Why do we need to first get rid of chametz before eating matzah? To begin living more simply and with more value, we have to remove all that makes life complicated. It could mean removing the candy in your home and trying to eat more fruits or removing the cell phone from your bedroom to try focusing on your spouse. All the “chametz” that takes away from what we truly want to do and who we truly want to be.

Removing Chametz becomes the priority for the holiday, while symbolizing the first step in simplifying our lives — ridding ourselves of any distractions. Year after year, we clean our houses intensely but it never seems to last. We frantically turn each room upside down once again, careful not to keep a mess, only to do the same next year. Alternatively, we could clean our homes with the intention to remove what does not belong (once and for all), what might take us away from what (or who) we sincerely love. This could mean donating that extra third winter coat sitting in our closet to someone who might need it and wearing our favorite winter coat more instead. It could mean no longer continuously buying more of the same stuff year after year. How do we kick this habit? The Torah hints at the solution. Only after we remove chametz, we are commanded to eat matzah. Only after we remove the excess, we can experience the joy of our values.

The commandment to eat Matzah is a reminder to end the vicious cycle of clutter and life’s distractions we encounter yearly. Matzah is a simple bread: its only ingredients are flour and water, nothing else – the bread that represents our freedom. Chametz on the other hand, is a lot more complex. Chametz requires more of our time and more ingredients. Chametz is excess. Matzah was the bread we grabbed in our rush to freedom. It was enough to nourish us. It was all we needed. A simple life is freeing. To live in this way means we don’t have to buy more and clutter our homes once again with things that don’t bring us happiness. It means Pesach cleaning doesn’t have to be so stressful. Once we remove the chametz, the distractions, we can make way for what is truly valuable, whether it be our favorite items, our favorite people, or using our time and energy doing what we love.

We know in our hearts materialism does not make us happy, but have we ever stopped to think whether we are truly living the simple life our soul desires? We left Egypt with our simple bread. We had our loved ones, our few valuables, and matzah.

In fact, it would be some of the valuables that led to our greatest national disaster. The Alshikh (Devarim 1:1) points out that the Jewish people had taken spoils from Egypt, but they ended up using it to sin with the Golden Calf. Attaining more can lead to bigger problems, like getting carried away with buying more in hopes to find happiness, or even worse – disconnecting from God as the Jews did with the Golden Calf. As the Jewish people used spoils to create a false god, we too can fall into the trap of worshipping materialism.

We have Pesach to get rid of all the chametz, all the excess in our lives. Our quarantine isolation might be physical, but it too will eventually end and the question we must ask ourselves will be: what will we do with this new freedom? As Pesach approaches, we find our real sense of freedom. At the Seder Table, when we sit back without any chametz in our homes, we can see our values when we eat our simple, untainted Matzah. We can choose to live in the present moment, with intention, doing what we love. We can worship God instead of our stuff.

Joshua Becker, founder of BecomingMinimalist.com, and Wall Street Journal best-selling author of *The More of Less* sums it up beautifully, “Once we let go of the things that don’t matter, we are free to pursue all the things that really do.”

Children of Freedom

Charlotte Shahverdi

Understanding freedom was a struggle of mine for quite some time. I've studied this concept in many ways. But, what clarified things the most for me was the literal translation (the Peshat) of our Torah and Haggadah which led me to a deeper study into the holiday of Pesah and how it pertains to us now.

We'll start with the Torah.

The Torah was given to Bnei Yisrael after a physical experience of freedom, Yetziat Mitzrayim. And it was given as our framework to continue the path of freedom through a lifelong journey of the self. We remind ourselves of this physical experience of savior several times a day in Keriyat Shema, when we say,

אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיכֶם אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִי אֶתְכֶם מֵמִצְרַיִם מֵעַבְדִּים וְאֶשְׁבֵּר
מִטַּת עַלְכֶם וְאוֹלָךְ אֶתְכֶם קוֹמְמִיּוֹת׃

I the LORD am your God who brought you out from the land of the Egyptians to be their slaves no more, who broke the bars of your yoke and made you walk erect. (Leviticus 26:13)

Now, let's go back to the beginning of the book of Shemot to help us see this opportunity of freedom that was given. The phrase, “שְׁלַח אֶת-עַמִּי יִשְׂרָאֵל” - Let my people go, so that they may serve Me - appears seven times in the book of Shemot. God had to relay this message to Pharaoh through Moshe several times, while in between, proving His power through various physical acts, the Ten Plagues. Although Pharaoh did surrender after the tenth time, his stubbornness towards God influenced the people in their lack of faith in Him. Bnei Yisrael naturally, from their environment, fell into this slave mentality. They believed this was as good as it was going to get for them. How could they have possibly seen that by following and believing Moshe, who knew this God was the right move for them at the time.

Many times, in our lives today, we tend to go back to the mindset that our nation had during their time in Egypt. We forget what Hashem wanted for us then and what He wants now - which is to follow Him and His ways which can help us reach our inner freedom. You may ask Why? or how?

He created each and every one of us. He knows our weaknesses as well as our strengths. No being knows us better than Him. But the beauty of it all is that He

does not expect it in an instant. It is part of each of our life long journeys. It is not something that we can do alone, nor should we! One of the many differences between Bnei Yisrael then and now is that we have something they did not, and that is the guide to attain this freedom, this journey of the self, which is our Torah.

A path to following the Torah is, to follow His ways. One way is, by celebrating the holiday of Pesah. Let's allow concentration on the "how to" when it comes to following Pesah. It is a seemingly restrictive holiday. We are told what to say, how to sit, what to eat and when. At first glance this seems much less meaningful and joyous than our other holidays. Why go through all this absence of our natural habits and deny our wants? These acts are mainly there to allow us to tap into our inner self. Surprisingly, restrictions can be a way to help us see our true selves. That is where our guide for the seder comes in, the Haggadah. I'd like to touch on a well-known verse from it, Ha Lachma Anya. At the start of Magid, we say the following:

הָא לַחְמָא עֲנִיָא דִּי אָכְלוּ אַבְהֵתָנָא בְּאַרְעָא דְּמִצְרַיִם. כָּל דְּכָפִין יְיָתִי וְיִיכַל, כָּל דְּצָרִיךְ
יְיָתִי וְיִפְסַח. הַשְׁתָּא חֲכָא, לְשָׁנָה הַבָּאָה בְּאַרְעָא דְּיִשְׂרָאֵל. הַשְׁתָּא עֲבָדִי, לְשָׁנָה הַבָּאָה
בְּנֵי חוֹרִין.

The likeness of this poor bread did our ancestors eat in the land of Egypt; all those that are hungry, let them approach and partake, all those that are in want, let them come and partake of the Paschal; at present we are here, but the next year we hope to be in the land of Israel, at present we are in servitude, but the next year we hope to be Children of Freedom.

This verse is there to remind us of the Lehem Oni - The Poor Man's Bread. Which is what our ancestors ate in Egypt because of the situation they were in. It is yet again, another reminder that we needed the physical acts to help us learn from our past. We can also see the matsa as bread eaten by Bnei Yisrael as they left Egypt in liberty. What transforms the bread of oppression into the bread of freedom is the willingness to share it with others.

Let's focus on this question: Why is this the first verse to the section of Magid?

I think, it is because of the significant message it is trying to show us. Let's pay attention to the last line in the verse.

הַשְׁתָּא עֲבָדִי, לְשָׁנָה הַבָּאָה בְּנֵי חוֹרִין

At present we are in servitude, but the next year we hope to be Children of Freedom.

Becoming free is not just about changing places physically, it is a change in our state of mind. Opening ourselves up internally, to allow the freedom to enter.

By being human in this world, naturally, we are all living lives of servitude. We are giving service to things and to others. But, that's not all that God wants from us as mentioned earlier. He's eagerly asking and patiently waiting for us to serve Him and start that connection. To be the Children of Freedom! To have the chance that our ancestors in Egypt did not. It is confusing, terrifying, yet so exhilarating to realize the significance of our everyday choices.

There are many messages that can be taken from this verse. However, one that is worth paying attention to is the one pertaining to the self. Working on, and taking the time to reflect on the life of our ancestors in Egypt while equally reflecting on our own lives today. How we can be the best humans we can be and compare ourselves to what we know not to be. Utilizing the Haggadah as our guide to be the Children of Freedom.

Another way for us to deepen our understanding of this freedom during Pesah is by being present and observing our acts at the Seder (how lucky are we that we get to have it twice!). Such as, who is sitting at our table with us, what are we putting into our mouths, why eat these random foods, why sit in certain positions, and ask the questions we ask. The Seders can be viewed as boring and difficult to connect to.

If done with careful thought, reflection, and questioning, we can all engage wholeheartedly and take part in this once a year, physical, spiritual, and intellectual act, which can help us further understand and appreciate our surroundings as well as our blessings and compare to what our brothers and sisters did not have! When we participate in the Seder, we are affirming our religion and our freedom.

On Pesah, we are indeed limited in what we eat. But by changing our usual habits (even if just for 9 days), we have the ability to be liberated. Because we get a chance to reflect in a different light, and get in touch with our souls, and nothing can be more freeing than that.

“When we nullify our will to do God’s will, we create something that is holy.” - Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

Wishing Us All a Meaningful Pesah!

Festival of Liberty

Gai Gohari

Pesach festival of liberty

We have been celebrating this since the year 2448 from Creation: We sit as a family to eat Matzah, drink the four cups of wine and eat the Maror to reminisce about the Exodus from our bondage in Egypt. "Slaves we were to Pharaoh in Egypt and now: we are children of freedom" we sing out loud!

Passover is all about freedom and the remembrance of the exodus from the Egyptian slavery through God's mighty hand and outstretched arm. What does it mean, really, to "be Free" or what is "real Freedom"? Are we really free?

I live in the land of the free and the brave, the USA, liberty is supposedly everywhere around me - is it still undeniably so? At this time, the talk of liberty of movement, freedom of speech and cancel culture is prominent in all the westernized world, shockingly so! Lots of people are having their tongues tied, their free choice locked away and all this was unthinkable on our planet.

Sitting at the Seder looking at your family eating the Matzah, can you wholeheartedly say "I am a Free human, free to choose, free to express"? Are we, yes "free" but still slaves to our minds, to our pressures, to our social standing, to our ego and to our urges? I am not sure this is real freedom.

Define Freedom

Real freedom is not only physical in the sense of the liberty to choose where to move around in space and time but it is first and foremost the birthright of making your own choices following your own God given instinct while expressing your own ideas with no fear of retaliation and consequence.

Freedom is also the autonomy from all the imbalanced impulses of our body along with the emancipation from all our emotional bondage. Liberation from all the mental constructs that impede us from truly being "children of the free" like we say in the Hagada.

So with the information at hand can you still certify that you are a free human, free to choose, free to speak, free from all your emotional baggage, free from addiction, free to do and be who you wish?

The people that left Egypt were indeed liberated from their oppressor but as the Scripture shows us glaringly, they still had a slave mentality. So much so it was decreed that only Joshua and Caleb would walk in the Promised Land from the original census.

Break Free

I have been in many prisons and stuck in many traps, emotional / mental / financial / physical ...as we all are - it's part of our evolutionary journey. At each stage of our life, we feel an imbalance, we see a lack, we want to break free. We ALL must want to break free from situations, handicaps, lacks, imbalances, people, living conditions, pressures, addictions. Pesach is here to remind us we can all set for self emancipation as a whole and as an individual, we remind ourselves of this event every single day. *"In remembrance of coming out of Egypt".*

The Creator took us then and he will take us out again. You just need to believe it and set a path for liberty. The question is do we want to get out of prison? Do we want to cut the chains? Nobody can take themselves out of jail says the Talmud, you need someone to open the lock for you.

I want to share with you the key that helped me come out of all my prisons: that key is Personal Prayer. When I was single and I wanted out of the trap of being incomplete I went out and prayed. When it was difficult for me to get out of bed in the morning, literally bondage chords tying me to the bed, I went out and prayed. When I was married and I had financial pressure I went out and prayed. When I wanted a better living situation for my family so we have more independence, I went out and prayed. When I wanted to change my career because I felt enslaved by my work I went out and prayed. When I was impeding my own growth with my own imbalances I went out and prayed (I still work on that). When I was too dependent on something and I wanted out of its grip I went out and prayed. When I had the Pharaohs (all sorts of Rasputins) in my life and I wanted self emancipation I went out and prayed.

One Address

At every point of my personal slavery, I realized the only way out is the Creator. He runs the world, no? He can split the red sea, close it back, and make it fly if he wanted! I only had one phone number and one address in my pocket: 001, 1 Creator Lane. The Creator is everywhere I learned but I like to meet him out there where there is vegetation, greens and flowers that soothe me, maybe some water streaming would

be nice too. An idyllic scene. You can find your own personal paradise meeting point with our Father in the sky.

"Maybe I can hear the birds singing as well, maybe I can breathe some fresh air while we talk, maybe I can put some music on, maybe we can go for a walk. You and me, like Father like Son, I can tell you all my problems - how big they are and You can tell me how Big YOU are and how it's so much simpler from up above. And I can talk to you in any language, in any way, in any slang, you understand it - you invented it. I am your creature - You, daddy, get me always!"

Desire is the path - Prayer is the vehicle - Change is the result

It all has to stem from the desire to be free: no desire for freedom and allowing this complacency will keep you chained down.

We can be tied, locked in a dungeon, gagged and blindfolded but our desire- our inner will to change- nobody can take that away from us. Desiring our happiness should be our first and foremost impulse for life. The pursuit of happiness through personal prayer is the culmination of our existence: achieving our goals with faith and self awareness is exactly why we are here. So please let's want this and will this into our lives!

Tell you what real freedom is for me: real freedom is talking to the Creator in your own words and in your own language, in your place of choice, anytime free to say whatever is on your mind, free to unload all the burden, free to cry, free to sing. Free from judgment. Free at last.

Knowing that this works undeniably, knowing the Creator hears you- not only hears you but stops the entire management of the world to listen to you -yes you- knowing you don't need anything else but Him. This is freedom!

Release from all the impediments we have been conditioned to accept. Once you have that self determination established above, I want to share with you one more key to the freedom of the mind.

Knowing you don't need to convince the Creator of anything: all this praying is not for Him-it's for you! You are free at last if you know this! Prayer is an opportunity for us to self reflect on those requests and needs we have. An opportunity to understand why we are in any kind of bondage and slavery- a chance to discover our true self and work on improving ourselves. All the lacks, all the slaveries stem from our inner imbalances.

We attract all the situations we are, for our own good, for our own evolutionary process. All our imbalances stem from a lack of prayer. Let's think about it deeply. Through Personal Prayer we can roll up our sleeves to fix all that is needed and unlock all the codes to our emancipation. If it wasn't for Hashem putting us in "time out" we would never set out to refresh ourselves, change our pattern of behavior and to see the toil of our hearts and mouths break the wall of our captivity. Then all your successes become the result of the relationship between you and the Creator and even your downfalls are just but a springboard for greater heights.

Freedom, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness

I realized my personal prayer- my spiritual pursuits - my search for inner balance are just as important (if not more) as my material pursuits.

Fulfilling my material needs through my spiritual endeavors while using matter to fulfill my spirit is what really, truly makes me Free as a Child and a Child of Freedom. Dialing 001 (reminds me I am a Zero without the One Creator) and driving to Creator Lane is liberating.

Having personal prayer in our lives, having the opportunity and desire to practice it, speaking the words, reflecting on where we are standing and having the mental freedom to be not embarrassed to talk to the Creator out loud (talking to yourself really out loud) is the epitome of freedom from all schemes.

Personal prayer is freedom in itself, it's an unbeaten path where no one can rob you of your attention and focus, there are no schemes, there is no system, it's all in our words and emotions.

In conclusion I'd like to share with you the intention and personal prayer I add to the structured blessing of "*Goel Israel*" (redeemer of Israel) which we say three times a day to remind us that Hashem is the redeemer past present and future: I add "redeem us from this trap, redeem us from this slavery redeem us from our low mind" so that we can clearly service you and Creation, free from all our prisons physical, emotional and mental.

Free at last.

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