

Yeshiva University Center for the Jewish Future
Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary

To-Go™

Pesach 5772



Featuring Divrei Torah from

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Mrs. Natalie Taylor

**Special Section: Haggadah Discussions for
the Family: A Collection from Yeshiva
University's Community Kollelim**



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On this Chag of *v'hegadata l'bincha*, of telling the story of our people, we take special pride in sharing with you our *Pesach-To Go*. Through sharing the torah of various Yeshiva personalities, we hope to add vivid color to your Torah thoughts around the seder and holiday table. With over 70,000 monthly unique visitors to our YU Torah website, 35,000 copies of the *YU Holiday To Go* series printed and disseminated, and an additional 5,000 copies downloaded we are excited about our capacity to make the walls of our *batei midrash* porous, allowing you and thousands more around the globe share the Torah of our Yeshiva.

This edition of *Pesach To Go* includes scholarly articles from Roshei Yeshiva and faculty members of Yeshiva University. It also includes a special section, *Haggadah Discussions for the Family*, a series that promotes conversations among the family throughout the Pesach seder. It is compiled by our budding scholars, members of our community kollelim in Chicago and Toronto.

In discussing the crossing of the Yam Suf, the Rambam (Maimonides), as well as other commentators [*Tosafot (Archin 15a s.v. kashem)*, Ibn Ezra (*Shemot 14:17*), Radak (*Shoftim 11:16*)] suggest that the Jewish people did not actually cross from one side to the other. Contrary to the proverbial joke - the children of Israel did not actually cross the sea to reach the other side. They instead entered and exited on the same coast, entering the sea and returning to the same beach front, just further down the coast from their origin.

And the fifth miracle [of the ten at Kriyat Yam Suf] included multiple crossing paths [for the Jewish people] equivalent to the amount of tribes. The [paths were designed] as rainbows, one within the other [with the Jewish people entering and exiting on the same side of the sea].

Rambam, Commentary on the Mishna, Avot 5:4

והחמישי - שהוא נבקע
לדרכים רבות כמספר
השבטים, קשת עגולה בתוך
קשת עגולה,
פיה"מ להרמב"ם אבות
ה:ד



In fact found in the commentary of the Rambam is the following diagram accentuating the point: Underlying this approach is the understanding that the purpose of *Kriyat Yam Suf* was not an expeditious get away from Egypt, offering a means to separate an enslaved people from their country of bondage by crossing a body of water. The critical achievement was found in the **journey**, not the **destination**. For during the journey they experienced the hand of God on their frail shoulders.

If we are truly to enjoy this holiday of freedom, we too must find a way to feel God in our lives. We all cross tumultuous waters; we navigate the currents of professional challenges, financial setbacks or the suffering of loved ones. Yet, without the dramatic miracle of parting waters, we must find a way to remove the barriers which often inhibit us from creating a rendezvous with God. Our Rabbis remind us that the true *chametz*, the kind which is most difficult to remove, is found in our hearts and souls. This is a form of “spiritual leavening” that creates obstacles deterring us from living truly free lives. Perhaps if we look closer and take a few minutes each day to focus on the important and not just the urgent, we will discover the wondrous role God continues to play in parting the turbulent waters that often challenge our lives.

I hope that the Torah found in this series enables all of us to use this holiday to reconnect, making this a true season of personal and communal redemption.

Chag Sameiakh,

Rabbi Kenneth Brander

The David Mitzner Dean

Yeshiva University Center for the Jewish Future

The Defining Moment: Once and Again

Rabbi Reuven Brand

Rosh Kollel, Yeshiva University Torah Mitzion Kollel of Chicago

In preparation for their triumphant departure from Egypt, the Jewish people were given one mitzvah, one charge, to seal their destiny as a freed people: the Pesach (paschal lamb). This historic event marked the end of centuries-old servitude and the beginning of nationhood for the descendents of Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov. Those who participated in the Pesach merited Divine protection from the tenth plague and left Egypt, while those who did not remained outside the covenantal community. This night of the fifteenth of Nissan was the defining moment for the Jews of Egypt and we recapture its suspense, excitement and spirituality every year at our exalted seder table. There was one simple prerequisite for participation in the Pesach in Egypt: a *brit milah* (circumcision). As the Torah describes in no uncertain terms:

And should a proselyte reside with you, he shall make a Passover sacrifice to the Lord. All his males shall be circumcised, and then he may approach to make it, and he will be like the native of the land, but no uncircumcised male may partake of it.

Shemot 12:48

וכי יגור אִתְּךָ גֵר וַעֲשֶׂה פֶסַח לֵה'
הַמּוֹל לֹו כָּל זָכָר וְאָז יִקְרַב לַעֲשׂוֹתוֹ
וְהָיָה כְּאֶזְרַח הָאָרֶץ וְכָל עֶרְל לֹא
יֹאכֵל בּוֹ.

שמות יב:מח

Several mitzvot had been known since the time of Adam, Noach, Avraham and Yaakov, yet the mitzvah of *milah* was the sole determinant of who could partake of a Pesach. This is not surprising as we know that there is a strong correlation between the mitzvot of *milah* and Pesach, as we will explore.

In the Haggadah, we reflect on the beginning of our relationship with Hashem and our undeserving state of spiritual poverty in Egypt. We invoke a prophetic description:

And I passed by you and saw you downtrodden with your blood, and I said to you, 'With your blood, live,' and I said to you, 'With your blood, live.'

Yechezkel 16:6

וְאָעֲבַר עֲלֶיךָ וְאָרְאֶךָ מִתְבּוֹסֶסֶת
בְּדַמֶּיךָ וְאָמַר לְךָ בְּדַמֶּיךָ חַיִּי
וְאָמַר לְךָ בְּדַמֶּיךָ חַיִּי.

יחזקאל טז:ו

The Midrash suggests that this verse actually alludes to the two experiences of Pesach and *milah*:

* Many insights in this article are based on a teaching I have learned from Rabbi Moshe Stav, Ra"m, at Yeshivat Kerem B'Yavneh. Thanks to Mrs. Ora Lee Kanner and Professor Leslie Newman for their editorial comments. All translations of verses are from Judaica Press.

What did the Holy One blessed be He see to protect them with blood? In order to remind them of the blood of the circumcision of Avraham. The Jewish people were saved from Egypt with two bloods: with the blood of the paschal lamb and the blood of circumcision as it states "and I said to you, 'With your blood, live,' and I said to you, 'With your blood, live.'"

Shemot Rabbah, Bo, no. 17

מה ראה הקב"ה להגן עליהם בדם כדי לזכור להם דם מילת אברהם, ובב' דמים ניצולו ישראל ממצרים בדם פסח ובדם מילה, שנא' ואומר לך בדמיוך חיי ואומר לך בדמיוך חיי בדם פסח ובדם מילה.
שמות רבה, פרשת בא פרשה יז

Another common feature of these two mitzvot is their unique Halachic category. The Talmud (*Makkot* 13b) notes that these are the only two cases that carry the punishment of *karet* (spiritual excision) without a negative commandment; they also lack a korban offering in case of error. Simply put, the mere failure to perform either of these two mitzvot invokes the harsh penalty of *karet*, which is otherwise reserved for a specific number of severe transgressions of Torah prohibitions.

Finally, it cannot be considered a coincidence of tradition that we celebrate the presence of Eliyahu the prophet at only two Jewish life cycle events: the seder commemoration of the Pesach and the *brit milah* of a newborn child. To appreciate the connection between these two mitzvot, let us take a closer look at the mitzvah of Pesach.

The Pesach was a *sui generis* event, just as our exodus from Egypt was a one-time, historic occurrence. The laws and practices of this sacrifice reflect its singular character and distinguish it from all other korbanot. First, the Pesach in Egypt was not really an offering at all, as there was no *mizbeach* (altar) on which to offer the sacrifice. Hence, the Torah never refers to the Pesach in Egypt as a korban. The Mishna in *Masechet Pesachim* (9:5) enumerates several other characteristics that were unique to the original Pesach of Mitzrayim:

What is the difference between the Passover in Egypt and Passover in future generations? The Pesach in Egypt had to be taken from the tenth, required sprinkling with a bundle of hyssop on the lintel and the two doorposts and was eaten in haste in one night. Passover for future generations is observed for seven days.

מה בין פסח מצרים לפסח דורות פסח מצרים מקחו מבעשור וטעון הזאה באגודת אזור על המשקוף ועל שתי מזוזות ונאכל בחפזון בלילה אחד ופסח דורות נוהג כל שבעה.

In addition to these anomalies of Pesach Mitzrayim, even the Pesach that was offered for generations as a korban in the Beit Hamikdash has several unusual laws. Most notably, the korban Pesach must be eaten as part of a predetermined group, which is not the case with any other offering (*Mishna, Zevachim* 5:8). This is a two-fold requirement. First, it mandates that in order for one to partake of a korban Pesach, he or she must be a designated participant before the korban is slaughtered, as the Mishna describes:

One is designated on it and removed from it until [The sacrifice] is slaughtered.

Mishna, Pesachim 9:3

נמנין ומושכין את ידיהם ממנו עד שישחט.
משנה פסחים ט:ג

Additionally, the actual eating of the korban must take place in a group. No portion of the Pesach may be eaten outside one's designated group, as the Rambam rules:

The Passover sacrifice can only be eaten with one group and one may not remove any of it from the group in which one is eating. One who removes an olive's-worth from one group to another on the night of the fifteenth receives lashes as it states "You shall not take any of the meat out of the house to the outside."

Rambam, Hilchot Korban Pesach 9:1

כל האוכל מן הפסח אינו אוכל אלא בחבורה אחת ואין מוציאין ממנו מן החבורה שיאכל בה. והמוציא ממנו כזית בשר מחבורה לחבורה בליל חמשה עשר לוקה שנאמר לא תוציא מן הבית מן הבשר חוצה. רמב"ם הלכות קרבן פסח ט:א

Further, even if one was able to actually consume an entire korban Pesach alone, according to one opinion in the Mishna, this is not allowed; one must eat the Pesach as part of a group.

What is the message of these Halachot that are unique to Pesach?

Perhaps all of these practices can be understood in light of the context of the Pesach in Egypt. The Midrash describes:

"Draw forth or buy yourselves sheep," This is what it states in the verse (Tehillim 97:7.) "All worshippers of graven images will be ashamed." When G-d told Moshe to slaughter the Passover sacrifice, Moshe said "Master of the Universe, how can I do such a thing? Don't You know that sheep are the gods of Egypt" as it states (Shemot 8:22 "Will we sacrifice the deity of the Egyptians before their eyes, and they will not stone us?" G-d said "For your life, the Jewish people will not leave here until they slaughter the gods of Egypt in front of their eyes so that I can teach them that their gods are nothing." And we find that this is what happened, for on that night the first born Egyptians were smitten and on the same night, the Jewish people slaughtered their Passover offerings and ate them. The Egyptians watched their first born die and their gods slaughtered and couldn't do anything as it states (Bamidbar 33:4.) "And the Egyptians were busy burying because the Lord had struck down their firstborn and had wrought vengeance against their deities."

Shemot Rabbah, Bo, no. 17

משכו וקחו לכם צאן הה"ד (תהלים צז) יבושו כל עובדי פסל, בשעה שאמר הקב"ה למשה לשחוט הפסח, אמר לו משה רבון העולם הדבר הזה היאך אני יכול לעשות אי אתה יודע שהצאן אלהיהן של מצרים הן, שנאמר (שמות ח) הן נזבחה את תועבת מצרים לעיניהם ולא יסקלוננו, אמר לו הקב"ה חייך אין ישראל יוצאין מכאן עד שישחטו את אלהי מצרים לעיניהם שאודיע להם שאין אלהיהם כלום, וכן מצינו שעשה, שבאותו הלילה הכה בכוריהם של מצרים ובו בלילה שחטו ישראל פסחיהן ואכלו והיו המצרים רואים בכוריהם הרוגים ואלהיהן שחוטין ולא היו יכולין לעשות כלום, שנאמר (במדבר לג) ומצרים מקברים את אשר הכה ה' בהם כל בכור ובאלהיהם עשה ה' שפטים, הוי יבושו כל עובדי פסל.

שמות רבה בא פר' יז

Here, the Midrash describes the context of the Pesach and sheds light on its significance as a defining moment. Let us consider the implication of this Midrash. According to this tradition, the sheep was an Egyptian deity, which the Jews were about to slaughter. Imagine the predicament of a Jew living in Egypt, having experienced the previous nine plagues but still living under the watchful eye of the Egyptians, his oppressive masters for centuries. G-d calls upon him to take the deity of his rulers on the tenth of Nissan in preparation for slaughter, with the promise of the impending Exodus. The presence of thousands of sheep in the Jewish environs

for four days obviously drew the attention of the Egyptians, who quickly learned that the Jews were about to commit the ultimate offense of decide. Only those individuals who were firmly convinced that they would leave Egypt as free people on the fifteenth of Nissan would have the temerity and courage to participate. This heroic demonstration of faith, this defining moment, would determine the destiny of each individual Jew.

We can now understand how the unique *halachot* of Pesach sharpened and amplified its role as a defining moment. The particulars that Hashem legislated made it impossible to equivocate about this decision. The Pesach had to be taken in advance and participants were required to register beforehand as well. Once one was included in the Pesach, it would be impossible to avoid detection by the Egyptians because the Pesach was eaten in groups, as families and neighborhoods. One was not allowed to snatch a piece of meat and eat it in hiding.

The Jews added insult to injury by splashing the blood of the Pesach, the Egyptian god, on the doorposts, marking the Jewish home, literally, marked for revenge at the hands of the Egyptians if the salvation would not arrive. Additionally, the manner in which the Pesach was eaten expressed this demonstration of faith in G-d and repudiation of the Egyptians. The Torah mandates:

You shall not eat it rare or boiled in water, except roasted over the fire its head with its legs and with its innards.

Shemot 12:9

אל תאכלו ממנו נא ובשר מבשרל במים כי אם
צלי אש ראשו על כרעיו ועל קרבו.
שמות יב:ט

The meat must be roasted on an open fire, which would obviously be done outdoors. The aroma of a barbecue is known to waft through the spring air and certainly permeated the homes of the Egyptians, who were surely furious at the spectacle. Meanwhile, the Jews sat eating their Pesach hastily, dressed in their travel clothes with their walking sticks at the ready, faithfully anticipating the imminent redemption, as the Torah describes:

And this is how you shall eat it: your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it in haste it is a Passover sacrifice to the Lord.

Shemot 12:11

וככה תאכלו אתו מתניכם הגרים נעליכם
ברגליכם ומקלכם בידכם ואכלתם אתו
בהפזון פסח הוא לה!
שמות יב:יא

We now have a greater appreciation of the significance of the Mitzvah of Pesach. The fundamental character of the redemption from Egypt was one-sided; we were unworthy, passive beneficiaries and G-d was the sole redeemer. It still was necessary for each Jew to make one decision- one expression of faith- to earn this salvation. The Pesach offering was this defining moment. In the Temple era, we reenacted this commitment annually with the offering of the korban Pesach, while today we do so at our seder table.

Perhaps in this light, we can appreciate the correlation between this mitzvah and the mitzvah of *milah*. *Milah* too represents a defining moment for a Jewish child. The act of circumcision is an irrevocable commitment to the covenantal community, one which also carries with it a measure of sacrifice beyond the actual pain of the procedure. There is a history of *mesirut nefesh* (self-sacrifice) for the performance of the mitzvah of *milah* dating back to Talmudic times (see

Shabbat 130a). Beyond this, the ongoing presence of the circumcision on one's body is itself a dramatic, undeniable symbol of Jewish identity. There are many known Holocaust anecdotes that describe how people who otherwise looked "Aryan" were exposed to be Jews by their Nazi tormentors by the presence of their circumcision. This is the ultimate commitment to G-d, similar to the one expressed by the Jews in Egypt.

We now appreciate why these two mitzvot carry their unique halachic categorization and the punishment of *karet*. *Karet*, spiritual excision, is as much a natural consequence as it is a punishment. It is obvious that one who does not make an unequivocal, sacrificial commitment cannot be a part of the community nor share in its destiny. Hence, the failure to perform Pesach or *milah* results in spiritual exclusion. In addition, we understand that because these mitzvot express our fundamental commitment to Hashem through self sacrifice, we perform them at the beginning of our life's journey, which exists on two planes- the individual and the communal. We perform the *milah* just after the birth of a child, the individual, and we perform the *Pesach* at the time of the birth of our nation which took place at the exodus.

Finally, we now understand why the presence of our prophet Eliyahu is felt at these two events. The Midrash teaches:

The Jewish people continued to perform circumcision until they were divided into kingdoms. Ephraim didn't perform circumcision and Eliyahu, who should be remembered for good, stood up and was zealous for G-d and said (Melachim I 19:10) "I have been zealous for the Lord." G-d said "You were always zealous regarding incest and now you were zealous. For your life, the Jewish people will not perform circumcision unless you see it with your own eyes." From here, the rabbis instituted setting an honorable chair for the angel of circumcision who is called Eliyahu, the angel of circumcision as it states (Malachi 3:1) "The angel of the covenant, whom you desire."

Yalkut Shimoni Parshat Lech Lecha

וכך היו ישראל מלין עד שנחלקו
לשתי ממלכות אפרים מנעו מהם
ברית מילה ועמד אליהו זכור לטוב
וקנא קנאה גדולה ויאמר קנא קנאתי
א"ל הקב"ה לעולם אתה מקנא קנאת
בשטים על גלוי עריות וקנאת כאן
חייך שאין ישראל עושין ברית מילה
עד שאתה רואה בעיניך, מכאן
התקינו חכמים להיות עושין מושב
כבוד למלאך הברית שנקרא אליהו
ז"ל מלאך הברית שנאמר ומלאך
הברית אשר אתם חפצים.
ילקוט שמעוני פרשת לך לך

According to this tradition, Eliyahu participates at the *milah* of every child as a response to his criticism of the Jewish people and their lack of commitment. The context of the verse that the Midrash cites is telling. Eliyahu stakes out his claim of zealotry after his dramatic victory over the idol Baal at Mount Carmel, when the Jews returned to their previously wicked practices. Eliyahu raced to the desert in despair, turning his back on the people, exposing their ambivalence. G-d teaches Eliyahu that despite the shortcomings of the Jews, they would always maintain a covenant, an unbroken commitment. This is expressed and symbolized by the circumcision; hence, Eliyahu is divinely ordained to witness this defining moment for each and every Jewish male child in history.

Similarly, he visits our homes each year as we sit at the seder to recount the Pesach, for the centerpiece of our seder experience is the korban Pesach. It is an indispensable part of our Haggadah liturgy, as we learn:

Rabban Gamliel would say: Anyone who has not said these three things on Pesach has not fulfilled his obligation and they are: Pesach, matzah and maror. Pesach in commemoration of the fact that the Omnipresent skipped over the houses of our forefathers. Matzah in commemoration of the redemption that our forefathers experienced. Maror in commemoration of the fact that the Egyptians made the lives of our forefathers in Egypt bitter.

Mishna, Pesachim 10:5

רבן גמליאל היה אומר כל שלא
אמר שלשה דברים אלו בפסח לא
יצא ידי חובתו ואלו הן פסח מצה
ומרור פסח על שום שפסח המקום
על בתי אבותינו במצרים מצה על
שום שנגאלו אבותינו במצרים
מרור על שום שמררו המצריים את
חיי אבותינו במצרים.
משנה פסחים י:ה

The three central motifs of the seder were wrapped together in one sandwich on the night of the exodus and eaten by Jews as their expression of their faith and impending freedom. Today, we eat the sandwich of matzah and maror, without the savory roasted meat of the Pesach, but we are conscious of its meaning and significance.

We recall the Pesach in various ways at our table, not merely to reconsider a sacrifice of bygone days, but to relive and rededicate ourselves to Hashem. Each year, we enable ourselves and our children to experience G-d's loving hand in reliving the redemption. We also remember the commitment and sacrifice of generations of Jews dating back to the Exodus, whose devotion expresses the meaning and message of the Pesach. Each year, we experience this defining moment and strengthen our unbroken commitment to Hashem, anticipating the redemption in our own lives.



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Sippur Yetzias Mitzrayim as a Special Form of Talmud Torah

Rabbi Menachem Genack

Rosh Yeshiva, RIETS

The primary text upon which we focus during the seder is the *parsha* in *Ki Savo*, “*Arami Ovaiv Avi*; (my father was tricked by an Aramean)” (Devarim 26:5), which also served as the text which would be recited by those who would bring *bikkurim* (first fruits) to Yerushalayim when they were *oleh regel*. The pilgrim would read, in thanks, the *parsha* of “*Arami Ovaiv Avi*.” The *Geonim* asked: Why was this text chosen to be the focus of the seder? There are so many direct and explicit *parshiyos* in *Sefer Shemos* that directly discuss *yetzias Mitzrayim*, the exodus. Why choose a more indirect *parsha* to serve as the primary text for exposition on the first night of Pesach?

Maggid as a form of Torah Study

Rabbi Soloveitchik, zt”l, suggested that the reason why this *parsha* was chosen, was that the primary mitzvah of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim*, the mitzvah to discuss the exodus on the night of the seder, is not only to retell the events of *yetzias Mitzrayim*, but it is a night of Torah Study. It is a night to study and to learn, through the instruments and the *middos* (tools) that the Torah *nidreshet bahem* (is analyzed), and through the vehicle of *Torah she-baal peh* (Oral Law), to interpret the *parsha* of *yetzias Mitzrayim*. As the Mishnah, *Pesachim* 116a, instructs: “*Ve-doresh kol ha-parsha kula* (one should interpret the entire section)”. *Doresh* means to interpret through *midrash*. The Mishnah in *Pesachim* also expresses *maggid* as a form of Torah study by stating, “*le-fi da'ato shel ben, aviv melamdo*; the father is obligated to teach his son based on the intellectual capacity of the child.” The expression is *melamdo* (to teach him), not *lesapro* (to tell him).

The Rav pointed out that this connection can be further proven from the comments of the Tosefta, *Pesachim* 10:8:

*One is obligated to involve oneself in the laws of
Passover all night long, even with one's son, alone,
or with one's student.*

חייב אדם לעסוק בהלכות הפסח כל הלילה אפילו בינו
לבין בנו אפילו בינו לבין עצמו אפילו בינו לבין
תלמידו.

* This article is based on a lecture given by Rabbi Genack and transcribed by R. Yonatan Kaganoff. The ideas quoted from Rabbi Soloveitchik (The Rav) were heard personally by Rabbi Genack.

The mitzvah of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim* includes not only telling over the miraculous events associated with *yetzias Mitzrayim*, but, additionally, by learning the laws, the *halakhos*, of the *mitzvos halayla* (the commandments relating to that night). In fact, the *Mekhilta*, in noting the answer to the *ben chakham* (the wise son) states that we teach him the laws of Pesach: “*Af at emor lo ki-hilkhot hapesach, ain maftirim achar pesach afikoman*; We teach him the *halakhos* of *akhilas korban Pesach* (the eating of the Passover sacrifice).” According to the text, the *girsas*, of the Vilna Gaon, it is “*ad ein maftirim* (until the last Mishnah in *Pesachim*).” We not only teach the *chakham* this particular law of “*ain maftirim achar pesach afikoman*”, but we teach him from beginning to end, all of the laws associated with *akhilas korban Pesach*.

In our Haggadah, we never mention Moshe Rabbeinu’s name. The Rav suggested that the reason is based on the passage in the Haggadah that states that the entire redemption was through *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* himself, *lo al yedai malakh, lo al yedai saraf, ela hakadosh baruch hu bekhvodo u-ve-atzmo* (not through an angel or a seraph, but rather through God himself). Therefore, it is inappropriate to mention any mortal as having a role in the exodus, even a mortal as important as Moshe Rabbeinu, who played a critical role in the exodus. Nevertheless, according to the Rambam, *Hilkhos Chametz U-Matzah* 7:2, the response to the *ben chakham* should include Moshe Rabbeinu's name. This is because when we are dealing with *halakha*, Moshe Rabbeinu’s name, as the *nosain hatorah* (the giver of the Torah), must be mentioned.

As we saw from the Tosefta, on the night of Pesach, there is a mitzvah to study Torah and in particular, the laws related to the *mitzvos halaylah*. That may be the reason why the Haggadah tells us the story of the five rabbis who gathered on seder night in Bnei Brak. The reason why they all came together is that the mitzvah of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim* includes telling the story of the exodus in its most dignified fashion and understanding it on as profound a level possible. The *Mekhilta* states in *Parshas Bo*:

R. Eliezer states: How do we know that (even) if there is a group of Torah scholars, that one must still study the laws of Passover until midnight? This is why it states "What are these testimonies etc."

Mekhilta, Masechta D'Pischa no. 18

ר' אליעזר אומר מנין אתה אומר שאם היתה חבורה של חכמים או של תלמידים שצריכים לעסוק בהלכות פסח עד חצות לכך נאמר מה העדות וגו'.
מכילתא, מסכתא דפסחא פרשה יח

We see that it is significant to have a *chaburah* (fellowship) of *talmidai chakhamim* (Torah scholars) together at the seder and that is why, even though all of these *Tanaim* lived in different cities, they all came together to create a *chaburah* of *talmidai chakhamim*. They wanted the *limud* (study) of that evening to be more profound, deeper, and extensive.

The story of the five rabbis provides an additional insight into the Talmud Torah aspect of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim*. We know that there is an argument, *machlokes Tanaim*, about the timeframe of the mitzvah of *akhilas korban Pesach* (eating the korban Pesach). According to Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah, one can only fulfill the mitzvah until midnight, and according to *chakhamim* one has all night long. Why then did Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah continue to stay up all night to continue studying and discussing *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim* with his fellow *Tanaim*, if,

according to his own opinion, the mitzvos of the night expire at midnight? Some *Achronim* suggested that he stayed up only in deference to the opinion of Rabbi Akiva, who was the *morah de-asra* (communal leader) of Bnei Brak and who decided the law in accordance with the Chakhamim. However, the Rav suggested that Rabbi Elazar's reason was because of the aforementioned Tosefta that one is obligated to study the laws of Pesach all night long. Therefore, one can derive that there are two aspects to this mitzvah of Talmud Torah of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim*. One is to discuss and analyze the *nissim*, miracles, that happened that evening. The second, as indicated in the answer to the *ben chakham*, is to study the *hilkhos hapesach*, the laws of korban Pesach. According to Rabbi Elazar Ben Azaryah the mitzvah to study the laws only applies in the “*shaah she-matzah u-maror munachim lefanecha*, the time when matzah and maror are placed before you,” and ends at midnight. However, Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah agrees that the mitzvah of *le-shabayach la-Hashem*, to praise Hashem, and to tell over the miraculous events and how God saved the Jewish people applies the entire evening.

Our response to the *ben chakham* contains both of these aspects. First, we respond “*avadim hayinu le-Paro be-Mitzrayim* (we were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt)”, which is a commandment to tell over the story, the events, and the history of *yetzias Mitzrayim* and of our miraculous redemption. Then, we respond: “*Ve-yetzavainu Hashem la-asos es kol hachukim haelu* (God commanded us to perform these statutes)”. This second half of the response is an interpretation of all of the *mitzvos halayla*. The mitzvah of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim* is to give the most profound interpretation (*doresh es kol haparsha kula*). It is a mitzvah of Talmud Torah that not only incorporates the story of the exodus, but also the *mitzvos halayla* of Pesach.

The Rav suggested that this is why Chazal chose the more obscure and less explicit *parsha* of “*arami oveid avi*” to analyze during the night: so that one can fulfill the mitzvah of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim* through the medium of *Torah shebaal peh*. The explicit *parshiyos* in *Sefer Shemos* of *Shemos*, *Vaera* and *Bo* describe the exodus in great detail and don't require explication or explanation. The choice of “*arami oveid avi*,” assures that the mitzvah will be fulfilled specifically through *derasha* (interpretation).

Based upon the Rav's analysis, that the mitzvah of the seder evening is a mitzvah of Talmud Torah, we can also understand the halakha regarding a person who celebrates the seder alone. The Gemara states:

Our rabbis taught: If the son is wise, he asks his father and if he is not wise, the wife asks and if not, he asks himself. Even two Torah scholars that know the laws of Pesach ask each other.

Pesachim 116a

תנו רבנן חכם בנו שואלו ואם אינו חכם אשתו
שואלתו ואם לאו הוא שואל לעצמו ואפילו שני
תלמידי חכמים שיודעין בהלכות הפסח שואלין זה
לזה
פסחים קטז.

The questions of *ma nishtana*, which are proscribed to be recited by the Mishnah, must be asked at the seder. Even if no one else is around, *shoel le-atzmo*, he should ask himself. It is a very strange phenomenon, that one should ask questions to oneself. I would like to suggest that the reason why one can ask oneself is that this self-interrogating act is reflective of the nature of Talmud Torah. The Rambam teaches this principle in the beginning of the laws of Talmud

Torah (1:4), where he discusses the mitzvah to teach one's son Torah:

Just as there is a commandment to teach one's son, so too there is a commandment to teach oneself.

כשם שמצווה עליו ללמד את בנו כך הוא מצווה ללמד עצמו.

The Rav pointed out that the Rambam should have said, just as one is obligated to teach his son, so too he is also obligated to study. What does it mean *le-lamaid es atzmo*, to teach oneself? The answer is that the essence the mitzvah of Talmud Torah is to share the treasures of Torah with others. Yet, even when one studies alone, it is not simply an act of study. It is always an act of teaching, of transmitting.

If this principle is true about Talmud Torah, then that concept can be applied to the mitzvah of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim*. Rabbi Chaim Soloveitchik pointed out that the mitzvah of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim*, which is unique to the night of Pesach, is an expansion beyond the general daily mitzvah of *zechiras yetzias Mitzrayim*, of remembering the exodus from Egypt. He noted that there are a number of additional requirements on the night of Pesach that are not required for the daily mitzvah. One of those requirements is that *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim* has to come through *shaylah u-teshuvah*, through question and answer. When there is no one to ask the *ma nishtana*, then one must ask oneself. This is because the Talmud Torah aspect of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim* produces a requirement of *shaylah* and *teshuvah*, question and answer.

The Rav explained that this is why before the passage about the four sons is introduced, we recite, “*Baruch haMakom baruch Hu, baruch shenason Torah le-am Yisrael, baruch Hu* (Blessed is the Omnipresent, blessed is He. Blessed [is He] Who gave the Torah to Israel, blessed is He)”. Why is it relevant to mention *baruch shenason Torah le-am Yisrael*? This passage, the Rav said, is a special form of *birkas hatorah*, blessing before Torah study. We recite this *beracha* before the unique mitzvah of Talmud Torah on the night of Pesach.

This mitzvah has to be gauged and measured appropriately, according to the capacity of each child present. It must be relevant and significant to each person. To the *chakham* who is able understand the abstract and complicated laws of Pesach, we teach him *Hilchos Pesach*. To the *she'aino yodeia lishol*, we must make Pesach relevant to him on his level.

The Night of Pesach as *Kabbalas Ol Malkhus Shamayim*

Why is the mitzvah of Talmud Torah and specifically *Torah shebaal peh*, chosen as the medium of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim*? I think that there are several reasons that can be found.

The night of Pesach serves as a night of *kabbalas ol malkhus shamayim*- accepting the yoke of heaven. *Yetzias Mitzrayim* is one of the foundations of the Jewish faith. It demonstrates to all Jews, God's involvement in human history.

The Rambam writes in the beginning of *Hilchos Kerias Shma*, that there is a biblical obligation to read all three *parshiyos*, portions, of *Kerias Shema*. Other *Rishonim* have different approaches. Some *Rishonim* are of the opinion that only the first verse is biblically required and the rest is a rabbinic requirement. Rashi seems to believe that it is only the first *parsha*. The *Shagas Aryeh* (in his responsa no. 9) was bothered by the Rambam's position because the Gemara in *Maseches*

Brachos 12b, seems to say explicitly that the last *parsha* of *tzitzis* is only rabbinic. The Gemara asks why the *parsha* of *tzitzis* was chosen to be recited twice daily, as opposed to alternative *parshiyos* and gives a number of reasons. If, according to the Rambam, the *parsha* of *tzitzis* is a biblical obligation, how could the Gemara debate which *parsha* to include as the third? Reb Chaim Soloveitchik suggested that, indeed, according to the Rambam, all three *parshiyos* are biblically mandated. However, there is no biblical requirement to specifically read the *parsha* of *tzitzis*. Rather, one must read a *parsha* that contains the theme of *zechiras yetzias Mitzrayim*. In order to fulfill the mitzvah of *Kerias Shema*, one must mention *yetzias Mitzrayim*.

Rambam does not count the mitzvah of *zechiras yetzias Mitzrayim* as an independent commandment in his list of 613 mitzvos. If there is a daily mitzvah to mention *yetzias Mitzrayim*, why is it not counted in the *minyan hamitzvos*? Reb Chaim explained that it is not an independent mitzvah. It is one of the details of the mitzvah of *Kerias Shema*, and the Rambam does not include *peratai ha-mitzvah*, the details of mitzvos when counting the mitzvos.

Why is the theme of *yetzias Mitzrayim* part of the mitzvah of *Kerias Shema*? *Yetzias Mitzrayim* is part of the mitzvah of *kabbalas ol malkhut shamayim*, accepting the yoke of heaven. Our belief in *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* is not simply a deistic belief in a God who created the world but then subsequently became uninvolved after the moment of creation. We believe in a God who is intimately involved in the world and in human events, a caring God who is involved in history and a design for humankind. This is the central lesson of *yetzias Mitzrayim*. According to the Rambam, the mitzvah of *kabbalas ol malkhus shamayim* must include a mention of *yetzias Mitzrayim*. Indeed, *Anochi Hashem Elokecha*, the foundation of faith according to the Rambam, in his *Minyan HaMitzvos*, is identified as the belief in a God who is *hotzaisikha mei-eretz mitzrayim*; it is the God who took us out of Egypt.

It is interesting that the Rambam also considers *Kerias Shema* a special mitzvah of Talmud Torah. The Rav proved this from the fact that *Ahava Rabbah*, which is the *bracha* immediately preceding *Keriat Shema* is a form of *birkas haTorah*. If a person did not say *birkas haTorah* before Shacharis (morning prayers), and he said the *bracha* of *Ahava Rabba*, he fulfills the biblical mitzvah of reciting a *birkas haTorah*. This proves that *Ahava Rabba* is a form of *birkas hatorah*. Why is it that *Ahava Rabba* was instituted as a form of *birkas hatorah*? It is because *Kerias Shema* itself is a mitzvah of Talmud Torah. This is not simply because the *parshiyos* of *Kerias Shema* are *parshiyos* that are in the Torah, but rather, the essence of *Kerias Shema* and the fulfillment of *Kerias Shema*, itself, is a special mitzvah of Talmud Torah.

There are a number of other sources that indicate the connection between *Kerias Shema* and Talmud Torah. First, Rashi *Berachos* 14b, says that the command to study Torah is mentioned in *Kerias Shema*- in the words *ve-debartu bam*. Rashi, says that those words are the source of both the mitzvah of Talmud Torah and the mitzvah of reading *Kerias Shema*. Second, the Yerushalmi, *Berachos* ch. 1, says that the reason why Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai and his colleagues were exempt from reciting *Kerias Shema* is because *hai shinun ve-hai shinun* (this and this are both considered study). Torah is *shinun*, study. The study with which they were involved constantly was Talmud Torah and *Kerias Shema* also is Talmud Torah. Third, the Gemara states in *Meseches Menachos* 99b, that the minimal requirement of Talmud Torah of *ve-*

hagisa bo yomam va-layla, the minimal requirement is fulfilled by saying *Shema* once at day and once at night.

Why is *Kerias Shema* an expression of the mitzvah of Talmud Torah? This is because it would be impossible to formulate and posit a mitzvah of *kabbalas ol malkhus shamayim* that doesn't include an aspect of Talmud Torah. When the Rambam discusses in *Hilkhos Kerias Shema*, the order of the *parshiyos* and the themes, he writes:

The section containing Hear O' Israel is read first because it contains the uniqueness of God, love for Him and study of His Torah which is the main principle that everything is dependent on.

Rambam, Hilkhos Kerias Shema 1:2

מקדימין לקרות פרשת שמע מפני
שיש בה יחוד השם ואהבתו
ותלמודו שהוא העיקר הגדול שהכל
תלוי בו.
רמב"ם הלכות קריאת שמע א:ב

Kerias Shema as a mitzvah of *kabbalas ol malkhus shamayim* includes the fundamental principle of Talmud Torah. Parallel to this is the mitzvah of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim* on the night of Pesach. As an extension of the daily mitzvah to remember *yetzias Mitzrayim*, it is, in a sense, a mitzvah of *kabbalas ol malkhus shamayim*. Since *kabbalas ol malkhus shamayim* without Talmud Torah would be impossible, *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim* must be through Talmud Torah, specifically through the medium of *Torah shebaal peh*.

I would like to suggest an additional insight into the story of the five rabbis in Bnei Brak. The Haggadah teaches us that they were involved in *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim* until their students told them it was time for *Kerias Shema shel Shacharis* (the morning recitation). Why did they continue until the time for *Kerias shema shel Shacharis*? Shouldn't the mitzvah of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim* end with dawn, well before the mitzvah of *Kerias Shema* begins at *misehyakir ben tekheles lelavan* (when there is enough light to distinguish between the blue and white strands of the *tzitzis*)? It is possible that the mitzvah of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim* extends until the next mitzvah of *zechiras yetzias Mitzrayim* begins. Since, according to the Rambam, *zechiras yetzias Mitzrayim* is part of *Kerias Shema*, the mitzvah of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim* is in effect until the time for *Kerias Shema shel Shacharis*.

Perhaps there is another reason why Talmud Torah is used, and, in particular, *Torah shebaal peh*, as the medium for the mitzvah of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim*. There is a fundamental difference between *Torah shebikhtav* and *Torah shebaal peh*. Let me demonstrate this difference with an example. The *pasuk* (*Shemos* 3:15) states “*zeh shmi li-olam ve-zeh zikhri li-dor dor* (this is My name forever and this is My remembrance for all generations).” The Gemara in *Pesachim* has the following comment on this verse:

The Holy One blessed be He said: The way My name is written is not the way it is pronounced. I am written with yud and heh and I am read with aleph and nun.

Pesachim 50a

אמר הקדוש ברוך הוא לא כשאני נכתב אני
נקרא, נכתב אני ביו"ד ה"א, ונקרא אני
באל"ף דל"ת.
פסחים נ.

God's name, the *Shem Hameforash* (the tetragrammaton) can almost never be pronounced as it is written. It can only be pronounced in the Bais HaMikdash by the Kohanim. The *kri*

(pronunciation) of the *Shem Hameforash* is the *shem adnus*. The Brisker Rav, Reb Velvel Soloveitchik, in his commentary on Chumash, suggests that *zeh shmi li-olam*, refers to the way that the name is written. Since it is written in the *Torah shebikhsav*, it is automatically enduring (*li-olam*). *Zeh zichri li-dor dor*, refers to the pronunciation. The way we pronounce His name can only be transmitted orally and is therefore considered *Torah shebaal peh*. This is why the *pasuk* states *li-dor dor*, because it is contingent on the transmission from generation to generation. The *Torah shebikhsav* doesn't require a transmission from one generation to the next. The *mesorah*, the transmission is strictly a function of *Torah shebaal peh*. The night of Pesach is the night of *mesorah*, when we pass the traditions that we experience from one generation to the next. The focal point of the night of the seder is the child, *ve-higadita li-bincha* (you shall tell your child). If it is *ve-higadita li-bincha*, then it is specifically through *Torah shebaal peh*; through the *mesorah*.

That may be why we find two occasions in Jewish life where we encounter Eliyahu HaNavi. One is at a *bris* and the other is the night of Pesach. What's the relationship between Eliyahu and the night of Pesach? The answer may be understood by understanding the historic role of Eliyahu HaNavi. Eliyahu HaNavi is the guarantor of the *mesorah*. From the time of Abaye and Rava, the *semikha* (ordination) ended. Until that time each rav (teacher) would bestow upon his student *semikha* and guarantee that the student was able and qualified to deal with certain issues. For example, *kenasos* (enforcing penalties) required *semikha*; *dinai nefashos* (capital trials) required *semikha*; *malkos* (lashings) required *semikha*. This chain extended back to Moshe Rabbeinu and ended in the time of Abaye and Rava. Ultimately it will be resurrected. How? There is one person from this unbroken chain who still exists and can re-institute the *semikha*. That person is Eliyahu HaNavi. That is why whenever we come to a halakhic conundrum that we cannot answer in the Gemara, the Gemara says “*Taiku*”, which refers to Eliyahu Hanavi: “*Tishbi yetareitz kushyot u-bayos*”. He will come and resolve all halakhic difficulties through the re-institution of *semikha*. Therefore, at a *bris*, when a father brings his child into the eternal covenant, “*lehachnis lebriso shel avraham avinu*”, and the *mesorah* is passed from one generation to the next, Eliyahu HaNavi is present. He is also present on the night of Pesach, which is a night of *mesorah*.

The Haggadah as a Form of *Shira*

I would like to suggest another reason why *Torah shebaal peh* is the medium for *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim*. One of the unique aspects of the Haggadah is that it incorporates into the seder, the mitzvah to say *Hallel* (praise to God). There are a number of indicators that *Hallel* is integrated into the mitzvah of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim*. First, according to Rashi, *Pesachim* 36a, *Hallel* is said only at the time when the matzah is present. Second, according to the Ran, *Pesachim* 27a, Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah is of the opinion that the mitzvah of *Hallel* ends at midnight. Tosafos, *Pesachim* 119b, are of the opinion that because *Hallel* is only rabbinic in origin, one may be lenient and rely on the position of the rabbis that the mitzvah of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim* extends for the entire night. However, they seem to agree fundamentally that *Hallel* is integrated into the mitzvah of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim*.

The *Sefer HaChinukh* implies that giving praise is an integral part of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim*:

To discuss the exodus from Egypt on the fifteenth of Nisan, each person according to their ability, and to give praise and tribute to God for all the miracles that He performed for us.

Sefer HaChinukh no. 21

לספר בענין יציאת מצרים בליל חמשה עשר בניסן כל אחד כפי צחות לשונו, ולהלל ולשבח השם יתברך על כל הנסים שעשה לנו שם.
ספר החינוך, מצוה כא

Indeed, the Rav suggested that the very word “Haggadah,” means to give *shevach vehodaah*. The Torah states in the *parsha* of *arami ovoid avi, higaditi hayom la-Hashem elokecha* (I have declared today to God), and the Targum Yerushalmi interprets this phrase as *odinan ve-shabchinan yuma hadain*, to give praise and thanks to Hashem.

The night of Pesach is a night of thanksgiving and therefore, we must say *Hallel*. We must experience the seder as if we lived through the night of *yetzias Mitzrayim*. It is not ancient history for us. It is an intimate event that we have just experienced and relive yearly. “*Chayav adam liros es atzmo ke-ilu hu atzmo yatzah miMitzrayim*,” a person must see himself as if he personally experienced the exodus. Each Jew is required to give praise to Hashem for the salvation that he has personally experienced.

Hallel and *hodaah* is a central theme of the seder. This is why the entire seder night is built around the four cups of wine, *Kiddush, maggid, birkas hamazon* and *Hallel*. The reason for this is that, “*ain omrim shira ela al hayayin*”. *Shira*, praise and song, is always said in association with wine. Just as the songs of the *Leviyim* in the *Bais Hamikdash* were said over wine, so too everything that is said as a song to *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, including the *Haggadah* as well, is said over wine. The theme of *shira* is why we say all the *piyyutim* at the end of the seder at *Nirtzah*. The custom to recite *Shir haShirim* on the night of Pesach also relates to this idea. It is the most beautiful song of praise we sing to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*.

Perhaps this is another reason why the passage “*arami ovoid avi*” was chosen to be recited during the seder as opposed to a more explicit discussion of the exodus. “*Arami ovoid avi*” serves primarily as an instrument of praise. When the farmer comes to the *Bais HaMikdash* on pilgrimage, he brings his first fruit to the *Bais HaMikdash*. After he has planted his crop and felt great risk, with the sense of anxiety whether this year will be a year of plenty or a year of famine, he brings this fruit, his first fruit and offers thanks and praises to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*. What *parsha* does the farmer recite? “*Arami ovoid avi*.” The *Mishnayos* in *Bikkurim* describe how the *bikkurim* were brought to *Yerushalayim*. The picture described is very idyllic:

How does one bring bikkurim? All of the cities would assemble and they would rest that night. They would sleep on the road of the city and would not enter the homes. They would get up early and the appointed one would say "Come, let us go to Zion, to the house of God." Those that were close would bring their fresh fruit; the other ones who were far would bring dried fruit. And there would be an ox that would be before them

כיצד מעלין את הבכורים כל העיירות שבמעמד מתכנסות לעיר של מעמד ולנין ברחובה של עיר ולא היו נכנסין לבתים ולמשכים היה הממונה אומר קומו ונעלה ציון אל בית ה' אלהינו. הקרובים מביאים התאנים והענבים והרחוקים מביאים גרוגרות וצמוקים והשור הולך לפניהם וקרניו

with his horns plated with gold, crowned with an olive wreath. And there would be instruments playing until they would enter Yerushalayim ... All artisans would stand up and ask of their welfare saying "Our brothers from that place have come peacefully." The instruments would play until they reached the Temple Mount. Once they reached the Temple, even King Agrippas would place the basket on his shoulders and enter the Azarah where the Leviyim would sing "I will exalt God for He has drawn me up and not let my enemies rejoice over me.

Bikkurim, Chapter 3

מצופות זהב ועטרת של זית בראשו
 החליל מכה לפניהם עד שמגיעים קרוב
 לירושלם ... וכל בעלי אומניות
 שבירושלם עומדים לפניהם ושואלין
 בשלומם אחינו אנשי המקום פלוני
 באתם לשלום. החליל מכה לפניהם עד
 שמגיעין להר הבית הגיעו להר הבית
 אפילו אגריפס המלך נוטל הסל על
 כתפו ונכנס עד שמגיע לעזרה הגיע
 לעזרה ודברו הלויים בשיר ארוממך ה'
 כי דליתני ולא שמחת אויבי לי

בכורים פרק ג

This beautiful description in the Mishnah emphasizes the experience of a spontaneous and explosive song of thanks and praise. Therefore, Chazal chose the *parsha* of *arami oveid avi* to be recited at the seder in order to express the exodus in the form of *shira*.

The Haggadah, when encouraging us to extend our discussion of the exodus states: *ve-chol hamarbeh lesaper beyetzias Mitzrayim harei zeh meshubach*. The Rambam's text is "*hamarbeh bederash parsha zu*," of interpreting *arami oveid avi, harei zeh meshubach*, is praiseworthy. Why is it that, although there is a defined text, whoever extends it and is more elaborate in their interpretation is praiseworthy? That, I think, is reflective of these two themes, of Talmud Torah and *shira*. Regarding Talmud Torah, there is an intrinsic requirement to study the material on the most profound level possible. Regarding the mitzvah of *shevach ve-hodaah*, to praise and give thanks to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, the more elaborate the interpretation, the more gracious the praise.

Talmud Torah as an Expression of Freedom

I would like to suggest one other reason why Talmud Torah is the medium for *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim*. The Haggadah begins with the passage "*ha lachma anya*", and I believe that the *ha lachma anya* serves as an introduction. The *Baal HaHaggadah* is bothered by a historical problem. The night of Pesach we eat in a regal fashion, reclining, as if we are all kings drinking wine. The question that begs itself is that throughout most of Jewish history, Jews were in a situation where they were rejected and oppressed. How is it possible to have a seder during the Chmelnitzky massacres? How is it possible to have a seder in the Warsaw Ghetto? The Warsaw Ghetto rebellion began on Pesach. How was that year's Pesach a meaningful experience? Weren't the words of the Haggadah empty at that historical moment? Recognizing this historical reality, the *Baal HaHaggadah* provides two answers. First, this unleavened bread, (*Ha lachma anya*) was eaten in Mitzrayim as slaves. We can feel freedom while in slavery if we have the perspective that "*leshanah haba bnei chorin*, next year we will be free." Second, *Hashata hacha, leshanah habaah b'arah d'Yisrael*, this year we are here, next year in Israel." There is always the possibility of immediate redemption. Even though a Jew's external circumstances may be at the moment very dark and bleak, his destiny is towards freedom and redemption and therefore, existentially, the Jew is always free.

Who feels greater freedom? Is it the person who is currently out of jail, but knows that he has been convicted, and that he is about to be sentenced, or is it the person who is imprisoned, but knows that within a day he will be free? Certainly, the second person will feel that he has greater freedom. While a Jew may be externally enslaved, there is a transcendent idea of freedom that makes the whole night of Pesach possible, meaningful, and real. That is the underlying concept behind the statement when we speak about the *luchos*, that God's words were *charus* on the *luchos*, engraved on the tablets. *Chazal* interpret these words, beautifully, *charus* is from the word, *chairus*, freedom: *ain lekha ben chorin ela mi sheosaik baTorah*, there is no person who is free except for one who is engaged in the study of Torah. It is that attachment to Torah that gives us that existential quality of freedom. When God took us out of Egypt, it was for the purpose of receiving the Torah at Sinai. Only when we accepted the Torah was the freedom that He gave us, the political freedom, meaningful, and that is a freedom that can never be taken away. Therefore, on the night of Pesach, when we affirm and assert our freedom as Jews, it must be linked to Talmud Torah.

Conclusion

On the night of Pesach, a night of Torah study, Torah is linked to *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim*, and Torah is the medium for the *mitzvah* of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim* for many reasons. Talmud Torah affirms the *mesorah* of father to son. Without Talmud Torah, the theme of *kabbalas ol malkhus shamayim* would be meaningless. *Arami Ovaid Avi* is a statement of *shira* and praise because it looks to our future, to our ultimate redemption, when our existential freedom will become not only the internal reality but also the external reality as well, *bimhaira veyamainu, Amen*.



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The Reality of Freedom

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Passover is often characterized in our liturgy as *'zman cheruteinu'*, the time of our freedom. How ironic, for the holiday is circumscribed and restricted with a myriad of rules, regulations, minute and painstaking requirements, more so than perhaps any other holiday observance in our religious calendar. This is freedom!?? Moreover, the Torah itself describes the Jewish people as "My servants, whom I freed from the land of Egypt" (Lev 25:55). How can a servant be considered free? Paradoxically, it almost seems as if the festival of freedom celebrates our trading in one form of servitude—to the Egyptians—for another—to the Almighty. And although an argument could certainly be sustained that G-d is a kinder, gentler Master than the Egyptians, nevertheless, why call it a festival of freedom?

Freedom and liberty are concepts which are particularly *au courant*. Last year, the "Arab spring" captured the hearts and minds not only of the Islamic world, where uprisings spread from country to country, leading to the stunning downfall of one dictator after another, but also of the entire global community, which watched the breathtaking events and was stirred by them. The quest for freedom and liberty are human strivings which strike a universal chord. Thus, as we approach our own holiday of freedom, it is appropriate to examine this goal more carefully.

The rebels in the many Middle Eastern countries who have been demonstrating and fighting valiantly for freedom almost certainly want to be free from oppression, from arbitrary cruelties, from government sanctions, from having their existence controlled by others. We in America can certainly identify with these hopes; we see them as a reflection of our own beliefs—"with liberty and justice for all." It would make sense that when, in bondage to Pharaoh and his followers, the Israelites cried out to G-d due to their bitter oppression, they too dreamed of being free to live their lives their own way, not to have to slave for others, to be able to savor for themselves the fruits of their labors.

While certainly these hopes are justified—we must realize that these dreams fall short of the Torah's definition of freedom; G-d did not take the children of Israel out of Egypt just to enable them to enjoy the good life, to live as free men in their own country. That was only part of the Divine plan. It was actually not even the primary goal per se, but rather the means to an end. As Hashem told Moshe Rabbenu at their very first encounter—when the Jewish people will leave Egypt, they will not go directly to their promised land. No, first "you shall worship G-d at this mountain" (Exodus 3:12). For it was the Divine intention that the Jewish people be transported not just to another country, but to another plane of existence altogether, the realm of freedom of the spirit.

Maharal develops this idea in connection with a fascinating homiletical interpretation. Exodus 32:16 describes the writing of the Ten Commandments on the tablets (*luchot*) as: והמכתב מכתב

אלקים הוא חרות על הלחת “and the writing was G-d’s writing, incised (*charut*) upon the tablets.” Explaining this verse homiletically, the Mishnah in Avot 6:2 comments, “... Do not read “*charut*” (incised) but rather “*cheirut*” (freedom), for the only truly free person is one who studies the Torah (אין לך בן חורין אלא מי שעוסק בתורה).”

Maharal notes that this rabbinic dictum is not just an irrelevant play on words, but rather conveys a remarkable idea:

The mind conceives a picture of an object, but that conceptual representation, of course, is not the object itself. Similarly, the Torah is a picture of the world—indeed, it is the blueprint of Creation and a prescription for how the world should be – but it is not the world itself.

*Script is a parallel Torah, for script is also a graphical representation of words, not the words themselves. Script is form, rather than matter. When script is written in ink, it has a minor physical aspect to it, but the letters of the Tablets of Law were not formed by ink. They were engraved right through the stone tablets and hence they were purely form without material. The very letters of the *luchot* reflect an essential characteristic of Torah; namely, that Torah is purely conceptual and its concepts stand independently of physical implementation. (i.e., the Torah’s mitzvot are practiced in the physical world, but the Torah’s truths are not dependent on actual practice.)*

*External forces act only upon substance, not upon form. Hence, only the physical can be subjugated and not the conceptual. Such is Torah, for even when the mitzvot are abrogated through neglect or persecution, the principles of Torah are unchanged... In summary, the word *charut*, meaning engraved, is truly connected to *cheirut*, freedom. True freedom comes only when the intellect is unencumbered by physical vulnerability and limitation.*

(Rabbi Tuvia Bassler, Maharal of Prague Pirkei Avos: A Commentary Based on Selections from Maharal’s Derech Chaim [Mesorah Publications, 1997], 380-1.)

According to this explanation, the connection between *charut* and *cheirut* is not only in the similarity of sound. Rather, the words of the Torah, which were *charut*, engraved, on the tablets—those words *had no substance*. The words of the Torah were created by the absence of anything physical—by being engraved right through the stone tablets; they were purely words without any substance at all, formed by empty space. In a most subtle way, the writing on the *luchot* demonstrates that true freedom [*cheirut*] exists when the physical is reduced to—nothing [*charut*]. And while, of course, we are not meant to eliminate our physical selves, the existential challenge is for the individual to minimize the physical demands of his/her existence. Freedom from slavery is one step, but it is only a prelude, a prerequisite, so that the person can then be free to choose to limit his physical desires, in order to apply his energies to a life focused on devotion to G-d.

Thus, the concept of freedom in the context of Judaism is quite different from others’ definition of it. In the modern world, we tend to think of freedom as freedom *from* some unwanted entity:

to paraphrase FDR, freedom *from* want, freedom *from* fear, freedom *from* oppression, etc. While these are undoubtedly elements in the freedom of an individual, Judaism sees true freedom not as freedom *from* but rather as freedom *for*. A truly free person is not simply someone without restraints; that condition more closely resembles hedonism or anarchy. Judaism sees freedom for an individual as arising from a person's not being constrained by his/her physical needs and desires, not being caught in a web of compulsions and cravings, but rather free to follow his/her spiritual and intellectual thoughts and act upon them. True freedom inheres not only in being free from physical oppression but being free, in mind and spirit, to fulfill the human potential without getting bogged down in the demands of the mundane. As far as Judaism is concerned, it is freedom of the spirit which is essential to achieving human potential. We are charged with developing the spiritual aspect of our beings, rather than scrambling for a bigger piece of the pie, for more food, more land, more money, more power, more luxuries, more satiation of physical needs and indulgences.

Yet, how can the Mishnah in Avot justify the statement that a person can only be considered free when he immerses himself in Torah? Torah is, after all, a demanding discipline; even the rabbis describe a religious person as constrained by the “yoke of Torah and mitzvot” (Eliyahu Rabbah 2). If so, how can only one who accepts this “burden” be considered “free,” when that which he is accepting is so palpably not freedom at all but rather a strict discipline? (See *Siftei Chaim*, *Moadim* II, pp. 323 ff.)

Judaism maintains that the most essential aspect of freedom is in its use, its application. The purpose of freedom for the soul—that most vital, precious and unique aspect of the human being—is to be able to freely choose how to act, what to do, and how to allocate one's time and resources. The opposite of freedom is coercion, compulsion. In reality, it makes no difference whether a person is forced to do an action because his master beats him with a whip or whether he is forced to do so by his inability to deny himself gratification of the desires of the flesh, by the force of his drive to advance himself in power, wealth, or influence. In either circumstance, he is coerced, regardless of whether it is a self-propulsion or external pressure that forces him to do things. But a person who freely chooses to follow a higher calling because of his belief that this is the Truth, that this is the path to holiness and eternal life—that person is exercising free will; he is truly free. Physical, material existence is ephemeral; spiritual life is a window to eternity. One cannot achieve this ability to have the mind and spirit rule the body without the guidance of the Torah, whose teachings free the person's psyche and intellect to rise above the mundane demands of material existence and enter the realm of the sublime.

It is in this sense that we conclude the *maggid* portion of the Seder with the avowal of our eternal gratitude to G-d, “Who redeemed us ... and took us from slavery to freedom ...” When the Jews, standing at the foot of Mount Sinai, willingly declared their readiness “to do and to listen” (Exodus 24:7) to whatever G-d might require of them, they were freely accepting their new status— their realization that the reverse of the coin of redemption from Egyptian slavery was the opportunity to take on the “yoke of Torah”. That is the message of the first Commandment— Hashem freed them from bondage in Egypt, and thereby they became His servants rather than the servants of flesh and blood. This elevation to being G-d's servants they accomplished at the moment when they totally accepted the Torah *carte blanche*, without knowing what it would

entail. Thereby they were exercising their ultimate freedom—the freedom to choose life on a lofty, spiritual dimension. Even though there is hardly a more rigid, tightly programmed scenario in the Jewish lifestyle than the preparations for Passover and the Seder, not only do these preparations commemorate our liberation; in and of themselves, they actually manifest our freedom to choose the spiritual path of service to the Almighty.

Siftei Chaim (336) points out a contradiction between two biblical verses: Deut. 16:1 speaks about offering the Passover sacrifice, “for it was in the month of Abib, **at night**, that the L-rd your G-d freed you from Egypt.” On the other hand, Deut. 16:3 cautions against eating leavened bread for the duration of the holiday “so that you may remember **the day** of your departure from Egypt as long as you live.” *Siftei Chaim* notes that this seeming contradiction alludes to the two-fold reality of the redemption from Egypt, which was experienced in two phases—when the first born Egyptians died, the Jewish slaves were freed from their physical bondage. But it was not the Divine plan to extricate them only from their lowly servitude. In the morning, when they marched out of Egypt, they became free in spirit, no longer subjugated to Egyptian culture and civilization, at liberty to fashion their own unique and enduring world built on obedience to a higher calling.

Maharal notes that the festivals mandated by the Torah are not merely commemorations of historical events in the past (*Tiferet Israel*, chapter 25). Eccles. 3:1 states, “A season is set for everything, a time for every experience under the sun.” This verse adumbrates a metaphysical phenomenon--that Providence has provided certain times of the year with a heightened spiritual dimension, a particular essence which can be accessed most readily at that season. In that sense, in Passover, the “festival of our freedom,” there inheres a special proclivity for the soul to rise above the daily demands upon its energy and thoughts. Passover is a time designated, since the Exodus, as the ideal opportunity to avail oneself of the spiritual legacy which the Jewish people experienced and which is renewed yearly in the cycle of our observance. Thus, as we celebrate the holiday, we can hope, through our observance and commemoration, to tap in to the spiritual reservoirs available at this particular time of year.

Celebrating Pesach in the Land of the Pharaohs

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The story of Pesach and the Land of Egypt are inextricably linked. In our recounting, Egypt is always the place we escaped from. We do not really concern ourselves with what happened to Egypt subsequent to our leaving it. Of course, King Shlomo did marry an Egyptian princess and subsequent Israelite and Judahite kings engaged diplomatically with Egyptian leaders. But overall, from the time of the Exodus (*yetziat Mitzraim*) to near the end of First Temple times, the people of Judah and Israel seemed to have had little interest in returning to the land of their enslavement.

However, this changed towards the end of the First Temple period, probably as a result of warming relations brought on by the common threat of the Assyrian Empire. When Egyptian Pharaoh Psamtik (26th Dynasty; 664-610 BCE), needed extra troops to protect Egypt's southern border from the Nubians, it is quite possible that the king of Judah, Menashe (687-642 BCE), responded favorably.

Whatever the origins, we know from written records that by the time the Persians reached Egypt under the leadership of Cyrus' son and successor Cambyses (525 BCE), a Jewish colony with its own temple was already flourishing in southern Egypt, at a place called Elephantine. Here, Jewish mercenaries were part of a large, Aramaic-speaking community. Within this multi-ethnic context the Jews succeeded in maintaining their distinct religious identity, bolstered by on-going relations with the Jewish communities of Jerusalem and Samaria. It is this community at Elephantine, their temple, and how they celebrated Passover that will be the subject of this brief essay.

Elephantine

Elephantine is an island in the midst of the Nile River, to the west of modern-day Aswan. In antiquity, the island marked the southern border of Egypt, as the Nubian Desert that stretched to the south was generally considered inhospitable for settlement while the Nile itself became

difficult for navigation. In addition to guarding the border, Elephantine played a significant role in the movement of exotic items from sub-Saharan Africa into Egypt proper.

The name “Elephantine” derives from the Greek word for elephant and is a translation of the Egyptian name for the city, *Yeb*. Two explanations have been proposed for this nomenclature. The first is that it reflects the pivotal role the town played as a market place for elephant ivory. The second suggests that the name comes from the smooth black rocks surrounding the island that from a distance appear to be bathing elephants.

The Jewish military colony that was first welcomed by the Egyptians and then retained by the Persians is well-known from papyri that were discovered over a century ago. The documents are primarily written in Aramaic and reflect a wide-range of communal matters such as politics, economics, social and legal issues, and religious concerns. Many are judicial and family documents that list property and marriage contracts. Quite a few of these property documents mention the colony’s temple in passing, so much so that the actual domiciles adjoining the temple precinct can be fairly well established.

The documents that most concern us here are known collectively as the Jedaniah Archive.¹ This corpus consists of 9 letters and 1 memorandum. The letters are either written by Jedaniah or are addressed to him, in his capacity as communal leader during the last quarter of the 5th century BCE. Many of the letters attest to escalating tensions between the Jewish community and the Egyptian priests of the nearby temple of Khnum. The reasons for these conflicts are not mentioned in the texts but are most likely related to religious differences.

A Passover Letter

The earliest letter in the archive makes it clear that not only were the Jews observing Pesach in Egypt but also that their observance accorded with established Jewish practice in *Eretz Yisrael*. This missive, known as the Passover Letter, is as follows:²

To my brothers Jedaniah and his colleagues the Jewish Troop, [from] your brother Hananiah.

The welfare of my brothers may the gods seek after at all times.

And now, this year, year 5 of Darius the king, from the king it has been sent to Arsames.

... Now, you, thus count fourteen days of Nisan and on the 14th at twilight the Passover make and from day 15 until day 21 of Nisan the Festival of Unleavened Bread observe. Seven days unleavened bread eat.

Now, be pure and take heed. Work do not do on day 15 and on day 21 of Nisan. Any fermented drink do not drink. And anything of leaven do not eat and do not let it be seen in your houses from day 14 of Nisan at sunset until day 21 of Nisan at sunset. And any leaven which you have in your houses bring into your chambers and seal (them) up during these days.

To my brothers Jedaniah and his colleagues the Jewish Troop, [from] your brother Hananiah.

We are uncertain whether or not this letter is a response back to an original petition from the garrison. In any case, Hananiah—about whom we know nothing else—succeeded in delivering

¹ Bezalel Porten, “Aramaic Letters: The Jedaniah Archive from Elephantine” in *The Context of Scripture*, Vol. III, edited by W.H. Hallo and K.L. Younger (Leiden and Boston, 2003), 116-132.

² *Ibid*, 117.

the proper protocol for observing Passover, approved not only by the authorities in Jerusalem but also by the Persian court. The Persian king at the time is Darius II (424-404 BCE) and Arsames is the satrap in Egypt. Thus the letter is dated to 419 BCE.

The letter itself follows a conventional structure, with an internal address, salutation, series of instructions, and external address. The plural use of gods in the salutation does not reflect polytheistic practice but is rather just common parlance. An analogy can be found in our names for the days of the week. When we schedule an appointment for “Thursday,” we are simply using convention and not actually attesting to the existence of the ancient Norse deity Thor.

More interesting are the instructions. The directives to observe Passover beginning on the eve of the 14th, to not work on the first and last days, and to eat unleavened bread seem quite basic. Were the Jewish soldiers so ignorant that they needed to be told the most rudimentary aspects of the holiday? Or perhaps the message was actually meant for the local Egyptians—serving as proof of the legality (*i.e.*, with Persian approval) of the holiday and its observances. A second teaching, to refrain from fermented drink, has given the letter a second moniker, the “No Beer” letter. This instruction is one of the oldest extant examples of Oral Law. A third instruction, to store one’s *chametz* in a sealed chamber without selling it, was evidently acceptable to them but prohibited by rabbinic tradition. (cf. *Pesahim* 5b, 28b).

A Temple

A number of the texts in the Jedaniah archive discuss the colony’s Jewish temple. A full range of rituals including food offerings, incense offerings, and animal sacrifices took place free from any explicit censure from Jerusalem. Tolerance for this temple probably derived from at least two sources: first, it was so far away and was serving a community that could not possibly travel regularly to Jerusalem; and, second, the temple at Elephantine probably predates the completion of the Second Temple in Jerusalem in 515 BCE.

This acceptance of the temple by the authorities in Jerusalem contrasts with the increasingly hostile reception the temple and its activities were eliciting among the local Egyptian community. The Egyptian priests of a nearby temple of Khnum were particularly strident. The archives record rising tensions leading to the actual destruction of the temple by the Egyptians in 410 BCE. The Jewish community appealed to the Persian authorities via the Jewish leadership in Jerusalem, requesting permission to rebuild. After several rounds of negotiation, it was agreed a few years later that the temple could be re-built on condition that no more animal sacrifices would take place.

This condition provides insight into the likely cause of the Egyptian antipathy towards the temple. The Egyptian priests were dedicated to the worship of Khnum, a ram-headed deity with particular ties to this settlement because he was credited with the annual inundation of the Nile from there northward. The sacred area of Khnum contained a “ram cemetery,” with individual burials for rams that were no doubt greatly cherished. The priests of Khnum therefore had reason to resent the Jewish animal sacrifices, especially the sacrifice of sheep at Pesach.

The exact location of this temple, described in the texts, remained elusive to archaeologists for nearly a century. Then in 1997, a German team working in the “Aramean Quarter” discovered

parts of the floor and walls of the temple and the surrounding courtyard.³ The full dimensions will never be known as the western end of the temple precinct has eroded away. Nevertheless, a sense of the overall structure has emerged (fig. 1). The temple building itself is 6 m wide and consists of two chambers separated by a dividing wall. The courtyard is 23 m wide. Due to the erosion, the exact lengths of the temple and its courtyard cannot be determined. However, the layout of the structure makes clear that this temple does not present a parallel to the *Beit HaMikdash* in Jerusalem, where the fundamental layout is tri-partite (*ulam, heichal, dvir*). Rather, the plan at Elephantine is reminiscent more of the *Mishkan* (Tabernacle).

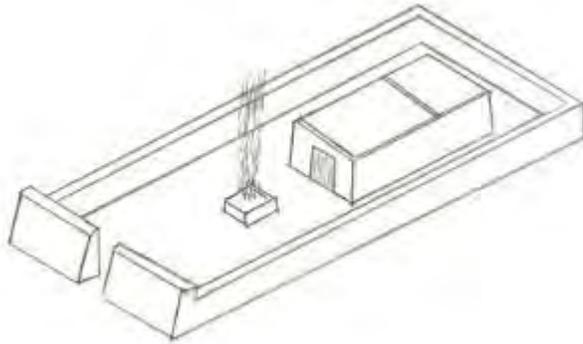


Fig. 1. Jewish temple complex at Elephantine⁴

This affinity in design with the *Mishkan* rather than the *Beit HaMikdash* has led some scholars to suggest that the original Jewish population that settled in Elephantine had their roots in the northern kingdom of Israel. Perhaps this elucidates Menashe's willingness to send troops to Egypt in the first place; he may have considered the Israelites (who had settled in Judah following the Assyrian conquest) more expendable. In any event, by the end of the 5th century BCE, the Jewish community in Elephantine considered itself part of the larger Jewish community, looking to *Eretz Yisrael* for guidance while maintaining their local traditions.

Conclusion

Even though the Jewish garrison did not last much longer—the Jews appeared to have left soon after the Egyptians wrested political control from the Persians in 400 BCE—this community at Elephantine enhances and enlivens the wonderful narrative that is Jewish history. Of all places, who would imagine that one of the first *galut* communities would be in Egypt, and that the Jews would be protecting the border from invasion! Their letters attest to the development of *halacha* and Oral Law, and how Jews were anxious to observe their rituals properly. The garrison modeled unity by transcending old political differences between Israelites and Judahites. In the face of religious opposition, they were also practical, finding a suitable compromise with their Egyptian neighbors. Yet, when the political winds changed and Egyptian intolerance was unleashed once again, the Jews of Elephantine learned from past experience and left quickly on their own. This time, they had a refuge waiting for them in *Eretz Yisrael*.

³ Stephen G. Rosenberg, *The Jewish Temple at Elephantine*, *Near Eastern Archaeology* 67 (2004), 4-13.

⁴ Adapted from *ibid*, 4.

The Freedom of Family

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In the “*ha lachma anya*” paragraph at the beginning of the Haggadah, we invite all poor people to come inside our homes and join us in our festive meal. We then conclude the paragraph by stating that we are now slaves but look forward to the following year when we shall all be free.

This familiar text carries a mysterious flavor. The entire Passover experience is a celebration of freedom, a recounting about “*avadim hayinu*” – how we were once slaves, but have since been emancipated. It seems anti-climactic to describe ourselves as still being in a state of slavery. Also, the juxtaposition is odd – what is the connection between inviting poor people to our meal and ascending from a predicament of slavery to a state of freedom?

The answer perhaps lies in a curious Talmudic passage in *Bava Basra* (10a). The Roman officer Turnus Rufus, who regularly sought to undermine the Torah in his conversations with Rabbi Akiva, presented the great sage with a conundrum. Why, asked Turnus Rufus, if G-d loves poor people, does G-d not take care of them Himself? Rabbi Akiva promptly responded that G-d leaves it to His people to sustain the poor in order to merit salvation from perdition through this mitzvah.

The Roman officer was not satisfied. Clearly, he reasoned, if G-d ordained that a person should be poor, this is akin to a king throwing a servant into a dungeon in which case the king would be angry at anyone who tried to nourish the servant. There is a verse, after all, declaring the nation of Israel to be “slaves” of G-d (*Vayikra* 25:55). Rabbi Akiva answered that the analogy is flawed. When G-d decrees poverty upon a member of the Jewish community, this is comparable to a king who places his son in a dungeon in which case the king would be pleased if others would feed and nourish his child and uplift him from his miserable condition. This is consistent with the verse in *D’varim* (14:1) that describes the relationship of the Jewish people to G-d as one of “sons” to a father. Thus, it is perfectly understandable why charity is appropriate under such circumstances.

Undeterred, Turnus Rufus noted that Rabbi Akiva’s response would be fine and good if a Jewish pauper was indeed considered a “son” of his Creator as opposed to a “slave.” But the filial relationship of Jews to their Creator is only applicable when they perform His will, not when they do not perform His will. Since they were speaking of a time when the Jews were not performing His will, clearly the “slave” analogy was more apt, and it was therefore inappropriate for any member of the nation to thwart the King’s will by providing sustenance to the poor.

The Talmud does not spell out how it was clear that the disputants were living in a time when the Jews were not performing G-d’s will. However, this understanding emerges from the

explication of two contradictory verses in *D'varim*. One verse (*D'varim* 15:4) states: "There shall not be any poor people among you," while the other verse (*D'varim* 15:11) states: "There shall never cease to be poor people in the land." Rashi (15:4), citing Midrashic tradition, reconciles these two opposing verses by explaining that the verse heralding an era in which there will be no poverty is referring to a time when the Jewish people are performing the will of G-d, while the other verse proclaiming that poor people shall never cease is referring to a time when the Jewish people are not performing His will. Since Turnus Rufus was referring to a time in which there were poor people, it was obviously a period in which the Jewish people were not performing the will of G-d. Accordingly, the question posed by Turnus Rufus stood – how could the King be pleased if others sustain the servant whom the King has cast into the dungeon?

Rather than addressing the philosophical question, Rabbi Akiva parsed a verse in Isaiah (58:7) to justify the feeding of the poor: "*pha'ros lara'aiv lachmekha v'aniyim merudim tavi bayis*" (meaning "extend your bread to the hungry, and bring paupers who are *merudim* [literally, "wailing" or "cast out"] into your home"). The Midrash (*Vayikra Rabbah* 34:13) cites an opinion that interprets the word *merudim* as "rebellious" (per the *Matnos Kehunah* commentary), referring to those "who did not fulfill the will of their Heavenly Father." According to this explanation, it is possible that Rabbi Akiva interpreted the verse to mean that the time to "extend your bread to the hungry" is when "you bring rebellious paupers into your home." In other words, the verse indicates that even when a pauper is "rebellious" – not performing the will of Heaven – it is appropriate to provide him with sustenance.

However, presumably Rabbi Akiva could have just as easily cited any scriptural passage indicating that it is appropriate to give charity to the poor, such as *Vayikra* 25:35, or *D'varim* 15:7-8. Clearly, Turnus Rufus was not impressed with the obvious fact that the Torah mandates providing charity to paupers, for otherwise he would not have posed his question. Rather, he was asking a much more pointed query – why is it that G-d desires that we feed the poor when such an act would appear to contravene His will? It is difficult to discern how Rabbi Akiva truly answered his question simply by quoting a verse from the Prophets.

The answer to this question is illumined by a Talmudic passage in *Kiddushin* (36a). The Talmud records a dispute between the *tannaim* R. Meir and R. Yehuda regarding whether the Jewish people are considered the "sons" of their Creator even in the event that they sin. R. Yehuda says they forfeit the title; R. Meir cites Biblical texts (e.g., Isaiah 1:4) indicating that no matter how badly His people have strayed, they are always considered to be His "sons." Rabbi Solomon ben Aderet (the *Teshuvos HaRashba* 1:194) notes that although the law almost always follows R. Yehuda against R. Meir, this is one case where we accept the view of R. Meir because of his compelling scriptural proofs.

In other words, even when the Jewish people are not performing the will of G-d, the relationship remains one of a son to a father. There is no act so hideous to cause the filial relationship between the Jewish nation and G-d to be severed. This opinion, however, requires elucidation. After all, as Turnus Rufus indicated, there clearly are times when the Jewish people are described as "slaves" indicating that the status of "son" is not inviolate.

Perhaps the explanation is that Rabbi Akiva was offering a trenchant insight about the transformative nature of charitable behavior. According to the Midrashic interpretation cited above, the Biblical verse specifically describes the pauper as “rebellious” for a reason. During imperfect times, when there is still poverty and suffering in the world, we have all failed to fulfill our mission – we are all “rebels.” The antidote to this renegade status is to perform redemptive acts, to feed the hungry and welcome paupers into our home. The very act of feeding the poor transforms us from a state of “rebellious servants” to that of faithful sons.

This is not an arbitrary transformation. The very nature of the Jewish nation being “sons” also connotes the corollary notion of being siblings as well. In a society of servants, there is no familial connection that is felt towards a distressed individual. Whatever type of assistance may be offered is in the form of a detached gesture of a stranger’s largesse rather than a brotherly hug. In this sense, the notion of bringing a pauper into the home is a powerful recognition of his status as a family member, as a brother. This gesture of hospitality re-defines their shared relationship as “sons” to a common father.

In fact, there is a different approach than the one adopted by the Rashba in ruling like R. Meir against R. Yehuda. The *Arukh HaShulkhan* (592:6), in explaining the text used during the Rosh Hashana liturgy “*im k’vanim ... v’im k’avadim*” (pleading for mercy whether we are in the category of “sons” or of “slaves”) accepts as normative the distinction of R. Yehuda that during times of non-fulfillment of G-d’s will, the Jewish nation is fundamentally viewed as “slaves” rather than “sons.” However, it is possible that even R. Yehuda would agree that the status of “slaves” can be magically converted into a status of “sons” if the Jewish people demonstrate recognition of their brotherhood, as exemplified through the welcoming of a poor person into one’s familial abode.

Thus, the message communicated by Rabbi Akiva to Turnus Rufus may in fact have been consistent with both opinions expressed by the *tannaim* – even when we are “slaves” we can always become “sons” through acts of benevolence and brotherhood. The state of “slavery” itself – of subjugation and hardship in this world which have not been obliterated – are opportunities for us to rediscover our kinship and thus rescue each other from the perfidy of an unredeemed world.

Based on this understanding, we can gain a renewed appreciation of the “*ha lachma anya*” prelude to the Haggadah. Indeed, we are not completely free from bondage – “*hashata avdei*” – we are in the category of slaves as long as there is privation and misery on the outside which does not concern us on the inside. However, upon declaring that “*kol dichfin yese v’yechol*” – all who are famished should enter our homes and eat, and “*kol ditzrich yese v’yifsach*” – all who are needy should join our Pesach meal, we demonstrate that we truly view each other as siblings and as children of a common G-d. It is through this recognition that we aspire to merit “*l’shana haba’ah benei chorin*” – once we have truly shown that we are in the category of “sons,” we are poised to merit freedom from our bondage as “slaves” and the exultation of ultimate redemption.

Once we appreciate this opening theme to the Haggadah, it is not surprising that much of the focus of the following sections is upon the familial bonds that tie us together as a people. After

reading about how we were slaves in Egypt, we quickly transition to a discussion of the four sons. We don't speak in a vacuum about the *chacham* – the wise/righteous person, or the *rasha* – the wicked rebel. Rather, they are all “sons” – “*k'neged arb'aah banim dibrah Torah*” – no matter what their inclinations or paths, they are all welcome in our homes and Seder tables, they are all part of our family, they are all our brothers, and therefore we are all “*banim l'makom*” – united as beloved sons - to our Heavenly Father. It is this motif of familial connection and responsibility towards each other that enables us to be in the category of those who perform the will of G-d and who can therefore declare “*l'shana hab'ah b'ara d'yisroel*” – that we look forward next year to our Father providing a Pesach trip for the entire extended family to our rebuilt and redeemed homeland.

Pesach: The Festival of Liberty and Love

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Pesach is the time during which we commemorate and celebrate our physical redemption from the bondage of slavery. The Sefer HaChinuch (Mitzva 306) contends that the Torah links the Yom Tov of Pesach with that of Shavuot, through the mitzva of *sefirat ha'omer*, to highlight the connection between our physical and spiritual redemption. The Chinuch asserts that the primary goal and intention of our physical liberation was to ultimately achieve spiritual redemption through receiving and observing the Torah.

One difficulty with this thesis is that if the goal of the Exodus was indeed only a means to the end of achieving spiritual salvation, why did Hashem separate these events by seven weeks, only connecting them through the mitzva of *sefirat ha'omer*? Would it not have been more appropriate to receive the Torah immediately after we left Egypt?

It is possible to suggest that at this point in history, the Jewish people weren't spiritually worthy of *Matan Torah*, and therefore needed time to prepare themselves. This idea has its roots in the many Midrashim that speak of the lowly spiritual level of the Jewish people at this point in history. This window of time enabled the nation to undergo the spiritual transformation necessary to receive the Torah.

Working within this line of reasoning, I would like to suggest that it was crucial that the Jewish people achieve physical freedom prior to receiving the Torah because this provided the emotional and psychological backdrop for the ideal service of Hashem – *avodah m'ahavah* (service out of love). The Mishna in Pirkei Avot (1:3) teaches that one should not serve Hashem for the sake of reward. The Mishna states:

Be not like servants who serve their master for the sake of receiving reward. | אל תהיו כעבדים המשמשין את הרב על מנת לקבל פרס.

The Rambam, in his commentary on that Mishna, explains that the Mishna is teaching that one should serve Hashem *m'ahavah* - out of love, and not for the sake of reward.⁵ In *Hilchot Teshuva* (10:1-2), he expounds upon this idea and writes that serving Hashem for any ulterior motive, even spiritual reward, taints the pristine nature of one's actions. The Rambam writes:

⁵ It should be noted that not all of the Rishonim agree with the Rambam on this issue. See R. Yitzchak Blau's article "Purity of Motivation and Desiring the World to Come" in the *Torah u-Madda Journal* (vol. 14 2006-7) for a comprehensive analysis of this matter.

A person should not say: "I will fulfill the mitzvot of the Torah and occupy myself with its wisdom to receive all the blessings which are contained within it or in order to merit life of the World to Come ... It is not fitting to serve God in this manner. A person whose service is motivated by these factors is considered one who serves out of fear. This person is not on the level of the prophets or of the sages ... Those who serve [God] out of love, occupy themselves in Torah and mitzvot and walk in the paths of wisdom for no ulterior motive: not because of fear that evil will occur, nor in order to acquire benefit. Rather, one does what is true because it is true and, and ultimately good will come because of it ... When one will love God in the proper manner, one will immediately perform all the mitzvot motivated by love.

אל יאמר אדם הריני עושה מצות התורה ועוסק בחכמתה כדי שאקבל כל הברכות הכתובות בה או כדי שאזכה לחיי העולם הבא ... אין ראוי לעבוד את ה' על הדרך הזה, שהעובד על דרך זה הוא עובד מיראה ואינה מעלת הנביאים ולא מעלת החכמים ... העובד מאהבה עוסק בתורה ובמצות והולך בנתיבות החכמה לא מפני דבר בעולם ולא מפני יראת הרעה ולא כדי לירש הטובה אלא עושה האמת מפני שהוא אמת וסוף הטובה לבא בגללה ... ובזמן שיאהוב אדם את ה' אהבה הראויה מיד יעשה כל המצות מאהבה.

Based on the Rambam's emphasis on the importance of serving Hashem *m'ahavah*, it follows that it was critical for the Jewish people to achieve physical freedom prior to receiving the Torah. A slave understands only reward and punishment; he does not have the experience of making his own choices. The ability to choose for one's self is a prerequisite to choosing to serve Hashem out of one's own volition and desire. It was necessary for the Jewish People to experience the freedom to make their own choices and move beyond the framework of reward and punishment so that they could receive the Torah *m'ahavah*.⁶

While we all agree that it is critical to serve Hashem *m'ahavah*, we sometimes undermine this goal when employing certain educational techniques that focus on reward and punishment in *avodat* Hashem. I recently visited a Yeshiva that started a daily *vatikin* (sunrise) minyan. The minyan was failing due to a lack of attendance, and a sign was posted on the bulletin board to encourage students to attend. The sign cited two sources that stress the value of getting up at the crack of dawn to recite the *Shema* and *daven*, and had part of the quotations emphasized in bold. The sign read:

It is ideal to recite [the Shema] before sunrise ... and one who can do this has great reward. (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim, 58:1)
He is promised a portion to the World to Come and will not be harmed that day
 (Mishna Brura ad loc.)

ומצוה מן המובחר לקרותה כוותיקין ... ומי שיכול לכוין לעשות כן שכרו מרובה מאד (שו"ע אור"ח נח:א)
 ומובטח שהוא בן עולם הבא ולא יזוק כל אותו היום. (משנה ברורה שם ס"ק ח)

⁶ One source that seems to run contrary to my explanation of why we attained our physical freedom before receiving the Torah is the Gemara in *Shabbat* (88a) that tells that Hashem raised *Har Sinai* above the entire nation and coerced the Jewish People to accept the Torah. The simple reading of the Gemara implies that the Torah was accepted out of fear and anxiety and not out of love and devotion. It should be noted, however, that the *Meshech Chochmah* (Shemot 19:17) interprets the Gemara as saying that the prophetic revelation was so great that the Jews had no choice but to accept the Torah. My analysis is consistent with this interpretation of the Gemara.

I was disturbed by the choice of which parts of the quotations were emphasized in bold. The Shulchan Aruch is teaching that this is the ideal time to *daven*, but by bolding the part about the reward, one loses sight of the inherent value of praying at this time.

Even if one thinks a reference to reward is a good way to “sell” this mitzva, highlighting the second half of the quotation from the Mishna Brura, which speaks of an immediately tangible reward in this world, and not the part about the spiritual reward of *Olam Habah*, again seems to miss the point of *avodat Hashem*. I recognize that people often respond better to immediate physical stimuli than to lofty ideals, but I ask myself if this is how we should be educating our students.⁷

My reservation to educate towards rewards is not limited only to the fact that it undercuts the concept of *ahavat Hashem*, although that alone should be a cause of concern. It stems primarily from a belief that if we want to successfully educate towards a life committed to Torah observance, we must instill and imbue our students with a genuine sense of *ahavat Hashem*. *Ahavat Hashem* should not be perceived or experienced just as a specific mitzva, rather it is one of the central motivating factors in the performance of all mitzvot. The Mishna in Pirkei Avot (5:19) teaches:

Any love that depends on a specific cause, when the cause is gone, | כל אהבה שהיא תלויה בדבר בטל
the love is gone. | דבר בטלה אהבה

If we want our children and students to internalize the eternal beauty of a Torah lifestyle, we must educate them towards recognizing and appreciating that beauty. If a child or student is always looking for instant gratification in today's world, they are much more likely to find it outside the Beit Midrash, regardless of the spiritual or physical “rewards” the Torah has to offer. Cultivating a genuine appreciation and love of religion that comes from having a meaningful and loving relationship with God enables healthy and sincere *avodat Hashem*.

The Pesach season is one in which we celebrate our independence and autonomy. Many have pointed out that one of the central differences between a slave and a free person is the right and responsibility of self-determination. The opportunity of freedom brings with it the challenge of taking responsibility for our actions. This responsibility requires us to take stock of our spiritual shortcomings and work toward rectifying them. I believe that one root cause of these shortcomings lies in a lack of a palpable *ahavat Hashem*.

There is a common custom to recite *Shir Hashirim* after the Pesach seder. Based on the above analysis, I would like to suggest that the reason we read *Shir Hashirim*, a *megillah* that speaks so vividly about the mutual love between Hashem and the Jewish People, is to highlight that the liberty attained on Pesach, can and should bring one to higher heights in the love of the *Ribono Shel Olam*. May we be blessed with the desire and ability to cultivate this type of relationship with Hashem as we internalize the liberty of Pesach in anticipation of Shavuot.

⁷ It should be noted that while the Rambam states unequivocally that serving Hashem *m'ahavah* is the ideal form of service, he recognizes that it is unrealistic to expect every member of society to conduct themselves in this manner, and as such encourages one to serve Hashem regardless of their motives. This is based on the principle mentioned in the Gemara in *Pesachim* (50b) that *mitoch shelo lishma bah lishmah* – serving Hashem for ulterior motives will bring one to serve Him for ideal reasons. At the same time, I wonder if students should be trained to respond to reward and punishment as opposed to serving Hashem *m'ahavah*.

Geared To Go: She'eilat Keilim

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Nehama Leibowitz,⁸ always sensitive to the nuance of the text, brings to life a discussion between the commentators regarding the following verses.

And the children of Israel did according to the word of Moses; and they asked of the Egyptians jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment. And God gave the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they let them have what they asked. And they despoiled the Egyptians.

Shemot 12:35-36

לה ובני ישראל עשו, כדבר משה ;
וישאלו, ממצרים, כלי-כסף וכלי זהב,
ושמלת. לו וה' נתן את-חן העם, בעיני
מצרים--וישאלום; וינצלו, את-מצרים
שמות יב:לה-לו

The extensive dialogue that spans the pages of the Talmud and biblical commentators mirrors our own moral and didactic intuitions. We feel uneasy with the act of the people of Israel, at the moment of freedom, acting as pillagers of war, seemingly lacking moral integrity. Moreover, God even preordains the *she'eila* (borrowing) and *nitzul* (despoiling) in his conversation with Moshe at the burning bush:

But every woman shall ask of her neighbor, and of her that sojourneth in her house, jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment; and you shall put them upon your sons, and upon your daughters; and you shall spoil the Egyptians.

Shemot 3:22

ושאלה אשה משכנתה ומגרת ביתה,
כלי-כסף וכלי זהב ושמלת; ושמתם,
על-בניכם ועל-בנותיכם, ונצלתם,
את-מצרים.
שמות ג:כב

In *Parshat Bo*, this incident is described as a Divine command:

Speak now in the ears of the people, and let them ask every man of his neighbor, and every woman of her neighbor, jewels of silver, and jewels of gold.' And God gave the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians.

Shemot 11:2

דבר-נא, באזני העם; וישאלו איש מאת רעהו,
ואשה מאת רעותה, כלי-כסף, וכלי זהב ויתן
ה' את-חן העם, בעיני מצרים;
שמות יא:ב

The biblical and academic research on these verses center around three main questions which will be discussed below.

⁸ 1 Nehama Leibowitz, *New Studies in Shemot*, "The Valuables the Israelites Took", Jerusalem, 1996, pp.183-192.

How can Bnei Yisrael “borrow” valuables that they have no intention of returning?

The first commentator to contemplate the Hebrew root *sha'al* to explain this difficulty was Sa'adya Gaon (892-942), insisting that it referred to asking for an outright gift rather than borrowing. He based his explanation on the usage in 1Shmuel 1:28.

Therefore I also have lent him to God; as long as he liveth he is lent to God | וְגַם אֲנֹכִי, הִשְׁאַלְתִּהוּ לָהּ, כָּל-הַיָּמִים אֲשֶׁר הִיָּה, הוּא שְׂאוֹל לָהּ

From this perspective, Chana gave Shmuel as a gift to God, since He had never asked for this. Chana understands that her son truly belongs to God and that he was given to her as a gift for a certain amount of time. On the other hand Shmuel is really hers on the most humanistic level: he is physically part of her. Even giving him to serve God all his life does not take away from her essence of being a mother. And so, Chana does not relinquish her motherhood, nor does she separate herself from her son. She takes care of him year in and year out until she must take him to Shilo. From this perspective Chana is *mash'ila* Shmuel to God for a specified period of time, but Shmuel remains her son.

Rashbam (1083-1174) makes a methodical study of the uses of the verb *sha'al*.

“Every woman shall ask” – as an irrevocable and outright gift, cf.: Psalm 2: “Ask of me (she'al mimeni), and I will give the nations for thine inheritance”. This is the plain sense and a refutation of the heretics.

Commentary on Shemot 3:22

ושאלה אשה משכנתה-במתנה גמורה וחלוטה, שהרי [כתוב] ונתתי את חן העם. כמו שאל ממני ואתנה גוים נחלתך. זהו עיקר פשוטו ותשובה למינים.
פירוש לשמות ג:כב

Chizkuni (13th century) adds another dimension to this debate and explains that the Egyptians bestowed a gratuity of silver, gold and clothing as a farewell gift from the masters to their freed servants.

What can justify the removal of gold, silver and clothes from their Egyptian task masters?

There are a variety of answers to the second question of the people of Israel's audacity of taking from those who had dominated them for so long. The Gemara provides an ironic approach:

Once again the Egyptians came to present their case against Israel to Alexander the Great. They said to him: Behold their Scripture states: “And the Lord gave the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so they lent them” Return us the silver and gold that you took from us. Said Gaviha ben Pasisa to the Sages. Permit me to go and argue with them in front of Alexander. If they vanquish me, say; You but vanquished our most ignorant one. And if I vanquish them,

שוב פעם אחת באו בני מצרים לדון עם ישראל לפני אלכסנדרוס מוקדון, אמרו לו הרי הוא אומר וה' נתן את חן העם בעיני מצרים וישאלום תנו לנו כסף וזהב שנטלתם ממנו אמר גביהא בן פסיסא לחכמים תנו לי רשות ואלך ואדון עמהן לפני אלכסנדרוס אם ינצחוני אמרו להם הדיוט שבנו נצחתם ואם אני אנצח אותם אמרו להם תורת משה רבינו נצחתכם נתנו

tell them, The Torah of Moses our teacher vanquished you. They gave him permission and he went to argue the case with them. He said to them, Whence do you bring a proof? They answered him: From the Pentateuch, as it is stated: "Now the time that the children of Israel dwelt in Egypt was four hundred and thirty years" (Ex. 12:40). Return me the wages of the six hundred thousand you enslaved in Egypt... " Whereupon Alexander the Great said to them: Answer him. They replied: Give us three days respite. He gave the time; they searched but could find no answer.

Sanhedrin 91a

לו רשות והלך ודן עמהן אמר להן מהיכן אתם מביאין ראייה אמרו לו מן התורה אמר להן אף אני לא אביא לכם ראייה אלא מן התורה שנאמר ומושב בני ישראל אשר ישבו במצרים שלשים שנה וארבע מאות שנה תנו לנו שכר עבודה של ששים ריבוא, ששיעבדתם במצרים ... אמר להן אלכסנדרוס מוקדון החזירו לו תשובה אמרו לו: תנו לנו זמן שלשה ימים. נתן להם זמן בדקו ולא מצאו תשובה.
סנהדרין צא.

Nehama Leibowitz expands upon this Gemara. The Egyptians who came to charge the Jews in front of Alexander the Great were the same people whose writings are littered with anti-Semitic sentiments. Our reply is clear, though its legal and moral standing is debatable. The Egyptians owed the people of Israel for hundreds of years of servitude and need no apology for what they took.

In the last generation of the Second Temple and immediately thereafter, two scribes devoted their life to defending the Jewish people against their enemies, Philo (20 BCE- 50 CE) and Josephus (Joseph ben Matityahu, 37- 100 CE).⁹ Philo in his work *Life of Moses*, shares the viewpoint of the Gemara in *Sanhedrin*. The people of Israel were not seeking to amass wealth, but rather to regain some of the wages owed to them for their slave labor and to obtain some compensation (albeit not sufficient) for the bondage they endured. Josephus did not share the approach of the Talmudic sages who argued that the people of Israel had a right to claim wages back. He adopts the view that a gift was involved. In his historiographic work *Antiquities of the Jews*, Josephus writes that the Egyptians honored the people of Israel with gifts and gave them over willingly in order that they would leave quickly. When the people of Israel left, they wept and regretted their ill-treatment of them.

Some of the Midrashim on this story do not see the *biza* so favorably. In *Mechilta D'Rabbi Yishmael* (on 13:19), we are taught that at the time the people of Israel were parting in the spoils of war, Moshe was busy with the mitzvah of preparing the bones of Yosef. The tone of other Midrashim are not so disapproving, and are more aligned to the opinions which justify remuneration owed to the people of Israel for their work.

Why does the Torah repeatedly emphasize this as a Divine command to Bnei Yisrael?

This brings us to the third question and perhaps most difficult problem of why the Torah emphasizes that God commanded this of the people of Israel? Shadal (1800-1865) explains that

⁹ Rabbi Elchanan Samet, *She'ilat ha'kelim b'rei ha'parshanut ha'apologetit u'vre'i ha'parshanut ha'acheret*, Shemot 12, www.daat.ac.il/daat/tanach/samet2/7-2. Quotes from Philo and Josephus taken directly from this article.

God despises immorality and wants to ensure that justice is meted out for His people who were enslaved for many generations. It is also an educational opportunity for us to learn how one should treat slaves. The *Or Hachaim* (1696-1743) sees the Divine command as an initiation for the nation's need to obey Moshe. Moving forward, Moshe would be giving them more challenging and seemingly illogical commandments. However, God needed to ensure that they would obey His appointed leader. In the grand scheme of things, the Netziv (1816-1893) explains, the action had to be one of borrowing and not taking. God's master plan was for the Egyptians to regret parting with their valuables, thus chasing after the people of Israel and drowning at *Yam Suf*. It was only then that the people of Israel could celebrate their full redemption.

Nehama Leibowitz quotes¹⁰ Benno Jacob (1862-1945) as saying :

For an Israelite, the word Egyptian had bittersweet associations. It would not have been remarkable had the Jew hated the Egyptian as the enslaver of his ancestors and would have reserved the right not to accord him the generous treatment enjoined by the Torah with regard to the stranger... But the Torah records that the Egyptians and Jews parted friends, the former, liberally furnishing them with gifts as the latter themselves had bidden, in the case of sending away their own Hebrew servants... Consequently "thou shalt not abhor an Egyptian, for thou were a stranger in his land." But since the Egyptian could not be expected to offer gifts, Israel was bidden to spur them to do and say to them: Let us part friends and we'll take with us a parting gift.

In a similar vein, she quotes MD Cassuto (1883–1951) as saying:

The Hebrew slaves had worked for their masters for the number of years preordained by Providence. They were entitled to their freedom and, therefore, at the same time to statutory farewell gratuity. The law or rather absolute justice demanded it. Though the latter does not exist in the world, the court on high sees to its implementation, directing the course of events accordingly.

While Cassuto's answer to the question of Divine imperative focuses on God's concern for justice, Benno Jacob uses the story as an educational tool to moderate the feelings of revenge and also allows us to fulfill the commandment of "thou shalt not abhor an Egyptian, for thou were a stranger in his land" (Devarim 23:8).

Perhaps Rashi's answer also is under the realm of a higher Divine plan.

Na in this context is an expression of request - please keep on reminding them, so that the righteous man, Avraham should not say "and they shall serve them and they shall afflict them" (Bereshit 15:3) He did fulfill, but "after wards they will come out with great substance" (Bereshit 15:14) He did not fulfill.

Commentary on Shemot 11:2

אין נא אלא לשון בקשה,
בבקשה ממך הזהירם על כך
שלא יאמר אותו צדיק
אברהם ועבדום וענו אותם
קיים בהם ואחרי כן יצאו
ברכוש גדול לא קיים בהם.
פירוש עה"ת שמות יא:ב

¹⁰ See Nehama Leibowitz, "Accept the Truth from Wherever it Comes," *Milim Havivin*, Vol. 1, pp. 108-110, www.yctorah.org/component/option,com_docman/task,doc_download/gid,121/, where she explains why she quotes ideas from Benno and Cassuto even though their commentaries contain other comments that are objectionable.

Rav Avraham I. Kook (1865-1935), *Ein Ayah, Berachot*, ch. 1, 114-115, explains this tension in relation to the two-fold Divine promise to Avraham. The people of Israel would suffer *v'avadum v'inu otam* (and they will be enslaved and tortured) but at the end of this process they would emerge *b'rechush gadol* (with great wealth). Rav Kook elaborates that in order to fulfill this Divine promise to Avraham, the people of Israel were required to leave Egypt in such a fashion. They needed to purge themselves of the slave mentality, to become more familiar with a more lofty level of existence, individually, nationally and globally. They needed to master the art of expanding their physical expectations and successes, so that the same could be achieved on a spiritual level as well.

Finally, Rashi's comment on the original verses quoted.

And garments: These were even more valued by them than the silver and gold. The later a thing is mentioned in the verse the more valued it is.

Commentary on Shemot 12:35

ושמלות אף הן היו חשובות להם מן הכסף ומן הזהב
 והמאוחר בפסוק חשוב.
 פירוש לשמות יב:לה

I would like to relate a small vignette which I heard. In 1945, at the end of the Second World War, many Jews were allowed into Sweden. They were held in quarantine due to fear of epidemics and diseases, yet they were treated reasonably. There was a committee of rabbis, including Rav Wolbe, Rav Pinchas, and Rav Yisrael Hazdan. On one occasion, members of the Red Cross accompanying a new group of women into the camp asked Rav Hazdan what was imperative for the women to receive. Rav Hazdan replied that make-up was most urgent. I believe that this story and Rashi's sensitivity to the *peshat* derive from the same place. Both are concerned with the dignity of man (or woman). While we may feel a level of discomfort with the image of the people of Israel borrowing or taking valuables from the Egyptians, we must surely identify with the most basic human need for self-respect. The people of Israel's Exodus from Egypt had to be endowed with material stature as the prequel to the most momentous of circumstances - receiving the Torah at Har Sinai.

Haggadah Discussions for the Family: A Collection from Yeshiva University's Community Kollelim

An Introduction to Maggid

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If we were in the position to write our own text for *Maggid*, we would probably not produce something remotely similar to what we have before us in our Haggadah text. As we know, the primary goal of this portion of the Seder is to fulfill the biblical commandment (Exodus 13:8) of *sippur yetziat Mitzrayim*, telling over the story of how our ancestors left Egypt. In excerpting various works from our rich collection of Jewish literature, one would think that the primary text of this story, the Torah's own account of the Exodus, would be crucial. The beginning of Sefer Shemot until the conclusion of the Song at the Sea (15:21) would seem to be an obvious choice for inclusion in one's personalized Seder. Yet, looking at our Haggadah text, one is struck by the absence of this narrative. Even when one finds one of the handful of verses quoted from those chapters, they are never the central focus; instead, an elaboration of another, seemingly less relevant source.

To begin to explain this absence, we can suggest that a central part of the mitzvah of *sippur yetziat Mitzrayim* entails not only recalling the events of the Exodus, but also describing the lessons we can glean from this experience. While there is much truth to such an approach, that would only demonstrate why we should **additionally** include the other major ideas found in *Maggid* – having the primary Exodus narrative laid out in full beforehand, to set the stage for an application of its lessons afterward, would seem most appropriate. Why then, are we not using the Seder as an opportunity to reacquaint ourselves with the very story we're celebrating?

We shouldn't be afraid to respond to this question with a very simple and intuitive answer: The Seder takes long enough. Even as a singular focus, and certainly if combined with the other aims of the Haggadah, the Shemot narrative would make *Maggid* dreadfully drawn-out and time consuming.

Such a concern does not need to merely stem from a selfish desire to progress to the meal (though this too can be justified; see *Pesachim* 68b). Looking at *Maggid* from an educational perspective, it should be noted that keeping things short is not without precedent. The Gemara (*Berachot* 12b) describes how Chazal considered including all of Parshat Balak (Numbers 22:2-24:25) into the twice-daily reading of *Keriyat Shema*, refraining only because of the burden that such a lengthy requirement would impose. A *Maggid* that incorporates the entire Exodus narrative would leave us far too impatient to have a meaningful Seder, with the gains in material being largely offset by a loss of interest. Additionally, the mitzvot of *motzi-matzah*, *maror*, *afikoman*, Hallel and the remainder of the four cups still need to be completed, many within a limited time frame.

For this reason, the Haggadah is, in relative comparison to what it could be, rather short. While we are blessed with many options in choosing a Haggadah, many of which contain lengthy commentaries that make for a substantially thick book, it needs to be kept in mind that the actual *Maggid* text is a mere 2,300 words and could easily fit onto two sides of a page. That *Maggid*, in practice, is at times long and drawn out is a function of our own discussion and commentary, not the text itself. This is not to say that discussions at the Seder are unimportant; perhaps that our short text facilitates such conversation was itself an intention of its compiler. Nevertheless, it needs to be clear to us that *Maggid's* brevity as a whole, as well as the abridged format chosen for the Exodus narrative, is intentional.

This observation explains why we are not reading from Shemot, but it leaves us with a more glaring question: if, in fact, the Haggadah was made brief by design, how do we explain the inclusion of a number of passages that seem to have very little to do with the Exodus narrative? With a quick look at the Haggadah, one can't help but notice that the mitzvah of *sippur yetziat Mitzrayim* doesn't seem to begin until the passage *metchila ovdei avodah zarah hayu avoteinu* (in the beginning, our forefathers were idol worshippers)... (and even then, in a very general sense), with perhaps a brief mention of the Exodus narrative in *avadim hayinu* (we were slaves). This leaves us with a significant number of passages that, despite *Maggid's* terse nature, take up a large amount of our time. Why are they here?

Perhaps we could suggest that the author of the Haggadah intended that these first few paragraphs serve as a primer for the unique mitzvah that we are about to begin. Although it is already late as we begin our Sedarim, and a rush to fulfill the night's many mitzvot is somewhat warranted, the *Maggid* text was kept short so that we should do it well. The author of the Haggadah understood that for any mitzvah to be performed properly, a preliminary reflection on its nature and context can drive us to focus and experience it in the way G-d had intended us to.

As you read through this preliminary section of the Haggadah, notice that these paragraphs essentially serve as a gateway towards answering the who, what, how, and when of *sippur yetziat Mitzrayim*:

- From *Ma Nishtana* through *Ma'aseh BeRebbi Eliezer*, we will discuss **who** is obligated in this mitzvah: everyone, irrespective of scholarship and ability. Additionally, we

immediately see that there is to be an emphasis on keeping our children, the next link of our *mesorah* (tradition), involved in this crucial *mitzvah*.

- With *Amar Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya*, we will properly contextualize **what** *sippur yetziat Mitzrayim* is: giving ourselves an in-depth, comprehensive picture of the Exodus, which we can then reference back to in the course of our daily obligation to remember G-d's taking us out of Egypt.
- The paragraphs dealing with the four sons show us **how** *Sippur Yetzias Mitzrayim* is to be conducted: in a flexible manner which can speak to the needs of different children with different learning styles.
- *Yachol MeiRosh Chodesh* finally emphasizes for us **when** this once-in-a-year mitzvah is to be performed: on this evening, right now.

Ha Lachma Anya, presumably the beginning of Maggid, is somewhat of an exception to this framework. As already noted by Raavan and Abudraham, this paragraph was not a part of the original Haggadah text; the fact that it was written in Aramaic, the language of the Amoraim, shows that it was written later in Babylonia. Nevertheless, its inclusion into today's text demonstrates a more overarching principle: while this evening, a crucial part of the continuity of the Jewish people, is essentially a night of Torah study, we are not to neglect the other two foundations of our world (*Avot* 1:2): *gemilut chassadim*, acts of kindness, which are symbolized by our invitation for others to join us this evening and *avodah*, prayer, which is represented by a short request that this year be the last of our long and bitter exile.

Ma Nishtana

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What is different about this night? What sets it apart from all other nights? Before we begin the story, with the description of our servitude and redemption, we point out a number of interesting differences at the table on the Seder night. We eat only matzah, we eat bitter herbs, we dip more than we do when eating hors-d'oeuvres and we lean while eating.

Questions:

1. Are we really asking anything? All we seem to be doing is pointing out the discrepancies between this night and all others.
2. What makes these questions so central to the Seder? How is it that they effectively introduce the discussion of the Egypt experience?

Answer

The Abarbanel points out that carrying out the symbolic acts of the Seder creates a mood and sets up contrasts. The effect of the first two of these symbolic acts is to confer restrictions on the meal. The remaining two add to it.

The first two are: the commandment to eat only matzah (since this is Pesach and ordinary bread is forbidden), and the specific imperative to eat maror. These restrictions symbolize slavery. The matzah represents a poor man's bread. The maror represents the bitterness of our slavery. This introduces one theme.

We also have two unusual additions to our meal. These are: dipping food twice in the course of the meal, and leaning while eating. They each indicate or symbolize nobility, a seemingly contradictory idea.

The Ma Nishtana outlines these two themes in four simple points; they constantly recur throughout the story of the Haggadah, and provide its tension. On the one hand, we remember our slavery and our meal is tinged by bitter tastes or 'slave' foods. On the other hand, we dine like kings, at ease and with luxurious choice of food. This short paragraph is indeed an appropriate manner with which to begin the story of our exodus.

The Five Sages in Bnei Brak

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Questions

The Haggadah notes that all of the sages gathered in Bnei Brak. Why is their location significant? Furthermore, why did they gather in Bnei Brak, rather than Yavneh, the center of Jewish life in that generation?

Answer

Bnei Brak was Rabbi Akiva's residence; the Talmud¹¹ says, "Follow Rabbi Akiva's court to Bnei Brak." Yet, why did the sages specifically gather at Rabbi Akiva's residence? To address this question, we need to examine an additional source, from the Tosefta:¹²

Once, Rabban Gamliel and the sages were reclining in the house of Boethus, son of Zonin, in Lod, and they were involved in the laws of Pesach all night until the rooster's crowing. They opened the window, collected themselves and went to the study hall.

מעשה ברבן גמליאל וזקנים שהיו מסובין בבית ביתוס בן זונין בלוד והיו עסוקין בהלכות הפסח כל הלילה עד קרות הגבר הגביהו מלפניהן ונועדו והלכו להן לבית המדרש.

Rabban Gamliel was the *nasi*, (president of the rabbinic court) during the generation of Rabbi Akiva and the sages mentioned in the Haggadah. It appears that he did not participate in the seder that they organized. Rather, he held his own seder, with other sages. The two *sedarim* extended through the night, but with entirely different content.

¹¹ *Sanhedrin* 32b.

¹² Tosefta, *Pesachim* 10.

At Rabbi Akiva's seder they were involved with 'the exodus from Egypt', as we do in our Haggadah, while the seder of Rabban Gamliel and the elders in Lod focused on the laws of Pesach. Perhaps this was why they separated; according to Rabban Gamliel it was appropriate to involve themselves in the laws of the korban Pesach even after the Beit haMikdash was destroyed, but according to R' Akiva and his colleagues the content of the seder was supposed to change. Due to this debate, there was no central seder in Yavneh, and instead they gathered in two separate *sedarim*.¹³

Some commentators to the Haggadah believe that the debate regarding the seder night was not only intellectual. Rabbi Akiva is known to have been a great supporter of Bar Kochba in his rebellion. Rabbi Yehudah Leib Maimon contends:¹⁴

There is room to hypothesize that the account of the seder in Bnei Brak is also a historical anecdote from some work of midrash or work of aggadah regarding the discussions and counsel of the great sages of Israel when they gathered in the center of nationalist zeal, Bnei Brak, the residence of Rabbi Akiva, to speak of the exodus from Egypt, the time of our freedom, and also to express ideas and arrange counsel in the matter of the movement for freedom which then enveloped the nation... All of them responded to Rabbi Akiva's call, and each came from his place to celebrate the holiday of freedom in Bnei Brak and to take counsel together in one secret seder, without the participation of their students, regarding the appropriate and necessary role of the sages of Israel in the zealous movement which waved the flag of rebellion against Rome.

יש מקום לשער כי גם הסיפור על המסיבה בבני-ברק הוא קטע היסטורי מתוך איזה מדרש או ספר אגדה, על מה שדיברו והתייעצו גדולי החכמים מישראל בשעה שנתאספו למקום המרכז של הקנאות הלאומית, לבני ברק, מקומו של ר' עקיבא, בכדי לספר ביציאת מצרים זמן חרותנו וגם לחוות דעה ולטכס עצה בדבר תנועת החרות שהקיפה אז את האומה כולה... כולם נענו להזמנתו של רבי עקיבא ובאו כל אחד ממקומו בכדי לחוג את חג החירות בבני ברק ולהתייעץ שם יחד במסיבה אחת ובחשאי, בלי השתתפות התלמידים, על היחס הראוי והצריך להיות מצד חכמי ישראל לתנועה הקנאית שהניפה את דגל המרד נגד רומא.

Within this view, the shift in focus on the seder night from the laws of the korban Pesach to the account of our exodus from Egypt invested the ancient story with renewed and current meaning. The exodus from Egypt is not simply a pleasant story to be re-told, and it is not only a tradition to transmit and protect. The story of the exodus from Egypt sets before us a challenge: Do we truly long for freedom? Do we, too, wish to emerge from slavery? On the night of his seder, Rabbi Akiva replied: Yes.

In truth, Rabbi Akiva's hope that Bar Kochba would be Mashiach was dashed. Despite the great will of those students to declare that the time for *Shema* of the morning had arrived, in the end it was revealed that the time to recite *Shema*, the time to sanctify the Name of Heaven,

¹³ Perhaps the split *sedarim* were due to the circumstances surrounding Rabban Gamliel's dismissal from his position as *nasi*; this requires further analysis.

¹⁴ *Chagim uMoadim* pg. 215.

had arrived – but the *Shema* R' Akiva recited, in the end,¹⁵ was *Shema* of the evening, of a great, dark night which descended upon the Jewish people with the collapse of the revolt.

Nevertheless, the sages established Rabbi Akiva's seder, and not that of Rabban Gamliel, as a model for all future generations. When we read the Haggadah, we encounter the exodus from Egypt at length, and very little regarding the laws of the korban Pesach. It appears that Rabbi Akiva's claim still resonates and the account of the exodus from Egypt must be heard even during the night.

It won't be long before we will open the door for Eliyahu haNavi. It is upon us to inquire of ourselves: Were we to encounter Eliyahu haNavi on the other side of the door, and were he to summon us to follow him to Jerusalem and redemption, would we be prepared to go? Is our involvement in the account of the exodus meaningful for us, or do the comfortable seats upon which we recline have a greater hold upon us than the demanding journey on which Rabbi Akiva would have us embark?

"Our masters! The time has arrived to recite the *Shema* of the morning."

The author wishes to thank R. Mordechai Torczyner for his assistance in translating this article.

Amar R. Elazar ben Azaryah

R. Mordechai Torczyner

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In introducing the mitzvah of discussing the exodus on Pesach night, the Haggadah recounts Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah's frustration with his inability to convince others that we are instructed to speak of that exodus every night, throughout the year. "Behold, I am like seventy years old!" the sage declares, "and I could not convince the sages, until Ben Zoma provided exegetical support for this ruling."

The Talmud¹⁶ explains Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah's odd exclamation, "I am like seventy years old," in a separate context. Rabban Gamliel was deposed from his position as the head of the study hall, and the sages sought to appoint a teen-aged Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah in his place. Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah's wife protested to him that he lacked the white hair which would mark him as an established sage, worthy of respect. A miracle occurred and he grew eighteen rows of white hair, which made him appear "like seventy."

This approach to Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah's statement that he was "like seventy years" is troubling, for it appears to undermine Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah's own exclamation. What could be the logic in saying, "I am much younger than I appear, and yet I could not convince the sages of my position?"

¹⁵ *Berachot* 61b.

¹⁶ *Berachot* 27b-28a.

The Rambam¹⁷ offers a different explanation for Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah's age-related comment, saying, "He was young, and he would study and learn and read prodigiously, day and night, to the point that his strength was drained and he aged prematurely and he appeared like a man of seventy years. At first he aged willingly, as recorded in the Gemara."

Indeed, Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah believed that his own breed of dedication was more than an exemplary work ethic; approaching Torah with lesser commitment would be a sign of disrespect. Thus Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah declared¹⁸ that a student who pretends to amass great learning, but who actually fails to devote serious time and develops only a superficial understanding, will not live long.

Ben Zoma, like Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah, excelled in Torah study in his youth.¹⁹ The Talmud presents Ben Zoma as a paradigm of scholarship²⁰ and exegetic skill,²¹ and he journeys into the mystical studies of *pardes* with Rabbi Akiva, a sage far senior to him.²²

Ben Zoma is younger than Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah, and so the Rambam explains Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah's shock: "I worked and joined myself with scholars [to the extent that I aged prematurely], and yet I never merited to know the scriptural hint to the obligation to read this portion at night – until [this young student] Ben Zoma taught it!"

This passage belongs in our Haggadah for its technical exploration of the year-round mitzvah of discussing our departure from Egypt, but it also adds to our own seder experience. Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah and Ben Zoma present two different models of participant, the former a lifelong denizen of the study hall who exhausted himself in study from the earliest age, the latter a youthful prodigy who developed an idea which had long eluded his elder. We need both types of participants at our seder, the experienced and the fresh-eyed, the better to learn from each other and develop a stronger appreciation of the greatness of our exodus.

Baruch HaMakom Baruch Hu- Blessed is the Omnipresent, Blessed is He

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We have just finished learning through the passages that expound upon the nature of the mitzvah to study the Exodus story. In a previous section, we learned how the greatest of Torah Sages spent the entire night performing this mitzvah, presumably delving into the depths of the redemption. *Baruch HaMakom* is the introduction to the next section which delineates the "four sons." In this next section we are told that the Torah, in describing this

¹⁷ Commentary to Mishnah, *Berachot* 1.

¹⁸ *Avodah Zarah* 19b.

¹⁹ *Sanhedrin* 17b, *Horiyyot* 2b, and see Rabbi Ovadia of Bartenura to *Avot* 4:1.

²⁰ *Berachot* 57b, *Kiddushin* 49b.

²¹ *Sotah* 49a.

²² *Chagigah* 14b.

important mitzvah, doesn't address great sages or even scholars. Instead the Torah speaks of children.

The mitzvah of the night as described in *Parshat Bo* (Shemot 12:26-27) is to respond to the question of a child. Whether that question is a simple "what's this?" or a sincere request to know more or a sarcastic "what's *this*?" the Torah is interested in how we teach our children. Even those children who have spent weeks learning the Haggadah in school and are so overflowing with answers that they are inadvertently in the category of "אינו יודע לשאול", don't know to ask" are not left out. The Torah tells us that we are to teach to the child who does not ask as well (Shemot 13:8). Truly, if any night is a fulfillment of חנוך לנער על פי דרכו, teach a child based in his path (Mishlei 22:6), it is the Seder night.

It is in this context that the author of the Haggadah is suddenly inspired to give an impromptu *birkat HaTorah*, blessing for the Torah. Blessed is the *Makom* that gave the Torah to His nation, Israel. The author was not inspired to make this blessing of praise over the teachings of the great sages. Not even when Rebbi Elazar ben Azariah expressed such excitement at the novel exegesis of Ben Zoma. Only now, when the Torah tells us how we are to raise our children, yet at the same time does not ask them to become automatons. When the Torah demands we take heed as to the particular nature of the individual child and guides us on how to proceed do we make this blessing on the Torah.

Question: There are many blessings and several that are made on Torah learning. This is the only one that uses this particular name "*Makom*." What is the significance of this name?

Answer: The Midrash (*Bereishit Rabbah* 68:9) states that God is given the name *Makom* because He is the place where the world is. Perhaps the author of the Haggadah is using this name to illustrate the fact that God and His Torah can relate to anyone and everyone. Our own presence in this world is due to God giving us the space to be here. He gives us room to express ourselves, and He knows just exactly what we need to hear in order to grow. The author of the Haggadah is thanking God for this notion that allows us to turn to the Torah for advice in all situations.

Rasha: The Wicked Son

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Questions

At first glance, the question of the *rasha*, the wicked son, is not all-too different from that of the *chacham*. The *chacham* asks "What are the testimonies, statutes, and judgments that G-d has commanded *you*?" (Deuteronomy 6:20). The *rasha* asks "What is this service to *you*?" (Exodus 12:26). Yet, the *Ba'al HaHagaddah* (compiler of the Hagaddah) infers from the *rasha's* question that the *rasha* excludes himself from the Jewish people, and thinks that the laws are for "you, and not to him." How does the *Ba'al HaHagaddah* know that the *rasha* intends to exclude himself from the Jewish people?

Additionally, if we look at the question of the *rasha* in *Parshat Bo*, we see that the Chumash gives a different answer than the one that the *Ba'al HaHaggadah* quotes. In Exodus Chapter 12, the Chumash answers the question of the *rasha* by saying, "You should say that this is the Pesach offering to G-d, who passed over the houses of the Jewish people in Egypt, when He plagued the Egyptians and saved our houses" (Exodus 12:27). Why does the *Ba'al HaHaggadah* not quote this answer, and instead answers "On account of this G-d has done for me when I left Egypt" (Exodus 13:8).

Answer

R' Yosef Dov Soloveitchik (of Brisk, *Beit HaLevi* to Exodus 12:8), focusing on the phrase "this service," explains that the *rasha* asks: why do the Jewish people have to bring a *korban Pesach* today? According to the *rasha's* reasoning, G-d told the Jewish people to bring the *korban Pesach* because G-d wanted the Jewish people to slaughter the god of the Egyptians, which was the sheep. In subsequent years, the people brought a *korban Pesach* to remind themselves that the gods of the Egyptians are worthless, and that everything is dependent on G-d.

The *rasha* thinks that the Jewish people only bring a *korban Pesach* when there are other people in the world who believe in *avodah zarah*. Nowadays, when people do not believe in *avodah zarah*, and when they certainly do not worship sheep, there is no reason why the Jewish people have to bring a *korban Pesach* to remind themselves that G-d runs the world. The *rasha* essentially asks, "Why are you doing *this* type of service to G-d; nowadays we should serve G-d in a way that fits with our current time period."

The *Beit HaLevi* continues that the Chumash states that the response to the *rasha's* question is "You should say that this is the Pesach offering to G-d, who passed over the houses of the Jewish people in Egypt, when He plagued the Egyptians and saved our houses." This is not a direct response to the *rasha*. Rather, after hearing this type of heresy, one must strengthen *oneself* and respond to oneself. Thus, the *Ba'al HaHaggadah* does not use this verse as the answer to the *rasha's* question.

The *Ba'al HaHaggadah* instead answers the *rasha* with the verse "On account of *this* G-d has done for me when I left Egypt," meaning that G-d took us out of Egypt *because* we did mitzvot—because we brought the *korban Pesach*. We tell the *rasha* that he has the opposite understanding of cause and effect. The *rasha* thinks that we bring the *korban* because G-d took us out from Egypt, but in reality, G-d took us out from Egypt because we kept the mitzvot. Effectively, we tell the *rasha* that we do mitzvot because G-d commands us to, and not because of our rational understanding of those mitzvot.

The Vilna Gaon, in his commentary on the Haggadah, suggests that the Chumash itself tells us to not answer the *rasha*. In the answers to the questions of the other children, the Chumash mentions the word "children." In the answer to the Rasha, the Chumash does not mention children. Instead, the verse states "You should say that this is the Pesach offering to G-d..."

Additionally, from the text of the Haggadah, it appears that we not address the *rasha* directly. The Vilna Gaon points out that that the Haggadah says "had he been there, he would not have

been redeemed.” If the father was speaking directly to the *rasha*, the father would have said “to me and not to *you*, had *you* been there, *you* would not have been redeemed.” Instead, the father tells the other children, “to me and not to *him*, had *he* been there, *he* would not have been redeemed.” Furthermore, the verse that the father answers the *rasha* with is the same as the one the father answers the child who does not know how to ask. Thus, we see that the father is actually speaking to other children in his house.

The above demonstrates that we do not address the *rasha* directly, and that we use his question to strengthen ourselves, and our other children. But at some level, the *rasha* does not totally exclude himself. After all, he is sitting at the Seder with the rest of his family! Why does the Haggadah not provide an answer to the *rasha* that will draw him back to his faith?

Perhaps, the answer that we give to the *rasha's* question actually is the best way to draw him back. There are three ways to respond to this type of question. One can send the *rasha* out of the house, respond directly, or respond indirectly. R' Aharon Kahn (RIETS Rosh Yeshiva) explains that by not sending the *rasha* out of the house, the father shows the *rasha* that he is not totally rejected. By not responding directly, the father shows that the *rasha's* question is not a valid question, and that the *rasha* must change his attitude from within. By snubbing the *rasha* and directing an answer to himself and to the other children, the father gives the *rasha* an opportunity to do *teshuvah*. By rejecting him, but keeping him at the table, the father shows the *rasha* that we reject what he stands for, but we wait with open arms for his return to Torah observance. By keeping the *rasha* seated at the Seder, we hope that he absorbs the message that we perform mitzvot because that is what G-d tells us to do, regardless of the reasons that we may attribute to those mitzvot.

Tam: The Innocent Son

Rabbi Dovid Zirkind

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Tam, the third of the four sons, is typically understood to be the ‘simple’ son. Unlike the one who does not know how to ask, he has questions, even if they lack the sophistication of the *chacham's* (the wise son's) inquiries. He is positive and participatory unlike the tone of the wicked son who asks “What is this work *to you*?” On the surface, he is exactly what his description suggests, simple. He just wants to understand what is being celebrated. However, an alternative understanding of the Tam may challenge us to see him as more of an ideal or inspiration, rather than an adolescent seeking to grasp a basic concept.

Rabbi Yitzchak ben Moshe Arama (Spain c. 1420 – 1494) author of *Akeidat Yitzchak* (end of *Parshat Bo*), argues that the Tam takes his name from the root of *t'mimut* – innocence, rather than simplicity. Shlomo Hamelech writes: "תַּמִּית יְשָׁרִים תִּנְחָם וְסִלְףֵי בִּגְדֵי־יָם יְשָׁדֵם - The innocence of the upright leads them, but the distortion of the treacherous robs them." (Mishlei 11:3) Innocence or *t'mimut*, in this context, refers to a purity of ideals which motivates the virtuous behavior of the upright.

Commenting on this verse, the Malbim (Mishlei 11:3) contrasts the personalities of the *tzaddik* and the *yashar*. The *tzaddik* is a person whose desires pull him towards the pleasures of the physical world; he possesses these desires and fights to overcome them. His stature is achieved through his religious struggle to overcome his human nature. However, the *yashar* is wired differently; he has a predisposition towards the moral and the ethical. The *tzaddik* must struggle to habituate to a life of Torah and mitzvot, but the *yashar* simply assimilates these imperatives into a personality which is already inclined to live ethically. Accordingly, Shlomo HaMelech's "*yesharim*" behave with *t'mimut* – the innocence and purity that fuels an ethical human being.

R' Shimshon Raphael Hirsch understands this to be the way we are first introduced to Yaakov Avinu:

Jacob was an ish tam. A man who only knows one direction and gives himself up entirely to that is single-minded. He gave himself up, as Abraham's grandson and as Isaac's son, to fulfill his mission, and thereby become a yosheiv ohalim, a man who recognized and taught that the highest mission in life lies in achieving the knowledge and practice to be obtained in the sphere of ohalim, the homes of mankind. (Bereishit 25:27)

Yaakov is the paradigm of truth (*titen emet L'Yaakov*-give truth to Yaakov, Micha 7:20). According to R' Hirsch, he did not dwell in the tents because it was simple, but because it was what he believed was the truth. He was 'single-minded' in his pursuit of Hashem's highest mission.

The Tam's question should not be seen merely as practical. He asks, "*Ma zot* – what is this?" This direct yet ambiguous question mimics the words of Yaakov Avinu when he discovers that Lavan had tricked him into marrying Leah rather than Rachel: (Bereishit 29:25) "וַיְהִי בַבֹּקֶר וַיִּהְיֶה הוּא לְאֵה וַיֹּאמֶר אֵל לָבָן מַה זֶאת עָשִׂיתָ לִּי הֲלֹא כָרַחֵל עַבְדְּתִי עָמְדָה וְלָמָּה רָמִיתָנִי – And it was in the morning and behold it was Leah! He said to Lavan, '**what is this** that you did to me?' Did I not work for Rachel? Why did you trick me?" Yaakov's reaction to Lavan is an ethical one. Yaakov asks, "Did we not have an agreement? Why would you trick someone who presents no harm to you at all?" Yaakov reacts, not out of anger or righteousness, but out of basic moral values. If I have not harmed you, why would you harm me?

This is the question of the *tam* as well. He does not ask, *what* is happening at the Seder; rather he seeks to understand the rationale behind it. For him, performing the seder night, as a mitzvah, is not sufficient. The *tam* seeks to embrace the night, not only religiously, but intellectually. How appropriate then, is the answer he receives. Although he is well-versed like the *chacham*, he is told simply that we commemorate this holiday because it is a reminder of G-d's saving us in our time of need. He is told that this is a mitzvah he can embrace wholeheartedly; it is a fulfillment of true *hakarat hatov* for a miracle like no other.

The message of the *tam* is an eternal one. While we strive to reach the *chacham's* understanding of halacha and live out that understanding in a perfect observance of Pesach, pursuing an intellectually meaningful experience is equally important. Whether we seek to embrace the aspect of freedom, Divine intervention, family or national identity, Pesach can and must speak to

us. As we sit around the Seder table we should seek to discover our own *ma zot* – the questions and answers that will integrate the messages of Pesach into our very identity.

Vehi She'amda- This Promise has Sustained

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The author of the Haggadah has just described how Hashem took care to ensure that the enslavement in Egypt was exactly in accordance with His promise to Avraham Avinu at the *berit bein habetarim*, the covenant of the pieces (Bereishit 15: 13-14). At this point the Haggadah explains that this promise that was given to Avraham 430 years before the exodus is the same promise that has “stood” for our fathers and still stands for us today.

This section is the conclusion of the middle portion of *maggid*. This portion of *maggid* describes that just as Avraham was saved from his pagan background, we too were saved from the Egyptian culture. At this point we realize and acknowledge the fact that we are constantly under threat from negative forces: whether they are spiritual or physical.

In the next section, the Haggadah will build on this point and present the juxtaposition between Pharaoh and Lavan.

Question

Many people are astounded at the fact that we would bring up another oppressor. Isn't this night about the exodus? Why are we spending time on other events, let alone claim that they might have been worse than the genocide in Egypt?

Answer

Vehi She'amda teaches us that we are supposed to feel the special care that Hashem takes of us as a nation and to recognize that He looks after us at all times. The first appearance of this special providence was at the exodus and that is why when we celebrate that *geulah*, redemption, we also celebrate the fact that Hashem still relates to us as His nation and has always related to us that way since Avraham. It is at this point that many families have the custom to give over their own story of Hashem's special providence as they have experienced it.

The story of the Nation of Israel that was prophetically told to Avraham, and that started with the exodus has continued throughout the generations. That original promise was not only about a one time event. It was just the first chapter of the book of our eternal covenant with *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*.

VaYare'u Otanu HaMitzrim: The Egyptians Treated us Badly

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This section is an exposition of the second sentence of the biblical excerpt which began with the words “אֲרַמִּי אֲבִי אֲבִי, my father is a lost Aramean.” After explaining the standing of the Jewish people in Egypt, the Torah describes the steps which the Egyptians took against them. The verse is divided into three phrases, each beginning with a different verb. As with the previous verse, the Haggadah breaks up the verse and attaches it to other verses that illustrate each phrase. First, the Egyptians treated us “badly”. Secondly, they persecuted us. Lastly, they placed upon us backbreaking labor. This leads to the next verse, in which the Jewish people cry out to G-d and He recognizes their suffering.

Questions

The Haggadah connects “*vayare'u otanu* (they treated us badly)” to the planning stage of the Egyptians’ scheme (“הִבֵּה נִתְחַכְמָה לוֹ”) to prevent the Jewish population from expanding. How does their very plot portray the act of “*vayare'u otanu*”? Was their expression of concern for a growth in the Jewish population a sign of doing evil?

Why are “*vayare'u otanu*” and “*vaya'anunu* (they persecuted us)” separate from “וַיִּתְנוּ עָלֵינוּ קֶשֶׁה עֲבוּדָה קָשָׁה (they placed upon us backbreaking labor)”? What forms of suffering did the Egyptians cause in addition to the backbreaking labor?

Answer

The phrase “*vayare'u otanu*” is strange. If the verse merely informs us that the Egyptians did bad things to the Jewish people, then it would have been written differently. It would have been formulated “*vayare'u lanu*,” which means that they did evil *to* us. Instead, the Torah uses the word “*otanu*,” which implies something different. The Egyptians did not only do evil to us, but they *made us evil*. How did they do that? The Egyptians portrayed the Jewish people as evil and claimed that they were corrupt. They made them out to be bad people. This is the tool through which the Egyptians justified their atrocious actions against the Jews and is illustrated by the plot of the Egyptians (“הִבֵּה נִתְחַכְמָה לוֹ”), in which they decried the Jewish people and depicted them as treacherous.

After validating their mistreatment of the Jewish nation, there were two types of suffering to which the Jews were subjected. One of these is hinted at by the word “*vaya'anunu*” and one is referred to through the phrase “*avodah kasha* (backbreaking labor).” The Jews were forced by the kingdom to do work, building the cities of the king. This served to break the Jewish people (“לְמַעַן עֲנוּתוֹ בַּסְּבוּתָם”), which followed from the kingdom’s claim that the Jewish people were dangerous. Furthermore, the Jewish people were now treated as slaves by the rest of the Egyptian population. They became servants (“וַיַּעֲבִדוּ מִצְרַיִם”) of their fellow citizens,

maintaining little value in the eyes of their neighbors. The actions taken against the Jews, by the state and by the civilians, were rationalized through the allegations that were raised against them and the evil portrait which was painted of the Jews.

(Based on the commentary of Don Isaac Abarbanel in *Zevach Pesach*)

Questions For Further Discussion:

- The Egyptians succeeded in their plot by claiming that the Jews had evil intentions. Has this tactic been used at any other time in the history of the Jewish people?
- Why is it important to delineate and differentiate the multiple injustices which the Egyptians perpetrated?

Vanitzak El Hashem – And we called out to G-d

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Summary

This section is the crux, the turning point of the story. After all the tension has built up, the Jews react with the one response that is always appropriate in a time of crisis - prayer. They call out to Hashem. In deciding to heed our call, Hashem looks not to our merits, but to the depths of travail that we underwent as slaves. With an understanding and empathy only possible for the Omniscient One, Hashem acted in mercy to redeem His nation-to-be and to punish the offenders for every detail of their crimes. The Midrashim presented here, by the Haggadah, elaborate on the different aspects of affliction that provoked Hashem to react in the manner he did.

Questions

1. The verse cited by the Haggadah indicates that it was only at this point that the Jews cried out in a manner that aroused Hashem's mercy. What changed? After all, the slavery had begun decades earlier, as had the decree to attempt the infanticide of Jewish newborn boys!
2. The Haggadah, following the text of *Mikra Bikurim* in Devarim Chapter 26, writes that the Jews cried out to Hashem. Yet in the verses of Sefer Shemot, Chapter 2, that the Haggadah cites in its *midrash* (interpretation) of that text, it simply says that we cried out, and that Hashem heard our cries. It never identifies that we cried out to Him. Indeed, in the whole story of the Exodus recorded in Sefer Shemot, we don't find a single reference to the Jews praying directly to Hashem. What can we glean from this ambiguity?
3. The Haggadah mentions our cries and afflictions as the impetus for Hashem's acting on our behalf. It also makes reference to Hashem's covenant with the forefathers, Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov. Never does it give an indication that our own merits were part of the initial push. Why not?

Answer

1. The verse (Exodus 2:23, quoted here by the Haggadah) pinpoints the time of the Jews' cries as after the death of the Pharaoh who initiated their affliction. It would seem that his death helped the Jews overcome a psychological barrier that can stand in the way of realizing the depth of any crisis. As the servitude got worse and worse, the Jews could have told themselves, "So what if this Pharaoh is a nut. He can't live forever. We just need to tough it out until he is gone, and things will be better." When after his death, Pharaoh's son upheld his wicked policies, it brought home to the Jews the danger that their terrible situation could become a permanent one. Only when the Jews themselves fully realized their predicament did they cry out in a way that motivated Hashem to listen. If we don't think we have a problem, we can't expect Hashem to fix it.
2. There are those who interpret that in fact, the Jews themselves never explicitly prayed to Hashem. Rav Shimshon Pinkus (*She'arim Batefillah* pp. 41-43) explains that there is a level of suffering at which a person cannot formulate any prayer. His pain has pushed him beyond words, and his prayer is simply a cry.. In Egypt, the Jews sank to that level (see Zohar Shemot, Parsha 20). Rabbi Moshe Weinberger (as heard by the author during a *Shabbat Hagadol Drashah*) went further, positing that at the time of the Exodus, the Jews were in too much pain to even consider prayer. Hashem peered past the veil of cries, into the souls of the Jewish people. There, He heard the subconscious prayer that laid buried deep underneath all of the groans. He knew we were crying to Him, even when we didn't.
3. It's important to recognize that the Jewish people that Hashem took out of Egypt superficially resembled the Egyptians in their manners and deeds. This was so true that when the Jews were standing at the Red Sea, the *Yalkut Shimoni* (Exodus 234) records that Satan at first protested Hashem's command that it split on the grounds that the Jews worshipped the same idols as the Egyptians. Despite these shortcomings, Hashem saw our potential to be the nation who would accept the Torah (see Rashi to Exodus 3:12) and focused on our affliction rather than our sins. It was for these reasons, not because of our merits, that He saved us.

Dayeinu

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Dayeinu is a fifteen-stanza poem that lists off the great acts that God performed for *Bnei Yisrael* from the time of their exodus from Egypt until the culmination of building the Beit Hamikdash. After recounting each act of kindness, we declare, "*dayeinu*, it would have been enough [had God only performed this act and no other]."

There is a strong parallel between *Dayeinu*, which contains fifteen praises of God, and the fifteen chapters of *Tehillim* that begin with the phrase שיר המעלות (Chapters 120-134). This is hinted at in the double meaning captured in the opening line of *Dayeinu* which reads " כמה

מעלות טובות למקום עלינו.” This is usually translated as “How many good deeds has God performed for us?” However, the word “מעלות,” usually translated as “good deeds,” also means “ascents” or “stairs” as is the case in *Tehillim*. Also, in *Tehillim* the fifteen chapters of שיר המעלות are juxtaposed to the paragraphs of *Tehillim* that are recited in *Hallel*; so too, the poem of *Dayeinu* precedes the recitation of *Hallel*, which begins at the end of *maggid*.

Questions

1. Would it really have “been enough” had God not followed through on taking us out of Egypt, and left us stuck at the Red Sea without performing *keriat Yam Suf* (the splitting of the Sea)?
2. If Pesach is a time to remember the exodus, why does *Dayeinu* include the praises of events that took place after the exodus, such as receiving the Torah and the building of the Beit Hamikdash?

Answers

1. In life, sometimes people are only able to help you out part of the way. Someone may only be able to give you a ride one way, or someone may only be able to lend you \$10 when you need \$20. That’s OK! We need to have *hakarat hatov*, gratitude, towards people no matter how much or how little they do for us. The same is true for our relationship with God. Had God only brought us out of Egypt, but not split the sea, nor given us the מן (manna), He would have deserved our undying gratitude. *Dayeinu* is teaching us how much more so we need to recognize the great acts that God performed for us since He left “no stone unturned and no need unmet” all the way from the exodus until we settled in *Eretz Yisrael*. Everything in our lives comes from God, and can be attributed to Him. Even though we sometimes feel that we want or expect more from God, or that God has only helped us some of the way, it is important that we take time in our lives to express our gratitude to Him.
2. Without question, the main historical event that we are commemorating and reliving on seder night is the exodus. However, there are a number of hints sprinkled throughout the Haggadah that point us in another direction. It is true that the exodus gave us our freedom, but it wasn’t until the giving of the Torah that we were given a purpose. That purpose did not come to its complete realization until *Bnei Yisrael* conquered and settled in *Eretz Yisrael*, culminating with the building of the Beit Hamikdash. This explains why *Dayeinu* recounts all of God’s acts of kindness through the building of the Beit Hamikdash. It is our ultimate hope that we will again experience that level of fulfillment with the rebuilding of the Beit Hamikdash. That is why we pour a fifth *kos* (cup) for Eliyahu Hanavi, who will be the harbinger of mashiach. That is why we conclude the seder with the hope and prayer: לשנה הבאה בירושלים הבנויה, next year in the rebuilt Jerusalem!

Bichol Dor V'Dor – In Each Generation

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Questions

In the Haggadah, we are told that “one is obligated to see himself as if he left Egypt.” When reading these words we should ask ourselves, is it possible for us to truly feel that Hashem took us out? What can we do to realize this challenging mitzvah and experience Yetziat Mitzraim in a personal way?

The Rambam (*Hilchot Chametz U'Matzah* 7:6) cites this Halacha, but with a subtle yet significant change in the text: “In each generation one is obligated to **display** himself as if he **now** left from the bondage of Egypt...” Rambam’s adaptation differs from the wording found in most Haggadot. He says “display” rather than “see”. What does he accomplish by doing so?

Answer

We began by asking how is it possible for one to see oneself as having personally escaped the slavery of Egypt. It seems that the Rambam struggled with this very question. Indeed it is quite difficult to “see” ourselves as having escaped; however, a display of freedom is very much within our reach. One who expresses himself behaviorally, acts in an outward display that achieves this objective. The Rambam understood that while our goal is to “see” ourselves as having left, we can only do so by way of displaying what the experience would have looked like if we were in fact participants. The seder night is all about creating the perfect setting, the ambiance which allows us to step into the role we have been cast to play each year on Pesach. Therefore, we eat the matzah, the same food as our impoverished forefathers. We taste the bitter maror as a reminder of their suffering and drink four cups of wine symbolic of the freedom they were given. According to the Rambam, bringing the events of the Exodus to life is the most effective method of reliving the story. By doing this, we come closer to understanding the emotional state of the people who actually left.

The author of our Haggada appears to have a more ambitious goal in mind. Although we do bring the Exodus to life at the seder, we do not stop there. Our ultimate goal is “to see ourselves” as having left personally, not merely understanding the mindset of those who lived it. Through reliving their experience we strive to internalize and personalize the feelings of those whose story we tell on Pesach. Rabbi Soloveitchik, in his work *Zman Cheiruteinu*, makes this very point:

“Man is incapable of praising and glorifying with passion unless he senses the inspiration within himself. The events that occurred are not merely relevant for us... rather they are part of who we are... b'chol dor v'dor is not a mitzvah of eating; it's an emotion and a state of mind. We should awaken our emotions and feel connected to Jewish history. “

The way to envision ourselves as having actually left Egypt on the night of the seder, can only be achieved with astute emotional awareness. The display that we perform around our tables brings us to that sense of connection.

With this understanding, we can answer another well-known question. Many have asked why there is no *bracha* on the mitzvah of *maggid*. We know that the commandment of “And you shall tell your son” is a *mitzvah diorayta* that we fulfill on the seder night. If so, why do we not make a *bracha* for it as we do for all other mitzvot?

The *Chatam Sofer* suggests that in fact, *maggid* does have a *bracha*. As we conclude the *maggid* section of the Haggadah we say “He who redeemed us and our forefathers from Egypt...” and we conclude “Baruch ata... ga'al Yisrael.” But if this is true, asks the *Chatam Sofer*, why does this *bracha* differ from most other *birchot hamitzvah*, which are recited prior to the performance of the mitzvah?

In explaining why this *bracha* is atypical, the *Chatam Sofer* offers a comparison to another such *bracha* that can only be recited after the mitzvah is complete. When a non-Jew completes the conversion process, his final step is immersion in the mikveh. Only when he exits the mikveh can he recite the *bracha*. The most basic reason for this is that prior to entering the mikveh, he is still not a Jew and is still unfit to make *brachot*.

This may explain the concluding *bracha* of the Haggadah as well. When we begin reading the Haggadah we have to see ourselves as those slaves from generations ago. We are subservient to the Egyptian nation and nearly consumed by the presence of idolatry in their culture. Can a person in our situation honestly declare that he is free? Can an Egyptian slave say ‘*Ga'al Yisrael*'?

B'chol dov vador introduces the conclusion of the Haggadah. At this point, specifically, we begin to reflect on the entire journey from bondage to freedom. After celebrating the splitting of the Sea and the burst of emotions that came with the confidence of freedom, we can finally thank Hashem properly in declaring ‘*Ga'al Yisrael*' – that he has given us, in each and every generation, an everlasting freedom.

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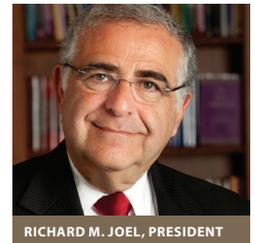


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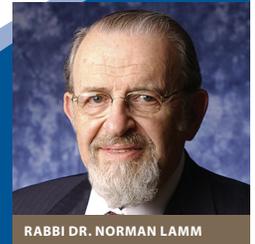
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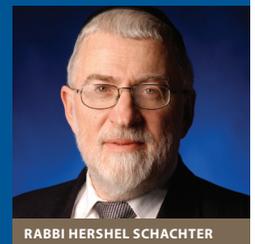
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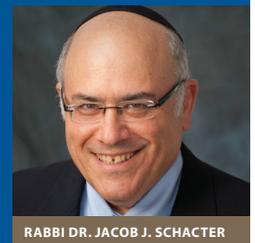
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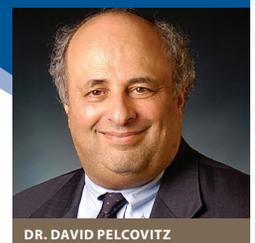
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