

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

Pesach To-Go

5770



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Rabbi Norman Lamm

Rabbi Reuven Brand

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Words of Introduction

Rabbi Kenneth Brander

The David Mitzner Dean, Yeshiva University Center for the Jewish Future

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 60,000 monthly visits to our YU Torah website, 10,000 copies of every YU Holiday To-Go printed and disseminated, and an additional 10,000 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.

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



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.

Pesah, Matzah, and Maror

Rabbi Norman Lamm

Chancellor and Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshiva University

The whole of the Seder shows the development from the impersonal to the personal, from the historical to the biographical, from recounting to reliving. Thus the central portion of the Haggadah explains each of the major symbols: *pesah*, *matzah*, *maror*. Each of these is defined in a manner more historical than personal. Thus, the reason for the Passover sacrifice is: God passed over our ancestor's homes in Egypt. We eat *matzah*: because the dough of our ancestors did not have time to ferment. And we eat the *maror*: because the Egyptians embittered the lives of our ancestors in Egypt. All the holiday seems to be a historical recollection. However, immediately thereafter we join the personal to the historical. We declare that we too are participants in the Exodus story. The redemption was not only of our ancestors, but of ourselves as well. Hence, immediately before the *Hallel* we raise our cups and declare, "Therefore we are obligated to praise and thank Almighty God who performed all these miracles both for our ancestors and for us!" And in anticipation of the great *Hallel* of this Passover Seder, we shall recite before God a new *shirah*, a new song. No longer are we historians; now we are participants. We are ourselves involved with the great experience of redemption. May that be our call this Passover, this year, and throughout our lives. May we learn to pierce the harsh facade of impersonality of modern life with the warm rays of a Jewish heart and soul. May we, and all Israel, and indeed all the world, recite before our Father in heaven a new *shirah*, a new song, singing of the redemption of all men and all mankind: *Haleluyah*, praise the Lord!

פסח - Pesah

Maharal notes that the Passover sacrifice could not be offered on the altar with any of its parts missing or burned separately; the entire animal had to be offered as one - hence, the principle of an unfragmented unity. Similarly, the very idea of *matzah* suggests the same theme. It consists of nothing but flour and water, the simplest and most minimal ingredients for bread, without any additives such as yeast or sourdough. The commandment to eat *matzah* and to refrain from *hametz* is thus again suggestive of the unity theme. Finally, we are not permitted to offer up the Passover sacrifice outside of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. Every family had to come to the

Excerpted from **The Royal Table: A Passover Haggadah** (OU Press, 2010).

For more information, please visit www.OUPress.org

center of the nation and there, on the Temple Mount, offer the paschal lamb, slaughter it, and eat it. Here the principle of geographical unity is affirmed in the laws of Passover. Hence, from all these laws, we learn to rededicate ourselves to the concept of oneness.

But Passover suggests not only the oneness of God but also the oneness of mankind; not only preachment but prophecy; not only doctrine but vision of the future. Hence, we read in the Haftarah of the last day of Passover the immortal words of Isaiah, who speaks of the redemption to come in the end of days when the Messiah will arrive. Isaiah's words are known to all mankind: "And the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid ... and the cow and the bear shall feed together." (Isaiah 11:6-7). In these metaphors does the prophet paint for all the picture of cosmic unity that will prevail when Israel will be redeemed. It is a vision of human oneness, reflecting and proclaiming the oneness of God, which has fascinated civilization for some twenty-five centuries.

מצה - Matzah

Matzah can be described as a dialectic baked into unleavened dough. It oscillates between two opposite poles: It recalls the magnificence of the Exodus when our ancestors were commanded to hurry to leave Egypt, before even allowing the dough to rise, and hence a token of divine redemption. It also is, physically, a sign of poverty. Thus, the Seder begins by holding the *matzah* aloft and saying, *ha lahmah anya*, this is the bread of affliction, the pauper's bread that we ate as slaves in Egypt. We declare that now we are slaves, but by next year we hope to be free, thus defining the two poles of the Seder experience: slavery and freedom.

Think of the *matzah* therefore as a kind of mirror held up to us as we gather round the seder table; our very own Royal Table. We acknowledge our humble beginnings as slaves (*'avadim hayinu*), and as well, our lowly origins as pagans (*'ovedei 'avodah zarah hayu avoteinu*), and then recount the wonders of God, who then granted us national freedom and spiritual excellence.

We eat bitter herbs to recall the bitterness of servitude under the Egyptian taskmasters, but we recite a blessing as we do so, thus overcoming the harshness by elevating it to a blessing, a typical Jewish maneuver.

We recount the seder that took place on the eve of the Bar Kokhba rebellion against the Romans — a seder attended by five of the most distinguished scholars in Jewish history — and yet the seder is constructed so as to attract the attention and participation of even very young children.

Traditionally we begin the actual meal by eating a hard-boiled egg — the symbol of grief, especially as the first day of Passover falls on the same day of the week as does Tish'ah be-Av, the national day of mourning marking the destruction of the two Temples in Jerusalem. Yet we also drink the four cups of wine, celebrating our joy at our four-fold deliverance by the God of Israel.

The festival of Passover is the celebration of our freedom. Passover not only commemorates an act of liberation in the dim past, but also reminds us that the aspiration to and striving for freedom are unending tasks. Freedom is quixotic. One is never sure of it. It is not something which, once achieved, is forever certain, safe, and secure. It requires constant struggle. Judaism no doubt endorses the American Revolutionary slogan, "Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty."

All of Jewish history is, in a manner of speaking, a long record of freedom lost and regained; a drama of *galut* and *ge'ullah* (exile and redemption); of *herut* and *'avdut* (freedom and slavery). It is as if Jewish history were really a large Seder table, where sometimes we drink the Four Cups and are heady with freedom — and then bite into the bitter herbs and experience the agony of subjugation; where now we practice *hessebah*, inclining in a manner of aristocracy (in addition to health reasons as mentioned in the Talmud), and then taste the humiliation of the *haroset*. And sometimes, perhaps most times, life is more like the *matzah* — a peculiar and paradoxical blending of both motifs, of freedom (for *matzah* is the sign of that bread which did not rise because we were in a hurry to leave Egypt and emerge from servitude) and slavery (the “bread of affliction”).

Matzah is called “*lehem 'oni*, the poor man’s bread” — a denial of the ability of money or material influence to save us. It is a symbolic refutation of the omnipotence of science and technology by the very fact that *matzah* must be made from the simplest of substances, flour and water alone, in the most primitive of ways. The *matzah* is a bread which does not rise, it does not push itself up in boastfulness, and is thus a symbol of humility, a denial of the working of the ego in and of itself. Pleasure too is counted out: by custom we do not salt the *matzah* that we eat at the Seder as we do with the bread that we eat all year long. And even power is dismissed, symbolized by the fact that the *matzah* we eat at the Seder, in fulfillment of the special commandment, must be *perusah*, a broken *matzah*, a symbol of powerlessness. So the *matzah* itself is a symbol of iconoclasm or the breaking of the idols of our times, and thus becomes a most appropriate “food of faith,” as some Kabbalists refer to *matzah*.

מרור - Maror

The *maror* that we eat at the Seder is more than just a vegetable recalling the hard times inflicted upon our remote ancestors in ancient Egypt. It is the very symbol of human anguish through all the ages, and what we do with the *maror* is an expression of the Jewish philosophy of suffering as it issues out of the historical experience of the Jewish people.

Consider how astounding is our attitude towards this piece of food and how it speaks volumes to us. We do not weep when we eat it. We take this *maror*, this morsel of misery, and we recite a *berakhah* over it, as if to say, “Thank you, God, for the miserable memory!” We then take this bitter herb and dip it into *haroset*, the sweet paste of wine and nuts and fruit. Life, we say in effect, is neither all bitter nor all sweet. With rare exceptions, it is bittersweet, and we ought not to bemoan our fate but to bless God for it.

Ever since Adam and Eve ate of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, our Kabbalists taught us, good and evil are comingled, and life offers us neither pure, unadulterated goodness nor pure, unredeemable wickedness. The pessimist deplors the bitter and the bad that corrupts the sweet and the good. The optimist is delighted that the sharp edge of bitterness is softened with sweetness, that there is some good everywhere. That is why when the Jew, the eternal optimist, dips his *maror* into the *haroset*, he makes a *berakhah*.

That too is why when we celebrate the *zeman herutenu*, the season of our liberation, we lean and recline as did ancient Roman noblemen while partaking of their banquet. Let others laugh at the comical Jew who tells himself he is a king while he is being tormented. We know it is true. Life is

bitter, but we have dipped it into the sweetness of *haroset*. Hence, as we come to *Pesah* this year and every year, we relearn our lesson. Many of us enter the holiday burdened with a secret sigh, a heavy heart, a distracted mind, and a soul sorely troubled. Yet, as Jews, we shall look for the sweet, we shall perform the *tibul maror beharoset*, the dipping of the *maror* in the *haroset*, and experience by sheer will the *simhat yom tov*, the happiness of the holiday.

But the message of *maror* is more than just the awareness of the bittersweet taste of life, more than just the idea that every black cloud has a silver lining. What *maror* wants to tell us is that misery is not meaningless, that pain is not pointless punishment, that human anguish has larger dimensions, and that the bitter leads to the sweet. In fact, without the foretaste of *maror*, *haroset* loses its value. There can be no sweet without bitter, no light without darkness before it, no joy without prior sadness. There can be no wealth without poverty, no faith without doubt, no freedom without slavery, no redemption without exile. A people that dips *maror* into *haroset* and makes a *berakhah* over it is defeated neither by fate nor by foe. A folk that can find the mellow in a morsel of misery can drive away the darkness with its own light, the outer sorrow with the inner joy.

כורך - Korech

This is the famous “Hillel sandwich.” This version restricts it to *matzah* and *maror*. These two foodstuffs are most prominent in the seder, and they symbolize two opposites. *Matzah* is the symbol of freedom, and *maror* of pain and exile and suffering. Both together are the essential twin components of *zekher le-mikdash ke-Hillel*, of our historic Jewish national memory. Such memory oscillates between the two antonyms of freedom and exile. Jewish memory encompasses both of these poles which complement each other.

In an entirely different context, the two reappear not in the framework of a joyous banquet, but in the fatal confrontation of Israel with Amalek — the wild, untamed, and murderous tribe, symbol of all that is evil and despicable. And, just as in the tension between *matzah* and *maror* there are two elements clashing with each other, so with regard to Amalek: “*timheh et zekher Amalek*, you shall erase the memory of Amalek,” and “*lo tishkah*, you shall not forget.” (Deuteronomy 25:19). When we confront naked evil in all its ugliness, the Torah demands of us two different but related reactions: *remembering* and *not forgetting*. “Remembering” consists of conjuring up discreet events or attitudes, scenes that punctuate your life at certain set times. “Not forgetting.” is not characterized by specific acts, whether physical or psychological, but by that which endures through all seasons, insinuates itself into every crevice of your memory and becomes part of your very being. While “remembering” is called into action at certain set times, such as Purim or *Ta’anit Esther*, and when prodded is proclaimed with gusto, “not-forgetting” becomes an integral part of your psychic and spiritual reality, often residing just below the level of your consciousness, and springing into readiness to protest at the first sign of Amalekite cruelty; and holds for all times and not merely at previously designated occasions.

Hence, an interesting relationship: *matzah* is an episodic event or series of events, as is the commandment “Remember what Amalek did unto you,” while *maror* is parallel to “you shall not forget” — a constant and uninterrupted awareness of the Amalek-Nazi axis and the consuming bitterness of their victims, and, ultimately, a Holocaust awareness that is not confined to Purim

or Yom ha-Sho'ah but is sensitive to the murderous potential of anti-Semitism beyond a certain level of social or political venom.

In this age of polarization it is important to point out the danger of “Too Much of a Good Thing.” What I plead for is that in any moral or ethical problem — and life is full of them at every turn — we consider all values, both during and after the choice between competing values. Any one value, when taken to an extreme, can be corrupted. If we consider all positive values together, even if we must choose one over the other, there is less chance of debasing ourselves, our lives, or society.

We need a dialectic of virtues, a harmonization of competing goods. We need freedom and responsibility; peace and self-defense; love and morality; patience and toughness; discipline and independent thinking. Like Hillel, who would make a sandwich of *matzah* and the bitter herbs and eat them together, we must manage to combine two different *mitzvot*, one bland and the other bitter, and not overdo either one at the total expense of the other.

Jewish life today must reveal that idea of balance, of not overdoing things, of a Seder that comes to an end with the *afikoman*. Religious perfectionism is a good thing. It means insistence upon more Torah, more observance of commandments, more morality. But religious perfectionism overdone can lead to isolationism, the kind that characterizes too much of Orthodoxy today. This is too much of a good thing — and we are warned not to be too much of a *tzadik*. At the same time, tolerance and understanding and acceptance of those of different opinions are certainly virtuous. Without tolerance, society crumbles. But done to an extreme, these will lead to indifferentism, to deciding that it makes no difference what you believe, what you practice, what you want to do. This leads to the breakdown of Judaism. Instead, we must have a dialectic of various virtues, an equilibrium between them, not going too far in either direction.

להסיב - Leaning

We lean on the left side when we drink the four cups and eat the *matzah*, according to the Talmud, because of a hygienic reason: not to choke on our food. But beyond that, scholars suggest other dimensions. The leaning is a symbol of aristocracy and freedom. But this is puzzling: Why adopt for our Jewish religious purposes a form or posture that was unique to the Romans of two thousand years ago? Why retain this fossilized Roman custom when we have so many beautiful Jewish customs? The answer, I suggest, lies in irony. Why is our seder lacking and incomplete today? Why do we not observe the Passover sacrifice which was the center of our seder in the days of independence? Why are we today in exile? It is because the Romans of two thousand years ago destroyed the Temple. But we shall not allow that destruction to rob us of our authenticity and undo us as a people. And so, today, we practice that very Roman symbol of freedom, the inclining on the left side. We adopt the Roman posture of leisure — and we thereby celebrate *zekher le-Mikdash*, remembering everything that occurred in the Temple, while they, the Romans who ravaged the Temple, are no longer in existence!

Words of Redemption, Words of Creation

Rabbi Reuven Brand

Rosh Kollel, Yeshiva University Torah Mitzion Kollel of Chicago

Words are vehicles, and very powerful ones.

- Adin Steinsaltz

The spoken word features prominently at the Pesach Seder table. This hallowed evening recounts the Biblical responsibility to speak to the next generation, to communicate to our children the story and history of our people:

And you should speak to your son on that day saying for this reason Hashem did this for me when I left Egypt.

Shemot 13:8

והגדת לבנך ביום ההוא לאמר בעבור זה עשה ה' לי בצאתי ממצרים:
שמות יג:ח

Most of our Seder tells the tale of the Exodus. This tale is told at great length and in as great detail as possible, knowing that *kol hamarbeh lesaper... harey zeh meshubach*, all those who speak at length... it is praiseworthy. The Mishna in Pesachim, a text we recite in our Haggadah, records the statement of Rabban Gamliel regarding the role of the spoken word on the night of Pesach:

Rabban Gamliel used to say that one who does not articulate three things does not fulfill his obligation., and these are they: Pesach, Matzah and Maror.

Mishna Pesachim 10:5

רבן גמליאל היה אומר, כל שלא אמר שלשה דברים אלו בפסח, לא יצא ידי חובתו, ואלו הן, פסח, מצה, ומרור
משנה פסחים י:ה

The context of this Mishna, nestled among multiple descriptions of the Haggadah, would indicate that the ruling refers to the Haggadah; any recital of the Haggadah which lacks verbal expression of these three core principles is not a complete Maggid. Hence, the Tiferet Yisrael (Rabbi Yisrael Lifschitz, Germany, 1782- 1861) notes in his commentary on this Mishna that such a Maggid is not the *mitzvah bshleimuta*, it is an incomplete mitzvah. However, the Tosafot Yom Tov (Rabbi Yom Tov Lipman Heller, Poland, 1579- 1654) in his commentary on the Mishna understands that Rabban Gamliel refers to the actual eating of the Korban Pesach during the time of the Beit Hamikdash. He invokes the Pasuk in Shemot, *Vaamartem zevach pesach-* and you shall say it is a paschal offering, and highlights the phrase, and you shall say. This

suggests that even the actual fulfillment of the original Mitzvah of eating the Korban Pesach includes an aspect of speech, one that is essential to the mitzvah. How do we understand the central role of speech during the Haggadah?

Perhaps this phenomenon of speech is highlighted because through the Seder and the spoken word, we relive our redemption from bondage, which was a servitude of silence. In part of our Haggadah, we recite a passage of the Midrash with its exposition of *psukim* in Parshat Ki Tavo:

And he went down to Egypt. Coerced against his will by the word, as it was said to Avraham, "as your children will be strangers in a land

Pesikta Zutreta Ki Tavo

וירד מצרימה. אנוס על כרחו ע"פ הדבור שנאמר
לאברהם אבינו [דף מו עמוד א] (בראשית טו) כי גר
יהיה זרעך בארץ
פסיקתא זוטרותא (לקח טוב) דברים פרשת תבא

The literal interpretation of this Midrash is that our unwilling descent to Egypt was in fulfillment of the word of Hashem, Who told Avraham that his descendents would be slaves. However, the Sfat Emet (Parshat Vayigash 5642) interprets the phrase homiletically that we descended to Egypt *על פי הדבור*, coerced by the word, the power of speech which was exiled. He cites a passage in the Zohar which describes that the actual words, the power of speech, was exiled.

[*And Moses spoke before the Lord, saying:*] "*Behold, the children of Israel have not harkened unto me, how then shall Pharaoh hear me, who am of uncircumcised lips?*" How did Moses dare say this? Had not the Holy One already promised him, when he said that he was not eloquent, that He "*will be with his mouth*" (Exodus 4, 10-12)? Or did the Holy One not keep His promise? However, there is here an inner meaning. **Moses was then in the grade of "voice," and the grade of "speech" was then in exile.** Hence he said, "*How shall Pharaoh hear me, seeing that my 'speech' is in bondage to him, I being only 'voice,' and lacking "speech."*" Therefore God joined with him Aaron, who was "*speech*" without "*voice*." When Moses came, the voice appeared, but it was "*a voice without speech.*" This lasted until Israel approached Mount Sinai to receive the Torah. Then the voice was united with the speech, and the word was spoken, as it says, "*and the Lord spoke all these words*" (Exodus 20, 1). Then Moses was in full possession of the word, voice and word being united. That was the cause of Moses' complaint (v. 23), that he lacked the word save at the time when it broke forth in complaint and God spoke to Moses."

Zohar Parshat Va'era

כתיב הן בני ישראל לא שמעו אלי ואיך ישמעני
פרעה ואני ערל שפתים, מאי ואני ערל שפתים
והא בקדמיתא כתיב לא איש דברים אנכי וגו'
כי כבד פה וכבד לשון אנכי, וקודשא בריך הוא
הוה אותיב ליה מי שם פה לאדם וגו', והוא אמר
ואנכי אהיה עם פיד, ס"ד דלא הוה כן והשתא
אמר ואני ערל שפתים אי הכי אן הוא מלה
דאבטח ליה קודשא בריך הוא בקדמיתא, אלא
רזא איהו, משה קלא, **ודבור דאיהו מלה דייליה**
הוה בגלותא והוה איהו אטים לפרשא מלין
ובגין דא אמר ואיך ישמעני פרעה בעוד דמלה
דיילי איהו בגלותא דייליה דהא לית לי מלה, הא
אנא קלא מלה גרע דאיהו בגלותא ועל דא שתף
קודשא בריך הוא לאהרן בהדיה, ת"ח כל זמנא
דדבור הוה בגלותא קלא אסתלק מניה ומלה
הוה אטים בלא קול כד אתא משה אתא קול,
ומשה הוה קול בלא מלה בגין דהוה בגלותא
וכל זמנא דדבור הוה בגלותא משה אזיל קלא
בלא דבור והכי אזיל עד דקריבו לטורא דסיני
ואתיהיבת אורייתא ובהווא זמנא אתחבר קלא
בדבור וכדין מלה מליל הדא הוא דכתיב ה"ד
(שמות כ) וידבר אלהים את כל הדברים האלה,
וכדין משה אשתכח שלים במלה כדקא יאות
קול ודבור כחדא בשלימו ועל דא משה אתרעים
דמלה גרע מניה

זוהר כרך ב (שמות) פרשת וארא

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik z"l unravels the mystery of this Zohar in an essay entitled "Redemption, Prayer, Talmud Torah" (*Tradition*, Spring 1978). He explains that the nature of exile and servitude is an existence that lacks words, speech:

The slave lives in silence, if such a meaningless existence may be called life. He has no message to deliver... The slave has neither a story nor a curious audience. Moreover, he is not merely a speechless being, but a mute being, devoid not only of the word, but of the meaningful sound as well.

The very essence of servitude is that the slave has no existence independent of his master. Hence, he has no life of his own and no message to speak. A slave has no identity - no past, present or future- as he exists only to perform tasks thrust upon him. He cannot formulate spoken words because he does not have any of his own. As slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, the Jewish people as a community, and Moshe as their leader, had no ability to speak, to formulate words. It is interesting to note that in the exile, many of the key figures in the narrative, including Moshe's family members, are anonymous. They are not called by names because as slaves they have no identity. When the Jews finally received a respite upon Pharaoh's death, they uttered a wordless, almost primordial cry, which pierced the heavens and set them on the path toward redemption, toward a speaking existence.

In contrast to the mute slave, the free man has a story to tell. He has a message to communicate to those who will listen. The transition from servitude and solitude to freedom and communication is redemption. The Rav elucidates:

Redemption involves a movement by an individual or a community from the periphery of history to its center; or, to employ a term from physics, redemption is a centripetal movement. To be on the periphery means to be a non-history-making entity, while movement toward the center renders the same entity history-making and history-conscious. Naturally the question arises: What is meant by a history-making people or community? A history-making people is one that leads a speaking, story-telling, communing, free existence, while a non-history-making, non history-involved group leads a non-communing, and therefore a silent, unfree existence...

Redemption, we have stated, is identical with communing, or with the revelation of the word, i.e. the emergence of speech. When a people leaves a mute world and enters a world of sound, speech and song, it becomes a redeemed people a free people. In other words, a mute life is identical with bondage; a speech endowed life is a free life.

In this light, we can appreciate why the role of speech is accented at the seder. This storytelling capacity, our use of the spoken word, manifests our status as free people. Our act of telling the covenantal story of our people is the fulfillment of our redemption and Divine mission. The charge given to us by the Torah multiple times is to tell our story to our children, to utilize our speech endowed life to ennoble our world.

Yet, perhaps, there is another profound lesson to be learned by the emphasis of the spoken word around the Seder table. The Talmud (Rosh Hashana 11b) records a debate between two sages of the Mishna, titans of their time, Rabbi Yehoshua and Rabbi Elazar, regarding the timing of the creation of the world. Rabbi Yehoshua maintains that the world was created in Nissan, while Rabbi Elazar opines that the world was created in Tishrei. Tosafot note that we seem to accept both of these mutually exclusive opinions, highlighting conflicting texts which are part of traditional liturgy of the Chagim recited still today in many congregations:

And that which Rabbi Eliezer Hakalir established the prayer for rain on Shmini Atzeret in accordance with the opinion of Rabbi Eliezer who says that in Tishrei the world was created, and on Pesach in accordance with the opinion of Rabbi Yehoshua, Rabbeinu Tam says that these and these are the words of the living G-d, and it is possible to say that in Tishrei it arose in the mind to create the world but it was not created until Nissan.

Tosfot Rosh Hashana 27a

ומה שישד ר"א הקליר בגשם דשמיני
עצרת כר"א דאמר בתשרי נברא
העולם ובשל פסח יסד כר' יהושע
אומר ר"ת דאלו ואלו דברי אלהים
חיים ואיכא למימר דבתשרי עלה
במחשבה לבראות ולא נברא עד ניסן
ותוספות מסכת ראש השנה דף כז.

Tosafot suggests that the world was created in stages, first in the “mind” of G-d in Tishrei and then in practice during Nissan. The creation of our world was not actualized until the month of the Exodus, the creation of the Jewish people, and the holiday of Pesach. This now can shed light on the role of speech at the Seder, as speech is the vehicle of creation. Rav Shneur Zalman of Liady (1745- 1812), the first Lubavitcher Rebbe, elucidates this basic concept in Chassidut in his seminal work known as the Tanya:

It is written: “Forever, O G-d, Your word stands firm in the heavens.” The Baal Shem Tov, of blessed memory, has explained that “Your word” which you uttered, “Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters...,” these words and letters stand firmly forever within the firmament of heaven and are forever clothed within all the heavens to give them life as it is written, “And the word of our L-rd shall stand firm forever,” “And His words live and stand firm forever....” For if the creative letters were to depart even for an instant, G-d forbid, and return to their source, all the heavens would become naught and absolute nothingness, and it would be as though they had never existed at all, exactly as before the utterance, “Let there be a firmament.” And so it is with all created things, in all the upper and lower worlds, and even this physical earth and the realm of the completely inanimate. If the letters of the Ten Utterances by which the earth was created during the Six Days of Creation were to depart from it but for an instant, G-d forbid, it would revert to naught and absolute nothingness, exactly as before the Six Days of Creation.

Tanya Shaar Hayichud V’Haemunah 1

הנה כתיב לעולם ה' דברך נצב
בשמים ופי' הבעש"ט ז"ל כי דברך
שאמרת יהי רקיע בתוך המים וגו'
תיבות ואותיות אלו הן נצבות
ועומדות לעולם בתוך רקיע השמים
ומלובשות בתוך כל הרקיעים לעולם
להחיותם כדכתיב ודבר אלהינו יקום
לעולם ודבריו חיים וקיימים לעד כו'
כי אילו היו האותיות מסתלקות כרגע
ח"ו וחזרות למקורן היו כל השמים
אין ואפס ממש והיו כלא היו כלל
וכמו קודם מאמר יהי רקיע כו' ממש
וכן בכל הברואים שבכל העולמות
עליונים ותחתונים ואפי' ארץ הלזו
הגשמית ובחי' דומם ממש אילו היו
מסתלקות ממנה כרגע ח"ו האותיות
מעשרה מאמרות שבהן נבראת
הארץ בששת ימי בראשית היתה
חוזרת לאין ואפס ממש כמו לפני
ששת ימי בראשית ממש
תניא שער היחוד והאמונה פרק א

We know from the Talmud that Hashem created the world with *asarah maamarot*, ten utterances. The Bal Shem Tov, according to the Tanya, expands this notion, teaching that the concept of Hashem's words (so to speak) as vehicles of creation continues to this moment, and that everything exists as some, albeit distant, derivative of the spoken word of Hashem. Speech is what transforms the world of the spiritual and the ethereal into the physical reality, the world in which we exist.

According to Tosafot, Nissan is the month of creation in actuality. We now understand this to mean that Nissan is the time when Hashem showered those first utterances into emptiness, and each year we celebrate and commemorate that initial creation and the fact that Hashem recreates us continually. Hence, on the eve of Pesach, the celebration of this creation by Hashem's word, we create our own worlds, worlds filled with spirituality and light, by our spoken word. Pesach, the contraction of Peh Sach, the speaking mouth, reminds us of the power of words. They are vehicles of redemption, from servitude to emancipation, but on a more basic level, they are vehicles of creation. They enable us each year to tap into the spiritual energy of Nissan and recreate ourselves both on a national and individual level.

The Recitation of Hallel in Synagogue on the First Night of Pesach

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Pesach is a holiday that features many different *minhagim* (customs). These *minhagim* provide diversity within a community as many people tend to observe the *minhagim* of their familial origins. One that highlights this diversity is the *minhag* to recite Hallel in the synagogue on the first night of Pesach. For hundreds of years, there have been synagogues that recite Hallel and synagogues that don't. In this article, we will discuss the various reasons for this *minhag*, the practical differences between these reasons and what one should do if one's personal custom is different than the custom of the synagogue.

The Reasons for the *Minhag*

By way of introduction, there is an obligation to recite Hallel at the Seder. This Hallel is different in many ways from the Hallel that is recited in the synagogue on Yom Tov. Most notably, Hallel at the Seder does not require a *minyan* (ten adult Jewish males); part of the Hallel is recited before the meal and the rest is recited after the meal; and there is no *beracha* recited prior to Hallel at the Seder.

Rashba (1235-1310) provides a source for reciting Hallel in the synagogue on the first night of Pesach from the Talmud Yerushalmi:

If [the beracha] is adjacent to another beracha such as [the berachot of] Keri'at Sh'ma and the Amidah, it does not begin with baruch. R. Yirmiyah asked regarding Geulah [the beracha at the conclusion of Maggid]. One can respond based on the statement of R. Yochanan that if one heard [Hallel] in the synagogue, one has fulfilled his obligation.

Talmud Yerushalmi, Berachot 1:5

ואם היתה ברכה סמוכה לחבירתה
כגון ק"ש ותפילה אין פותחין בהן
בברוך התיב רבי ירמיה הרי גאולה
שנייא היא דמר רבי יוחנן הלל אם
שמעה בבית הכנסת יצא.
תלמוד ירושלמי ברכות א:ה

There is a rule that if there are two *berachot* that are recited as part of a series, the second *beracha* does not open with "*baruch*." R. Yirmiyah questions this rule from the *beracha* of "*Asher Ge'alanu*"

which is recited at the Seder at the end of *Maggid* immediately after the opening of Hallel, yet it opens with "baruch." Shouldn't the *beracha* recited on Hallel obviate the need to recite "baruch" on the *beracha* that follows? R. Yochanan responds that if one already recited Hallel in the synagogue, one would not recite a *beracha* on Hallel at the Seder. Therefore, "*Asher Ge'alanu*" is not necessarily connected with another *beracha* and should open with "baruch." Rashba comments:

According to the consensus of the great masters, it seems that this is the explanation of the Talmud Yerushalmi that I mentioned earlier: "One can respond based on the statement of R. Yochanan that if one heard [Hallel] in the synagogue, one has fulfilled his obligation," therefore, the primary institution to read [Hallel] was for the synagogue and not for the house. It is for the reading in the synagogue that they instituted a beracha because it is the primary reading. In the house one does not [recite a beracha]. It must be this way, because it would not make sense that one who hears it in the synagogue fulfills the mitzvah and does not recite a beracha at his table but one who did not hear it in the synagogue would recite Hallel at his table and recite a beracha. People will say [how can it be] that two people are in the same house, one recites Hallel with a beracha and one without?

Chiddushei HaRashba, Berachot 11a

ולפי הסכמה זו של גאוני עולם ז"ל נראה פירוש הירושלמי שכתבתי למעלה דהכי קאמר שנייה היא שאם שמעה בבית הכנסת יצא והלכך עיקר תקנת קריאתו בבית הכנסת היה ולא בבית ובקריאת ביהכ"נ הוא שתקנו לברך שהיא עיקר התקנה ומצות הקריאה אבל בבית לא, וכן בדין הוא שאלו מי ששמעה בבית הכנסת יצא ואינו מברך על שלחנו ומי שלא שמעה בבית הכנסת גומר על שלחנו ומברך יאמרו שנים בבית אחד זה קורא ומברך וזה קורא ואינו מברך. **חידושי הרשב"א ברכות יא.**

According to Rashba, the primary recitation of Hallel on the first night of Pesach occurs in the synagogue. For this reason, the *beracha* is recited in the synagogue and not at the Seder.

R. Ya'akov ben Asher (1269-1343) provides a different rationale for the *minhag*:

Regarding the beracha on Hallel, there is a dispute among the rabbis. Ritzba would recite two berachot: one before the meal and one after the meal. This was also the practice of Maharam MiRutenberg, Rav Hai, Rav Tzemach and Rav Amram. However, Ritz Gi'at and Avi Ha'Ezri wrote that one should not recite a beracha at all because we split Hallel and recite part of it before the meal and part of it after. Therefore, how can one recite a beracha with an interruption in the middle? This was also the opinion of my father, my master, the Rosh. This is what one should do on every matter that involves doubt regarding its beracha: one should not recite a beracha because berachot do not prevent [fulfillment of a mitzvah]. There are places that recite Hallel in the synagogue publicly in order that they won't have to recite a beracha when reciting Hallel during the Haggadah. This minhag is good and pleasant.

Tur, Orach Chaim no. 473

בענין ברכת ההלל איכא פלוגתא דרבוותא ריצב"א היה מברך עליו ב"פ אחת קודם אכילה ואחת אחר אכילה וכן היה נוהג ה"ר מאיר מרוטנבורק וכ"כ רב האי ורב צמח ורב עמרם אבל הרי"ף גיאת ואבי העזרי כתבו שאין לברך עליו כלל לפי שהולקים אותו לשנים לפני הסעודה ולאחריה וא"כ האיך יברכו כיון שפוסקים באמצע וכן היה נוהג א"א הרא"ש ז"ל וכן ראוי לעשות בכל דבר שיש ספק בברכתו שאין לברך דברכות אינן מעכבות ויש מקומות שנוהגין לקרות ההלל בב"ה בציבור כדי שלא יצטרכו לברך עליו בשעת ההגדה ומה טוב ומה נעים ההיא מנהגא. **טור או"ח ס' תעג**

According to Tur, the recitation of Hallel in the synagogue is a means of avoiding a *berachot* dilemma. There is a dispute as to whether one should recite a *beracha* on Hallel at the Seder due to the interruption of the meal. One can avoid the issue by reciting Hallel in the synagogue, where there is no interruption.

R. Menachem Meiri (1249-1306) provides a third explanation for the minhag:

This applies to those who have the minhag to recite Hallel in the synagogue before the day starts as a remembrance for the Hallel in the Azarah that they used to recite when they slaughtered the Korban Pesach.

Beit HaBechira, Pesachim 117b

והוא שהיה מנהגם לקרוא את
ההלל בבית הכנסת מבעוד יום
זכר להלל שבעזרה שהיו אומרים
בשעת שחיטת פסחים.
בית הבהירה פסחים קיז:

The Mishna, *Pesachim* 64a, states that Hallel was recited when the *Korban Pesach* was slaughtered. Meiri suggests that the recitation of Hallel in the synagogue is a remembrance for the Hallel that was recited at the time of slaughtering the *Korban Pesach*.

It should be noted that there are some who have the practice of reciting Hallel if they bake matzah on the afternoon of the 14th. The purpose of this practice is to commemorate the Hallel that was recited when they slaughtered the *Korban Pesach*. The practice is recorded in R. Alexander Ziskind of Grodno's (d. 1794), *Yesod V'Shores Ha'Avodah* 9:4. R. Yitzchak Safrin, *Shulchan HaTahor* (in *Zer Zahav*, ch. 6 at note 23), adds that the *minhag* in Jerusalem is to recite this Hallel with a *beracha*.

A fourth reason for this minhag is provided by the Vilna Gaon (1720-1797). In his *Bei'ur HaGra to Orach Chaim* 487:4, the Vilna Gaon suggests that the *minhag* was instituted to provide those who don't know how to recite Hallel the ability to fulfill the mitzvah.¹

R. Chaim Soloveitchik² provided a fifth reason for reciting Hallel in the synagogue on the first night of Pesach. According to R. Chaim, there are two independent reasons to recite Hallel on the first night of Pesach. The first is a function of the obligation to recite Hallel on Yom Tov. While Hallel on Yom Tov is normally recited during the day, the Gemara, *Erchin* 10b, derives the obligation from the verse (Yeshaya 30:29) equating Yom Tov to the night of Pesach, implying that there is a special obligation to recite Hallel on the first night of Pesach. The second is a function of the obligation to recite Hallel as part of the Seder. Hallel as a function of Yom Tov can be fulfilled throughout the night. Hallel as a function of the Seder can only be fulfilled at the Seder. Since Hallel as a function of Yom Tov can be fulfilled throughout the night, it is preferable to recite it at the first possible moment. For this reason, it is recited in the synagogue at the conclusion of Ma'ariv.

Practical Differences between the Reasons

There are a number of practical differences between the reasons given for the *minhag* to recite Hallel in the synagogue on the first nights of Pesach. The first difference is in the timeframe of

¹ See also, *Bei'ur HaGra to Orach Chaim* 671:7, where he implies that the *minhag* was instituted in order to publicize the miracles of Pesach in a public setting (*pirsummei nisa*).

² Quoted in *Shiurim L'Zecher Abba Mari* Vol. I (page 3) and in *Harerei Kedem* Vol. II, no. 101.

the recitation of Hallel. The *Korban Pesach* was slaughtered on the 14th of Nissan during the day. The Seder does not begin until nightfall of the 15th. Meiri - following his explanation that the recitation of Hallel serves to commemorate the Hallel that was recited at the slaughter of the *Korban Pesach*- states that Hallel should be recited before sundown. If one assumes that Hallel in the synagogue relates to the Hallel at the Seder, it is arguable that one should not recite Hallel until the evening. Another factor to consider is the concept of *tosefet Yom Tov*, which allows one to accept Yom Tov before the actual time. Tosafot, *Pesachim* 99b, s.v. *Ad*, note that *tosefet Yom Tov* does not allow one to perform the mitzvot of the Seder before nightfall. This would include Hallel in the synagogue if one assumes that it relates to the Hallel at the Seder. According to R. Chaim, the Hallel in the synagogue does not relate to the Seder and perhaps *tosefet Yom Tov* is applicable, allowing one to recite Hallel before nightfall.

Second, R. Chaim Y.D. Azulai (1724-1807), *Birkei Yosef, Orach Chaim* 487:8, writes that if someone whose *minhag* is to recite Hallel attends a synagogue that does not recite Hallel, he may recite Hallel privately with a *beracha* after the services. This ruling can assume any of the reasons for the *minhag* except the reason of the Vilna Gaon. R. Moshe Shternbuch, *Moadim U'Zmanim* 7:179, notes that according to the Vilna Gaon, the reason for reciting Hallel in the synagogue is to benefit those who are not able to recite Hallel at home and ostensibly, there is no reason to recite Hallel privately and if one does so, one may not recite a *beracha*.

Third, there are some communities that recite Hallel in the synagogue but do not recite a *beracha*. [See for example, *Minhagei Chatam Sofer* note 8 and *Dinim V'Hanhagot MiMaran HaChazon Ish, Pesach* no. 28.] This practice seems to be a way of fulfilling the *minhag* while showing deference to the opinions that one should not recite Hallel (which will be discussed in the next section). In reality, this does not fulfill all opinions because according to R. Ya'akov ben Asher, the purpose of the *minhag* is to provide the ability to recite a *beracha*. As such, there is no fulfillment of the *minhag* if one recites Hallel without a *beracha*.

Why the *Minhag* is not Universally Accepted

As we noted earlier, this *minhag* is not observed by everyone.

On the first night of Pesach, we complete Hallel in the congregation in a pleasant manner and with a beracha at the beginning and end. The same applies on the second night of [those in the Diaspora who observe] the second day of Yom Tov for the Diaspora. Rama: We do not observe any of this because we don't recite Hallel in the synagogue at night at all.

Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 487:4

בליל ראשון של פסח גומרין ההלל בצבור בנעימה בברכה תחלה וסוף וכן בליל שני של שני ימים טובים של גלויות. הגה: וכל זה אין אנו נוהגים כן כי אין אנו אומרים בלילה בבית הכנסת ההלל כלל.
שלחן ערוך או"ח תפז:ד

R. Yosef Karo's *Shulchan Aruch* records Sephardic tradition that one should observe this *minhag*. Ashkenazic tradition follows the comments of Rama (R. Moshe Iserles 1520-1572) that one should not observe this *minhag*.³

³ Some Ashkenazic communities have adopted the practice of reciting *Hallel*. See, for example, *Sefer Eretz Yisrael* page 62, *Igrot Moshe, O.C. 2:94*, citing those who follow the practices of the Vilna Gaon and *Teshuvot Maharshag* 1:30.

There are two basic reasons presented why one should not recite Hallel in the synagogue on the first nights of Pesach. First, R. Naftali Z.Y. Berlin (1816-1893), *Meishiv Davar* 1:13, writes that the ideal time to fulfill the mitzvah of Hallel is at its proper place in the Seder. If one recites Hallel earlier, one fulfills the mitzvah of Hallel, but not in the ideal form. Once one fulfills the mitzvah, there is no additional fulfillment when one repeats it at the Seder. Therefore, many people refrain from reciting Hallel in the synagogue so as not to fulfill the mitzvah of Hallel in a non-ideal form. R. Yitzchak Z. Soloveitchik (1866-1959, cited in *S'deh Avraham, Moadim* no. 18) presents a similar objection to the *minhag*. The Gemara, *Pesachim* 108b, states that if one drinks all four cups of wine together, he fulfills the aspect of drinking wine, but not the obligation to drink four cups. R. Soloveitchik explains that in order to fulfill the mitzvah of drinking four cups of wine, one must drink each cup after a specific part of the Seder.⁴ The fourth cup of wine must be drunk after Hallel. If one recites Hallel in the synagogue and fulfills his obligation, he cannot fulfill the mitzvah of Hallel again at the Seder and therefore, cannot fulfill the mitzvah of drinking the fourth cup.

The Vilna Gaon, op. cit., presents the other reason why this *minhag* is not universally accepted. He explains that since the reason for reciting Hallel in the synagogue is to provide those who don't know how to recite Hallel the opportunity to recite Hallel, communities whose congregants know how to recite Hallel are not required to recite it in the synagogue.

Divergent Practices in the Same Synagogue

As we noted earlier, it is common for some congregants in a synagogue to have a *minhag* that differs from that of the synagogue's *minhag*. R. Moshe Feinstein (1895-1986), *Igrot Moshe, O.C.* 2:94, notes that one may not publicly deviate from the synagogue's practice. Therefore, if one is in a synagogue that recites Hallel and his own *minhag* is to refrain from reciting Hallel, he should recite Hallel with the congregation. In terms of the *berachot*, R. Feinstein writes that if he can skip the *berachot* in a manner that won't be noticeable, he should do so, but if not, he may recite the *berachot* as well. R. Moshe Shternbuch op. cit., questions R. Feinstein's ruling that it is permissible to recite a *beracha*. It is reported (in *Haggadah Shel Pesach MiBeit Levi, Kovetz Hosafot* page 65 and *MiPninei HaRav* page 88) that R. Yitzchak Z. Soloveitchik used to walk out of the synagogue while the congregation recited Hallel. This implies that he rejects R. Feinstein's premise that one must recite Hallel with the congregation, even if that is not one's *minhag*.⁵

If one has the *minhag* to recite Hallel and is in a congregation that omits it, the only option is to recite it privately. According to R. Azulai, one may recite Hallel with a *beracha* privately. R. Shternbuch, op. cit., concludes that one should not recite a *beracha* unless he recites Hallel together with the congregation.

⁴ See R. Soloveitchik's *Chiddushei Maran Riz HaLevi, Hilchot Chametz U'Matzah* 7:7, where he develops this idea further.

⁵ It is possible that R. Soloveitchik did not view reciting Hallel with the congregation as a valid option based on his aforementioned opinion that recitation of Hallel in the synagogue prevents one from fulfilling the mitzvah of drinking four cups of wine.

Chametz and the “Altar”ation of Our Homes

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There are two “partner” *mitzvot* that lie at the heart of our celebration of Pesach: the obligation to eat *matzah* and the prohibition of eating *chametz*. Of the two, the latter is the one that dominates our preparations for the holiday. In many Jewish homes, the all-out offensive to eradicate *chametz* begins virtually the moment the last package of *mishloach manot* is delivered on Purim, a full month prior to Pesach. The enormous amount of time and energy that preparing for Pesach requires far exceeds that demanded by any other holiday.

This leads one to pose the following three questions: First, why do we have to get rid of our *chametz* at all? The Torah explicitly tells us the reason we must eat *matzah* - to commemorate the haste with which our ancestors left Egypt, leaving no time for their bread to rise.⁶ However, no reason is given anywhere in the Torah for why we cannot eat *chametz*. This begs the question: why can't we simply celebrate Pesach by eating *matzah* in addition to eating *chametz*?⁷ What is the significance of getting rid of our *chametz*?

Second, the frenzy that precedes Pesach is largely a result of a unique aspect of *chametz*: that it is *assur* not only to eat *chametz* but even to own it.⁸ Why does the prohibition extend so far as to demand our ridding *chametz* from our possession?

Third, the prohibition against *chametz* is generally associated specifically with Pesach since that is the only time of the year that it exists. However, there is actually one place where *chametz* is prohibited all year long – on the *mizbe'ach*.⁹ Thus, any explanation of the prohibition of *chametz*

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⁶ *Shmot* 12:33-34, 39 and *Devarim* 16:3

⁷ Granted our ancestors ate only *matzah* when they left Egypt. However, on Sukkot, though our ancestors in the desert did not have houses in addition to the *ananei hakavod/sukkot mamash*, it is not prohibited for us to enter our homes.

⁸ This prohibition is referred to as *בל יראה בל ימצא*, based on *Shmot* 12:19 and 13:7.

⁹ See *VaYikra* 2:11 and 6:9-10

must be able to account for why *chametz* is permitted the rest of the year everywhere except on the *mizbe'ach*.

Several interpretations of the symbolism of *chametz* have been suggested throughout the ages.¹⁰ However, it seems that the most prevalent interpretation is that *chametz* represents *avodah zarah*. In fact, the *Zohar* in 2:182 even claims that “whoever eats *chametz* on Pesach is as if he prayed to an idol.” The reason that so many commentators, going all the way back to *Chazal* and continuing through many of the *Rishonim* and *Achronim*, make a connection between these two seemingly disparate concepts is that there are many striking similarities between the *halachot* that govern them. Examples include the prohibition of even seeing or owning them; the requirement to physically destroy them and wipe out their existence, preferably through burning specifically; that both are subject to an *issur hana'ah* – it is prohibited to derive any form of benefit from them whatsoever; and the prohibition on even the tiniest particle of either of them, which is not found in any area of *halachah* other than *avodah zarah* and *chametz*.¹¹

I would like to further explore the link between *avodah zarah* and *chametz*, so as to develop a richer understanding of why we are required to rid ourselves of *chametz* every year prior to Pesach. To do so, we have to take a slight detour and explore the topic of *Korban Pesach* first.

Because we live in a post-*churban* world, we often fail to appreciate certain aspects of the *chagim* that were the focal point of the holiday in the times of the *Beit HaMikdash*. The *Korban Pesach* is a primary example. In fact, not only was the *Korban Pesach* a critical component of the *chag*, but it actually created a separate holiday of its own. It is commonly assumed that the names Pesach and *Chag HaMatzot* are two appellations used interchangeably to refer to the same holiday. However, R' Menachem Leibtag points out¹² that a careful look at the *pesukim* reveals that they are actually two separate holidays.

These are the holidays of God, holy convocations that you shall proclaim in their proper times. In the first month [Nissan] on the 14th of the month in the afternoon is Pesach for Hashem. On the 15th of this month is Chag Hamatzot for Hashem, for seven days you shall eat matzot.

Vayikra 23:4-6

אלה מועדי ה' מקראי קדש אשר תקראו
אתם במועדם: בחודש הראשון בארבעה
עשר לחדש בין הערבים פסח לה':
ובחמשה עשר יום לחדש הזה חג המצות
לה' שבעת ימים מצות תאכלו:
ויקרא כג:ד-ו

What is surprising is that the Torah is explicitly telling us that the holiday of Pesach occurs on the 14th of Nissan, the day which we consider to be merely *erev* Pesach. There is in fact a seven

¹⁰ See Rabbi Alex Israel's article, "The Symbolism of Chametz," (www.vbm-torah.org/pesach/ai-cham.htm) where he presents the following four explanations: Rabbi Alexandri in Brachot 17a seems to identify *chametz* with the *yetzer hara*. The Rambam in Moreh Nevuchim 3:46 posits that God wanted us to distance ourselves from *chametz*, especially on the *mizbe'ach*, because idolaters used to sacrifice only leavened bread. The Netziv in his Ha'amek Davar commentary to Shemot 13:3 suggests that *chametz* represents man's ability to manipulate nature, which is often positive, but has no place on the altar or when commemorating God's Divine redemption of the Jewish people in an entirely miraculous fashion. Rav Yoel bin Nun in contemporary times has suggested that *chametz* represents the completion of a process.

¹¹ See *Haggadah Sheleimah* by Rav Menachem Kasher Appendix #7, cited by Rabbi Alex Israel.

¹² In his shiur, "Pesach and Chag Ha'Matzot" (www.tanach.org/shmot/bo/bos1.htm)

day holiday that begins on the 15th of Nissan during which we must eat *matzah*, but the Torah never refers to it as Pesach; this holiday is called *Chag HaMatzot*. What emerges from these *pesukim* is that the holiday that we all refer to as Pesach is not really Pesach. Pesach, according to the Torah, is a one-day holiday celebrated on the 14th of Nissan (which we think of as *erev* Pesach) through the bringing of the *Korban Pesach*. The seven-day holiday (eight outside of Israel) that we all celebrate from the 15th through the 21st of Nissan to commemorate our Exodus from Egypt is a separate holiday called *Chag HaMatzot*.

The important point for us is that the *Korban Pesach* is so important, it actually generates a holiday of its own.¹³ In fact, Rav Michael Rosensweig notes¹⁴ that many *halachot* reflect the existence of a “*Korban Pesach* holiday” as well. For example, one of the strongest litmus tests to determine if a day possesses *mo’ed* qualities is to see if it has an *issur melacha*. Surprisingly, there is in fact a prohibition of *melacha* on the 14th of Nissan (which, again, is the day we consider *erev* Pesach).¹⁵ And the proof that this prohibition is created specifically by the bringing of the *Korban Pesach* is that the ban on *melacha* only begins at *chatzot* (midday) – the earliest time the *Korban Pesach* could be brought.¹⁶

The fact that the bringing of the *Korban Pesach* creates a *yom tov* also finds expression in the laws of mourning. As the *Rama* notes in *Yoreh De’ah* 399:3, on all *arvei yom tov* other than Pesach, a mourner who is in the midst of *shiva* continues *aveilut* until close to dusk, leaving just enough time to perform the necessary preparations for *yom tov*. However, on *erev Pesach*, all preparations become permitted at *chatzot* since that is when the *Korban Pesach* was slaughtered. The *Biur HaGra* there explains that the reason for *erev Pesach*’s unique status is that *erev Pesach* itself is considered a *mo’ed*. In fact, the *Rama* concludes that it might even be better for a mourner to take a haircut *prior* to *chatzot* since after *chatzot* it is already a holiday and prohibited to do *melacha*.

Another *halachic* manifestation of the *yom tov* created by the *Korban Pesach* relates to the prohibition of *chametz*. One would have expected the ban to begin with the advent of Pesach (as we call it; really *Chag HaMatzot*) when the sun sets at the onset of the 15th of Nissan. After all, the obligation to eat in a *sukkah* or hear the *shofar* on *Rosh HaShanah* or light Chanukah candles only takes effect once the holiday itself begins. However, when it comes to *chametz*, a strange phenomenon occurs: *Chametz* becomes *assur* on *erev* Pesach, before the holiday actually begins. Once we understand that the 14th of Nissan is a holiday itself, it makes perfect sense. And once again, it is clear that this earlier prohibition is generated specifically by the *Korban Pesach*, because it is based on *Shmot* 34:25 and *Devarim* 16:3, which say "לא תשחט על חמץ דם זבחי" and "לא תאכל עליו חמץ" – the *Korban Pesach* cannot be slaughtered or eaten while one still possesses *chametz*.¹⁷

¹³ This is evident not only from the fact that the Torah refers to the day of its sacrifice as Pesach, but also because its description is placed under the header "מועדי ה'".

¹⁴ www.torahweb.org/torah/2004/moadim/rros_pesach.html

¹⁵ *Rambam Hilchot Yom Tov* 8:17-18 and *Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim* 468:1 with the *Mishnah Berurah*.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ See פסחים ה. and *Rashi* to *Shmot* 12:15.

What emerges from all of the above is that the *Korban Pesach* is of monumental significance – it even generates its own holiday on the 14th of *Nissan* with an איסור מלאכה and an איסור חמץ. But why is it so important? What exactly are we supposed to be celebrating on the 14th of *Nissan*, and why couldn't it just be incorporated into *Chag HaMatzot*?

It seems that the reason the *Korban Pesach* is so significant is that it was only through the *Korban Pesach* that *Bnei Yisrael* merited being saved. The Jews in *Mitzrayim* do not seem to have been particularly meritorious *tzaddikim*. In fact, *Yechezkel* 20:5-8 relates that the Jews in Egypt refused to abandon their *avodah zarah*, so that God wanted to destroy them along with the Egyptians. However, as *Rashi* to *Shmot* 12:6 reveals, He gave them one last chance – the opportunity to perform two *mitzvot* and thereby merit redemption. Those two *mitzvot* were *dam milah* and *dam pesach* - the blood of circumcision and the blood of the *Korban Pesach*.

Brit milah's selection as one of the two *mitzvot* that would grant *Bnei Yisrael* the merit to be saved is readily understandable. Undergoing circumcision is how a Jew actively enters into the covenant with God, how he actively becomes a member of the Jewish nation. This is indicated by the very name of the *mitzvah* itself – *brit*, meaning covenant. It is also evident from the fact that *brit milah* is one of only two *mitzvot aseh* in the entire Torah whose failure to perform results in *karet*, excision. Since the point of a *brit milah* is to join the Jewish nation, the punishment for, or perhaps natural result of, not undergoing one is *karet* – being cut off. Thus, it makes perfect sense that this was one of the two *mitzvot* chosen to distinguish *Bnei Yisrael* from the Egyptians and enable them to be redeemed.

But why was *Korban Pesach* selected as the second *mitzvah*? Why not *Shabbat* or any other one of the myriad commandments? What about the *Korban Pesach* made it uniquely suited to give *Bnei Yisrael* the merit to be redeemed?

As mentioned earlier, there are only two *mitzvot aseh* in the entire Torah whose failure to perform results in *karet*. The first is *brit milah*, and the second is none other than *Korban Pesach*. The message seems to be that performing a *Korban Pesach*, like undergoing a *brit milah*, is a declaration that one is choosing to join himself to the Jewish nation.

However, this begs the question: how does bringing a *Korban Pesach* constitute a declaration of belonging to the Jewish nation?

It is well-established that sheep were an Egyptian deity.¹⁸ Therefore, *Bnei Yisrael* slaughtering sheep was an unequivocal demonstration that they utterly rejected all belief in the power of the Egyptian gods. After all, if they still harbored even a modicum of doubt, they never would have been able to take one of these “gods” and slaughter it. Not only did sacrificing the *Korban Pesach* demonstrate their repudiation of Egyptian gods, but it also showed their complete faith in *HaShem* as their protector and savior, because even if *Bnei Yisrael* no longer believed in the power of these sheep, the Egyptians still did. By slaughtering the sheep in front of the Egyptians as they were commanded, *Bnei Yisrael* proved that they had complete faith in *HaShem* to protect

¹⁸ See for example *Rashi* to *Bereishit* 46:34. This would also explain why it was an embarrassment that Yosef's brothers were shepherds.

them from the Egyptians' wrath. Thus, the *Korban Pesach* was the perfect vehicle for expressing rejection of *avodah zarah* as well as faith in the one true God.

In essence, Pesach was a time of national conversion, when each and every individual had to decide whether he or she believed in God and wanted to be part of His nation. It was not enough simply to have been born a descendant of the *Avot*, for as *Rashi* famously says on *Shmot* 13:18, only one fifth of the Jews were taken out of Egypt. Each and every Jew in Egypt had to actively choose, as all converts must, if he believed in the God of Israel; sacrificing the *Korban Pesach* was the vehicle for expressing this choice. In fact, *Chazal* felt the need to explicitly preclude the possibility that every convert throughout the ages would have to bring a *Korban Pesach* as part of his conversion process, regardless of what season of the year he converted.¹⁹

With this appreciation for the significance of the *Korban Pesach*, we can understand why it generates its own independent holiday. We usually think of Pesach as the holiday on which God chose us and redeemed us. But before God would choose us, we had to show that we were worthy by us first choosing Him. And that is why there are really two holidays in *Nissan*. First, on the 14th of *Nissan*, we commemorate the *Korban Pesach*, which was the medium through which *Bnei Yisrael* demonstrated their repudiation of all foreign beliefs and their willingness to risk their lives for their faith in *HaShem*. Only after recreating that experience are we ready to and worthy of celebrating the holiday of *Chag HaMatzot*, when God chooses us and redeems us.

But how do we nowadays recreate the *Korban Pesach* experience? The *seder* is all about reliving the part when God redeems us, but what do we do beforehand to become worthy of it? What is our *Korban Pesach*?

The answer is that we recreate the *Korban Pesach* experience by getting rid of *chametz*. It now makes perfect sense that *HaShem* imposed upon *chametz* the same strictures as on *avodah zarah* – not simply so that *chametz* represents *avodah zarah*, but so that getting rid of *chametz* reenacts that first initial bringing of the *Korban Pesach*, which actually was Egyptian *avodah zarah*. They had to sacrifice an animal which was viewed as *avodah zarah*; we relive that by getting rid of *chametz* which symbolizes *avodah zarah*. So destroying *chametz* does not simply represent destroying *avodah zarah*; it is how we today recreate the *Korban Pesach* experience and make ourselves worthy of being redeemed on Pesach.

This explains why *chametz* becomes *assur* on *Erev Pesach*, rather than with the onset of Pesach itself. The whole point is to get rid of *chametz* in advance so that we make ourselves worthy of being freed and of celebrating *Chag HaMatzot*. And the fact that the Torah prohibits *chametz* starting from noon, the first moment the *Korban Pesach* could be brought, is a clear indication that getting rid of *chametz* is our equivalent of bringing the *Korban Pesach*.

There is one final proof that eradicating *chametz* is our way of recreating the *Korban Pesach*. *Shmot* 12:13 tells us that it was specifically the placement of the *Korban Pesach*'s blood on their doorposts that gave *Bnei Yisrael* the merit to be saved from *Makkat Bechorot*. Why wasn't

¹⁹ *Mechilta* cited by *Rashi* to *Shmot* 12:48.

slaughtering the animal in front of the Egyptians sufficient? Why did they have to smear the blood on their doorposts, and why was that act the pinnacle of their *avodah*?

Rabbi Zvi Shimon²⁰ suggests the following insight: All animal sacrifices in the *Beit HaMikdash* required the sprinkling (or pouring) of the animal's blood on the *mizbe'ach*.²¹ Thus, *Bnei Yisrael's* obligation to spread the blood of the *Korban Pesach* on their doorposts seems to parallel the general requirement to place a *korban's* blood on the *mizbe'ach*. The implication is that by placing the *Korban Pesach's* blood on their doorposts, *Bnei Yisrael* transformed their homes into mini-*mizbechot*, mini-altars. In fact, the *Mechilta* to *Shmot* 12:7 says explicitly, "We learn from here that they had three altars in Egypt: the lintel and the 2 doorposts."²²

We can now understand why we have to eliminate *chametz* from our homes, rather than simply refrain from eating it. What we are trying to do is recreate the *Korban Pesach*, and the climax of the *Korban Pesach* was the transformation of *Bnei Yisrael's* homes into mini-*mizbechot*.

Therefore, in some way, we also must transform our homes into mini-*mizbechot*, and purging our homes from *chametz* does exactly that. As mentioned earlier, *chametz* is never allowed on the *mizbe'ach* at any point of the year, so us ridding our homes of *chametz* is a symbolic way of showing that we are transforming our homes into the *mizbe'ach*.

Thus, all of the questions with which we began have been answered. We must refrain from eating *chametz* in addition to eating *matzah* because the eradication of *chametz* possesses its own intrinsic significance - it is our way of reenacting the sacrificing of the *Korban Pesach*, thereby becoming worthy of being redeemed. We must go so far as to eliminate it from our homes because the climax of the *Korban Pesach* was *Bnei Yisrael* placing the blood of the *Korban Pesach* on their doorposts, thereby transforming their homes into *mizbechot*. Similarly, we symbolically transform our homes into altars by eradicating *chametz* from them. The *Korban Pesach* is what gave *Bnei Yisrael* the *z'chut* to be redeemed from *Mitzrayim*; hopefully our elimination of *chametz* from our homes will make us truly worthy of celebrating *Chag HaMatzot*, as well as the ultimate *ge'ulah*. בניסן נגאלו, בניסן עתידין ליגאל – In *Nissan* they were redeemed, in *Nissan* we are destined to be redeemed in the future.²³

²⁰ In his shiur, "Passover in Egypt – The Blood of Redemption" (www.vbm-torah.org/pesach/zs-blood.htm)

²¹ See for example *VaYikra* 1:5.

²² This also explains why *Korban Pesach* has a unique focus on the home – שה לבית אבות שה לבית.

²³ *Rosh HaShanah* 11a.

Moshe Rabbenu: Enough Said

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A careful look at the early years of Moshe's life reveals a fascinating dichotomy. Born to Israelite parents, Moshe was hidden by his mother, rescued by an Egyptian princess, then returned to and nursed by his own mother, only to be subsequently raised in the royal palace of Egypt.²⁴ Reading retrospectively, it might be tempting to see in Moshe a man who was always aware of, and unequivocally loyal to, his Israelite heritage. While it is plausible that Moshe was in fact aware of his lineage throughout his years in the palace,²⁵ a close reading of the text uncovers allusions to the duality of his identity.

From the moment he was placed in the Nile, Moshe's identifying features, as well as the group with which he identified, become obscured by the text. When he was found by the Nile, for example, the daughter of Pharaoh concluded that he was a Hebrew baby, but no explanation is given as to how she arrived at that conclusion.²⁶ While her logic may have dictated that only a Hebrew parent forced to contend with Pharaoh's infanticidal decree would resort to such measures,²⁷ the text's silence on the matter is noteworthy as it precedes a number of similar ambiguities. Chapter 2 verse 11 tells us that when Moshe grew up he went out to his brothers, at which point he witnessed an Egyptian beating a Hebrew. Twice in the pasuk, the Hebrews are referred to as אֶחָיו, his kinsfolk. As readers, aware of the objective truth of that statement, we are left wondering whether the words accurately reflect Moshe's perspective as well.²⁸ Moshe's "ethnically neutral" inquiry of the two Hebrews fighting in verse 13, "למה תכה רעך," is equally enigmatic in regards to his orientation.

²⁴ Shmot 2:-10

For an interesting discussion regarding foreign children being raised in the Egyptian courts see J.K. Hoffmeier, *Israel in Egypt, The Evidence for the Authenticity of the Exodus Tradition*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996) 142-143

²⁵ Children in Egypt were likely weaned at a much later age than they are in the modern societies, at which point they were officially "taken in" by their adoptive parents. (See N. Sarna, *JPS Commentary Shmot*) That being the case, it is very possible that during their time spent together, Yocheved informed Moshe of his identity.

²⁶ See Rashbam 2:6 for example who explains that she saw that he was circumcised.

²⁷ Cf. Ramban 2:6

²⁸ The argument that his intercession was driven solely by his affinity for the Hebrews is difficult to ascertain. Aside from the ambiguities mentioned, his actions must also be considered in light of the fact that he later intervenes to save Midianite women from their assailants.

Moshe's ethnicity was ascribed by the daughter (or daughters) of a non-Israelite elite, for the second time, in Midian. Upon being rescued at the well, the daughters of Reuel, the Priest of Midian reported: איש מצרי הצילנו מיד הרועים, an Egyptian rescued us from the shepherds. In verse 19 of chapter 2, as was the case in verse 6, no indication is given as to the basis for their assumption. Once again the text is silent, leaving us with nothing but room for speculation. Reading the two episodes in light of each other, the evolution that Moshe underwent in the intervening years is drawn into high relief. As a baby he was unmistakably a Hebrew, as an adult, an assumed Egyptian. Still, of Moshe's own perspective the Torah says nothing.

The name that Moshe gave his first son further intensifies the elusiveness of the text. Chapter 2 verse 22 says that Moshe named his son Gershom for he had been "a stranger in a foreign land."²⁹ Evocative of the covenant made with Avraham foretelling the exile in Egypt,³⁰ Moshe's words can be understood as an empathic acknowledgment of his people's experience. His lack of specificity however, leaves open the possibility that the commemoration was pronounced by a self-proclaimed Egyptian living in the foreign land of Midian. Of utmost importance for this discussion is the fact that the text has, once again, left room for the entertaining of both realities.³¹

The vagueness that pervades this aspect of Moshe's life needs to be understood in its larger thematic context. The Torah does not include details about people's lives as a means of presenting a fully rounded biographical sketch, nor does it do so for the sake of historical documentation. The people and their lives as recounted in the Torah are presented for didactic purposes. Our responsibility is to attempt to make sense of both the facts and the manner in which they are imparted. By doing so, we can begin to discover how the Torah is communicating truths and reinforcing the underlying premises of the surrounding narrative.

Much of Moshe's life story is left untold. Two-thirds of his life is compressed into four short chapters, as he is already eighty years old by the time he goes to speak with Pharaoh.³² Those details that are recorded prior to his transformation to leader, however, are particularly remarkable when viewed through the lens of Israel's national experience. Allowing for the temporary personification of Israel, one notices that the two "biographies" mirror each other in significant ways.³³ While Moshe's biography is intricately connected to, and necessarily reliant on, the collective Israelite experience, at the same time, through symbolic and linguistic parallels, the Torah puts forth in Moshe a model for the people.³⁴

In the wake of Pharaoh's decree Moshe's birth bore the important element of defiance. Against the King's best attempts to prevent the birth of any single male child, Moshe is born and

²⁹ "ותלד בן ויקרא את שמו גרשם כי אמר גר הייתי בארץ נכריה"

³⁰ Bereishit 15:13, "ידע תדע כי גר יהיה זרעך בארץ לא להם ועבדום וענו אותם ארבע מאות שנה"

³¹ When the text becomes decisive about Moshe's self-perception is unclear. It can be argued that chapter 4 verse 18 is again intentionally inconclusive. In his early conversations with God, for example 5:22, Moshe referred to the Israelites in the third person. By 8:22 however, his identity had clearly been subsumed into that of the nation.

³² Shmot 7:7. For an interesting accounting of the "missing years" see Ramban 2:23.

³³ For an in-depth look at the various stages of Israel's national development see I. Pardes's *The Biography of Ancient Israel: National Narratives in the Bible* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000)

³⁴ Cf. E. Fox *Exodus: A New English Rendition With Commentary* (New York: Schocken Books, 1990)

sustained by his mother for three months. While we find out later that Moshe had older siblings, in the context of his birth story, he initially appears as the eldest, the בכור of his parents.³⁵ Yetziat Mitzrayim signified the birth of Israel as a national entity, God's firstborn.³⁶ Israel, like Moshe, was born in spite of the efforts of Pharaoh.³⁷

The verse that describes Moshe's mother's decision to save him speaks of the goodness she *saw* that led her to believe in Moshe's chance for survival.³⁸ Moshe was placed among the reeds (בתוך (הסוף) by the bank of the Nile.³⁹ His sister played a prominent role, hovering inconspicuously over the basket, and then reuniting mother and son.⁴⁰ Like Moshe's parent, God's *seeing* indicated survival.⁴¹ Israel was rescued at the sea, after they went into the water (בתוך הים).⁴² The sea that was split was, not coincidentally, the ים סוף, the Sea of Reeds. Just prior to the Splitting of the Sea, Israel expressed fear and a lack of faith in God.⁴³ Through her melodic praise of God immediately following the miracle, Miriam once again assumed center stage by the water and, it can be argued, successfully reunited Israel with God; child with parent.

After spending years of his life herding sheep in the wilderness Moshe had his first encounter with God on the mountain.⁴⁴ Appearing in a blazing fire, God coerced Moshe to accept his position as His emissary and leader of the people. Though initially riddled with fear and self-doubt, Moshe reluctantly acquiesced. He shed his Egyptian identity, turned his back on his Egyptian roots and wholly assumed the role for which God had singled him out.⁴⁵ Israel too was led into the wilderness following their miraculous birth and rescue at sea.⁴⁶ On more than one occasion the Tanakh speaks of Israel's years spent in the desert as its nascent years, alluding to the collective maturational process that took place during the course of the nation's wanderings.⁴⁷ Israel, like Moshe was warned not to approach the fiery space infused with God's presence.⁴⁸ It is at that point that their biographies diverge.

³⁵ Cf. Rashi 2:1 who accounts for this "misrepresentation" by explaining that Moshe was in fact the first child of his parents' second marriage.

³⁶ Shmot 4:22 "ואמרת אל פרעה כה אמר ה' בני בכרי ישראל"

³⁷ Ibid. 1:12. Ironically, Pharaoh is the first person recorded referring to Israel as a nation in 1:9.

³⁸ Ibid. 2:2 "ותהר האשה ותלד בן ותרא אתו כי טוב הוא ותצפנהו שלשה ירחים"

³⁹ Ibid. 2:5

⁴⁰ Ibid 2:4-9

⁴¹ In chapter 12 verse 13 God informed the people that His seeing of the sacrificial blood on the doorposts would ensure their safety. "וראיתי את הדם ופסחתי עלכם ולא יהיה בכם נגף למשחית בהכתי בארץ מצרים..."

⁴² Shmot 14:22

⁴³ Ibid 14:10-14

⁴⁴ Shmot Rabbah 2:4. Chazal identify Har Horeb, the location of Moshe's revelation, with Har Sinai.

⁴⁵ There are those that would argue that the "last leg" of his spiritual journey towards monotheism occurred in 4:24-26. See Sforno 4:24 for example.

⁴⁶ In the cultural vacuum that is a desert, one is afforded both the time and space to meditate on that which is of utmost spiritual importance. For an interesting discussion regarding the desert as a geographical phenomenon see R. T. Anderson, "The Role Of The Desert In Israelite Thought", *Journal of Bible and Religion*, 27 (1959)

⁴⁷ In Bamidbar 11:11-12 Moshe himself speaks of his resistance to carry Israel "as a nurse carries an infant," since he did not conceive or bear them. From a more positive vantage point, Yirmiyahu 2:2, speaking on behalf of God, fondly recalls Israel's devotion as "חסד נעוריה."

⁴⁸ Shmot 3:5 and 19:12, 23.

Unlike Moshe, Israel was unable to fully embrace that which God demanded. Like Moshe, Israel may have been aware of its ancestral link to the Avot;⁴⁹ however, its existence in the Land of Egypt over the course of three generations had taken its toll. Culturally, Israel identified with Egypt. The polemical nature of the plagues, and the stipulations for the night of the Exodus were a means by which God intended to extract Israel from Egypt, both geographically and theologically. Unlike Moshe, however, Israel vacillated in its loyalties. Throughout its years in the desert, Israel continually challenged God, speaking incessantly of its longing for Egypt. On more than one occasion Israel resorted to the idolatrous behavior of its exile.⁵⁰ Unable to sever its bond with Egypt, Israel resisted that which it had been chosen for.⁵¹ The nation needed time to cultivate its latent spiritual potential, to draw on its encounters with God and move towards monotheism. Moshe spent forty days on the mountain communing with God, readying himself for his role as purveyor of God's word. Israel spent forty years in the desert struggling with its impending role as representative of God on the international scene.

By remaining ambiguous about Moshe's self-identification in the early years of his life, the Torah maximized his versatility as a paradigm. While incremental, the nation's devotional shift from Egypt to Israel was not a linear one. At points it fully embraced its destiny, at others it pined for Egypt, while still at others it fell somewhere between those two ends of the spectrum. The stories told about Moshe's youth provided a framework through which Israel could contemplate its miraculous birth, rescue and chosen status. Moshe's ultimate decision to choose Israel over Egypt was resolute, and in that way he defined the ideal, sustainable relationship that God requires. By not disclosing Moshe's orientation prior to his appointment, his experiences were open to the interpretive needs of his people. At any given point along its journey the nation could find in Moshe an exemplar, specifically *because* the text did not initially delineate his loyalties.⁵² The blank spaces created by that which was not said, allowed for a national conception of Moshe that was multi-faceted; one that could both comfort and inspire the people through their own ambivalences. Moshe led the way for Israel in the desert in the literal sense of the word, but his life functioned, and I would argue, continues to function as a roadmap of a different sort.

⁴⁹ Ibid 3:15

⁵⁰ The episode of the Golden Calf is perhaps the most prominent, but by no means the only example.

⁵¹ Shmot 19:4-6

⁵² In a similar vein, the silence of the text prior to Avraham's first encounter with God at the age of seventy five, could be understood as leaving room for all possible roads to the discovery of God.

The Messages of *Galut Mitzrayim*

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On a national level, the Jewish people are more inclined to think about *geulah* than about *galut*. We daven for *geulah* daily and gladly proclaim 'Next Year in Jerusalem,' but it's much harder to contemplate the purpose of *galut* and its role in Jewish history. But *galut* has played a critical role in the historical and spiritual development of the Jewish nation, which has spent most of its existence in exile. *Galut Mitzrayim* is particularly significant, for as chasidic and kabalistic sources teach us, *galut Mitzrayim* is the paradigm for all future exiles. What can we learn from *galut Mitzrayim* about the purpose of our *galut*? How is *geulah* reconciled with *galut*? These and other important questions are addressed by the Shem m'Shmuel, the second Sokatchover Rebbe, in his chasidic discourses.

On the surface, the transition from life in Eretz Yisrael to slavery and subjugation in Egypt seems quite abrupt. At the end of Sefer Bereishit, the family of Ya'akov is living comfortably in Egypt, their welfare seemingly guaranteed by Yosef's position of prominence. We enter into Sefer Shemot, and suddenly the Jews are enslaved and their children are being thrown into the river. But the transition is not as rapid as it seems. Earlier in the Torah, at *ברית בין הבתרים*, Hashem tells Avraham about the exile and enslavement in Egypt.

12 And it came to pass, that, when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Avram; and fear and a great darkness fell upon him. 13 And He said to Avram: 'Know that your descendants shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them for four hundred years.

Bereshit 15:12-13

(יב) ויהי השמש לבוא ותרדמה
נפלה על אברם והנה אימה חשכה
גדלה נפלת עליו: (יג) ויאמר
לאברם ידע תדע כי גר יהיה זרעך
בארץ לא להם ועבדום וענו אתם
ארבע מאות שנה:
בראשית פרק טו

Although the exile in Egypt was to last four hundred years in total, Shem m'Shmuel learns from the pasukim that there were really four distinct stages – your descendants shall be a stranger (גר יהיה), in a land that is not theirs (בארץ לא להם), and shall serve them (ועבדום), and they shall afflict them (וענו אותם).

It's clear from the pesukim that we spent far less than 400 years in Egypt. Chazal explain that the count of 400 years started with the birth of Yitzchak. Although Yitzchak spent his whole life in Israel, he was dependent on the good will of the local Canaanite inhabitants, as was his son

Ya'akov. Hence, it was appropriate to count their time in Israel as the first stage of exile, that of גר יהיה זרעך. 190 years later Ya'akov and his family of seventy offspring left Israel to Egypt, beginning the next stage of לא להם בארץ. Chazal teach that the enslavement began after Ya'akov and his children died, beginning the third stage of ועבדום. The fourth and final stage of וענו אותם was represented by the decree that all male Jewish children be thrown into the river.

Several commentators ask what triggered the transition from one stage of exile to the next. Why did the Jews have to spend so much time enslaved in Egypt? Hashem did not fix how long each stage would take. Why couldn't the Jewish people spend more time in Israel, with subservience to the Canaanites counting towards the total of 400 years, as it did for Yitzchak and Ya'akov?

Beit haLevi and others explain that each successive stage of exile was triggered by various national sins. The transition from גר יהיה זרעך to לא להם בארץ was caused by the brothers' sale of Yosef. For that terrible sin, Hashem decided that the time had come to leave Israel and sojourn in Egypt. The Jews may well have stayed there comfortably for the remaining 400 years, with a small amount of enslavement and oppression at the end. But another national sin brought on the enslavement much earlier. Midrashim explain that the Jewish people in Egypt underwent painful surgical procedures to cover up their brit milah. By seeking to eliminate the sign of Jewishness from their body, they committed a serious transgression. They did so not intending to abandon G-d and the Jewish faith, but in order to win social acceptance from their Egyptian neighbors. They hoped to avoid anti-Semitism and integrate themselves into the Egyptian society and economy. They forgot the example of Yosef, who rose to prominence and success in Egypt, and still managed to keep his Jewish identity.

For abandoning the mitzvah meant to distinguish us from the gentiles, Hashem punished the Jewish people measure for measure. Instead of accepting the Jews, the Egyptians began to suspect the Jews' efforts to win favor. The Egyptians began to suspect the Jews' loyalty and to consider them a dangerous threat to Egypt's security. We find a similar process throughout Jewish history; whenever we abandon our identity to ingratiate ourselves with the non-Jewish society, the ultimate response is rejection and persecution. The Torah demands that we be proud of our distinctness, and proclaim our identity in order to sanctify Hashem's name by our conduct. When we refuse to do so, we subvert an important purpose of *galut*, of sanctifying Hashem's name in our encounters with the non-Jewish world.

Until this point, although the Jews were covering up their brit milah, they were still observing the mitzvah. However, at some point after the enslavement began, there was a national consensus to stop brit milah entirely. This is why, as the pesukim tell us, Hashem commanded the Jewish people to circumcise themselves before making the korban Pesach. This sin triggered the fourth and final stage of the exile, וענו אותם, Pharaoh's decree against the Jewish male children. The punishment was measure for measure, with the blood of the Jewish children corresponding to the blood of brit milah which the Jews had abandoned.

We tend to think of *galut* Mitzrayim as a uniquely Jewish experience. Indeed, the above analysis, in which the national sins of the Jewish people triggered the successive stages of that *galut*, supports this perspective. However, Kabbalistic sources teach us that *galut* Mitzrayim was an

important event in the larger development of human history. According to the Zohar, the Jewish people in Egypt had the reincarnated souls of Adam, the generation of the flood, and the generation of Migdal Bavel. The different types of suffering the Jews experienced in Egypt atoned for the respective sins of these earlier generations. This idea seems as astonishing as it is hard to relate to. However, it contains an important lesson for us. Although they ended up making the wrong choices, Adam, the generation of the flood, and the generation of Migdal Bavel had the potential for spiritual greatness. If they had lived up to their potential, all of humanity would have received the Torah and its mitzvot. That Hashem gave these gifts exclusively to a 'chosen nation' was not a foregone necessity. The Zohar teaches us that the purpose of the ethics, values, and spirituality modeled by the Jews was originally intended for all of the nations. Until the world accepts the values and ideals of the Torah, the Jewish people must, by necessity, hold themselves separate. But this is only a temporary measure. Eventually, all of humanity will acknowledge Hashem and his Torah, and accept their Godly responsibilities that are temporarily the exclusive possession of B'nei Yisrael.

The Pattern of *Galut* and *Geulah*

Galut also reflects a basic pattern in the world. God made the world in a pattern of waves where one cyclically travels between low points and high points. In *Chasidut* this is referred to as “*yeridah l'tzorech aliyah*,” a descent for the sake of an even greater ascent. Rav Nachman m'Breslov explains that exile is a necessary component in our relationship with Hashem.

Peace, peace, to him that is far off and to him that is near, says God Who creates the fruit of the lips; and I will heal him.

Yeshayahu 57:19

From a distance God appears to me. “I have loved you with an eternal love, and so I have drawn you with kindness.”

Yirmiyahu 31:2

בורא ניב שפתים שלום שלום לרחוק
ולקרוב אמר ה' ורפאתיו:
ישעיהו נז:יט

מרחוק ה' נראה לי ואהבת עולם אהבתיך
על כן משכתיך חסד:
ירמיהו לא:ב

A nation first must be distant to come close to Hashem. Rav Nachman explains that in life, people who don't work for things tend not to value them. A person must be strong to face the difficulties of life. And the difficulties of life require difficult training.

We find that the greatest gifts Hashem has given to the Jewish people have always followed a *galut* experience. The Torah, which is the greatest gift possible, and the *Mishkan*, God's presence within Israel, came only on the heels of *galut Mitzrayim*. Similarly, the second *Beis HaMikdash* was only erected after the *galut of Paras and Madai*. The great *galut* which we have experienced for almost 2000 years is so deep and terrible because it is the precursor for the ultimate redemption. The greater the *geulah*, the greater the *galut* that precedes it. The *galut of Bavel*, which lasted for only seventy years, produced the Second Temple, which was not the ultimate redemption. Only the great *galut of Edom* that we are in now can produce the ultimate redemption.

This back and forth rhythm of highs and lows was built into the fabric of creation when God created night and day. It is reflected in nature, such as the low and high tides of the oceans. The descent of *galut* is a training arena for the Jews to grow spiritually. When someone lacks something the desire to get it grows. The deeper the *galut*, the more the Jew wants the redemption. The more we want the redemption the greater it is.

The word *galut* (גלות) is related to *l'galot* (לגלות), meaning that exile reveals and brings out our strength, and compels us to rise above our environment to discover our spiritual strengths. One of the great benefits of *Galut* is that it reveals the hidden faith of the Jewish people. Jews are blessed with the spiritual genetics of Avraham, Yitzhak and Yaakov, the genetics of faith in God. The Rav zt"l once interpreted the symbol of the burning bush, the original symbol of redemption, as representing the inner fire within the Jewish people, a fire of faith and hope despite a barren world which seemingly is a thorn field, bereft of anything productive. The sages say that the twelve sons of Yaakov were all named after the concept of redemption. For example, Reuven is "*ra'ah ani*" God sees my suffering. Shimon is "*Shma tza'akasi*" God hears my prayers etc. which indicates how faith is at the core of every Jew.

This is why the Jewish people are believers in a brighter future and in God's ultimate salvation. When Moshe tells Hashem that the people won't believe in him, He responds that "*b'cha ya'aminu*" they will believe in you. We know that the slogan of the redemption of Egypt was revealed by Yosef, "*pakod yifkod*" "the moment of redemption shall come." The repetitious phrase of *pakod yifkod* implies certainty, as Yosef told Pharaoh that his double dream meant that the fulfillment of the interpretation of the dream was imminent. The certainty of redemption is rooted in the certainty of Jewish faith.

Thus, we see in our own time that Jews have an obsession to fix the world. The Jew has an innate instinct that the world can become and should become a better place. The Jew is optimistic about the possibility of improving the human condition. The Jewish people are all Messianic in this belief in a brighter future. This comes from our *galut* experiences. The *galut* and *geulah*, the wave-like historical experience has taught us that the world can become a better place and that redemption is a certainty.

The Blessings of *Galut*

Another aspect of how *galut* is a very powerful positive influence is in the Jewish quality of appreciation. Because of Jewish suffering the Jew has learned to appreciate the good things of life and to be "*makir tov*," to appreciate blessings. First and foremost a Jew appreciates God's blessings and responds with 100 blessings a day. Jews also appreciate other people, as reflected in the incredible loyalty of Jews to their parents in fulfilling the mitzvah of *kibbud av v'em*, in the mitzvah of *k'vod Rav* and ultimately in the mitzvah of *k'vod habriyot* by appreciating all people for what they do. When somebody experiences *galut* and realizes how cruel people can be, an appreciation for other people grows immensely. This is another blessing of the *galut*.

Another benefit of *galut* is that it reduces and hopefully eliminates *ga'avah* – smugness and hubris. The Torah mentions many times that "you must remember that you were a slave in Egypt". You must always remember your humble beginnings. No matter how comfortable life is

today we must always remember how it all began. It is for this reason that the Torah emphasizes *ahavat ha'ger* – loving the convert as we were strangers in Egypt. Another aspect of this humility that *galut* has bestowed upon us is the countless acts of *chesed* and *tzadakah* that Jews do. Jews are the kindest of all people. Jews are on the forefronts of social justice and charities. This is because the *galut* experience has shown us that we should provide help for the less fortunate.

Yet another lesson of the *galut* experience is that of the power of prayer. The Jews in Egypt prayed, and prayed without stop for hundreds of years until their prayers were heard as the Torah writes:

23. *And it was in those long days, and Pharaoh had died, and the Jews groaned from their work, and called out, and their cry arose to God from their work.* 24. *And God heard their cry, and God remembered their covenant, Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaacov.*

Shemot 2

(כג) ויהי בימים הרבים ההם וימת מלך מצרים ויאנחו בני ישראל מן העבדה ויזעקו ותעל שועתם אל האלהים מן העבדה: (כד) וישמע אלהים את נאקתם ויזכר אלהים את בריתו את אברהם את יצחק ואת יעקב:
שמות פרק ב

This is the prayer that Dovid Hamelech describes in Tehillim – “*mima’amakim keraticha Hashem*” “I call to you Hashem from the depths of suffering”. This is prayer even after one has given up hope. It is the prayer after *yiush*. It is the prayer of one who realizes that no human being can help him, only the almighty God. This is the prayer of Chana who prayed for a son even after everyone around her gave up hope. When even her husband told her that he was better to her than seven sons, she prayed from the deepest depths and that’s when her prayers were answered.

Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh

There’s a great *machloket* as to whether the Jewish people were redeemed from Egypt because of *teshuva* or despite the lack of *teshuva*. Yonatan Ben Uziel, based on the *pasuk* “*Va-Yar Elokim et b’nai Yisreal Va-Yayda Elokim,*” says that God saw the repentance of the Jewish people and accepted it. However, Ramban disagrees and says that the redemption from Egypt was purely because of *chesed elyon*, God’s limitless kindness towards His children, the Jewish people. According to Ramban the redemption is described, as Dovid Hemelech says about a certain relationship that we have with the Almighty “*ki-gamul alay imo*” as a baby on his mother’s breasts. The baby receives direct beneficence from his mother without any good deeds. This concept is spelled out in Tehillim:

Throw your load on God and He will support you, He will not allow the righteous to be moved.

Tehillim 55:23

השלך על ה' יהבך והוא יכלכלך לא יתן לעולם מוט לצדיק:
תהלים נה:כג

Ramban has a very amazing insight in this regard. When Moshe asks Hashem what name to use in identifying Him to the Jewish people He says “*Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh*” “I shall be what I shall be”. What is the meaning of this mysterious name? Ramban explains that this means that “I Hashem will be what you want Me to be.” In other words, if you want Me, Hashem, to have mercy upon you, then you must have mercy on one another. If the Jewish people are people of *chesed* with

others than Hashem is the *Av HaRachamim*, the merciful father. This is the concept of *middah k'negged middah*. What Ramban is saying is that even though the Jews in Egypt did not do *teshuva*, God invested in them, as He knew that in the future they would do *teshuva*. God took the first step of *chessed* so that the Jews themselves would follow suit. According to *chasidut* the ideal is that the human being should take the first step towards God as we need Him and He does not need us. We should be the ones to do the *teshuva* and then God will respond, as it says “*v’shavta ad Hashem Elokecha v’shav Hashem.*” First you return to God and then He returns to you. However, sometimes the Jew is so distant from Hashem, so depressed and so forlorn that he cannot take the first step. So Hashem takes the first step as He knows that the Jew will respond. According to the Ramban, Hashem took us out of *galut* even without *teshuva*, as He knew that it would be a good investment as we would become the people of *chessed* and *teshuva*.

Rashi gives another insight into the mysterious name “*ehyeh asher ehyeh.*”

I will be with the Jew in this time of travail and I will be with them in other times of travail.

Rashi Shemot 3:14

אֱהִיָּה אֲשֶׁר אֱהִיָּה: אֱהִיָּה עִמָּם בְּצָרָה זֹאת אֲשֶׁר אֱהִיָּה
 עִמָּם בְּשֶׁעֶבֶד שְׂאֵר מַלְכוּת.
 רַש"י שְׁמוֹת ג:יד

This is the very profound idea of “*imo anochi b’tzarah*” that God Himself is in the *galut* together with the Jew. It is the simple meaning of the burning bush – God Himself is in the thorns together with the people. This is referred to as *Shchinta b’galuta* – the *Shechina* is in *galut*. Chasidim explain that this is the paradox of *galut*. Superficially it appears that God is not with us as it says “*v’Anochi hastir astir panai.*” However, this is only superficial, as in a more profound way He is together with us in the *galut* and suffers with us. This is also the secret of the four-letter name of God which is spelled *Havayah*, To Be, but is pronounced *Adnus*, To Rule. The four-letter name *havayah/adnus* expresses out loud God as a distant ruler, the *adon*, but in reality He is very close, *havayah*, with us every step of the way. The *shem havayah* is a hidden part of the name. This paradoxical form of God’s name is only in *galut*, outside of the *Beis HaMikdash*. However, in the *Mikdash* the pronunciation matches the spelling, since God’s closeness to us is clear in that place. According to our sages, the *shem Havayah* is described as the name of *chessed* because it implies that God is as close to the Jew today in *galut* as He always was, even in the *Beit HaMikdash*. It is only the name of *adnus* in which Hashem is far from us.

This secret is really the key to prayer. The Jew knows that even if he seems to be very far from God in some external way, really He is very close. In a certain way He is closer than ever as God is suffering with every Jew. In this *galut* a Jew can pray in the strongest way. In fact he can pray for the *tza’ar* of the *Shechina*, for the suffering of God Himself, as we say “*aseh li-ma’an shimecha*” – do it for Your name. According to chasidic traditions, when a Jew prays for God’s own name, that prayer must be answered. The evil forces that oppose Jewish honor cannot oppose the honor of God and His holy name.

Two Forms of Redemption

Galut develops and displays the heroism of the Jewish people. In Egypt there were certainly Jewish heroes. Yocheved and Miriam were two such heroes, as they refused to obey Pharaoh’s

orders to kill the Jews, risking their own lives to do so. Moshe, as the prince of Egypt in Pharaoh's palace, risked his life to save a single Jew being beaten by an Egyptian. The fact that the Jewish people had so many babies in Egypt despite their suffering is an expression of their general heroism and their desire to survive. Jewish women made the Jewish family an unbreakable link in the Jewish people's existence in Egypt.

However, Hashem tells Moshe a very interesting thing. We mentioned that "*pakod yifkod*" "I will redeem" was the slogan of the redemption coined by Yosef. This double expression also implies that there can be two redemptions. The first redemption was the result of Jewish heroism. Only 20% of the people were able to be heroes. The other 80% could not do it, and according to our sages never left Egypt. This first redemption is that of the heroes, the people who still had faith, the people who still had some hope and the will to survive. Many Jews had lost every trace of their faith, pride and will to survive. They opted to assimilate into Egyptian society and never left.

However, the second redemption is one that all the Jews will deserve. It is even greater than the first redemption. It's the final redemption of Mashiach.

Redemption is not a straight line up; rather it is a wave that goes up and down. The key to reach the high tide is to have faith throughout the cycle, even at the lowest point. This is a very important lesson for us today as we go through different difficulties and troubles in our process of *galut* and *geulah*. We must be very careful, despite the blessing of having returned to the state of Israel, to avoid hubris and smugness. Sometimes God gives up a blessing with *ehyeh asher eheyh*, a call for us to respond. The blessing of the state of Israel is really a call for us to do *teshuva*. We must strengthen our *teshuva*, *tefila*, *u'tzedaka*.

As we return to Israel we have to bring the good lessons we learned in *galut*, *l'galot*—we have to reveal the *kedusha* which the Jewish people discovered in the *galut*. Our goal has to be to get every Jew to become part of this redemptive process so that no Jew should be left behind, unlike the redemption from Egypt in which many Jews were left behind. The future redemption, for which we pray for every single day, must be a *geulah* for every Jew and every person in the world. May this long exile serve as the catalyst for our meriting the *geulah* speedily in our days.

The Mitzvah of Sippur Yetzias Mitzrayim

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Recounting the Story of the Exodus

The mitzvah of “*sippur yetzias Mitzrayim*” – recounting the story of the Exodus – constitutes the cornerstone of the Seder experience. In characterizing this mitzvah, the Rambam emphasizes:

It is a positive mitzvah from the Torah to tell of the miracles and wonders which our ancestors experienced in Egypt on the night of the 15th of Nissan.

Rambam Hilchos Chametz U'Matzah 7:1

מצות עשה של תורה לספר בנסים ונפלאות
שנעשו לאבותינו במצרים בליל חמשה עשר
בניסן
רמב"ם הלכות חמץ ומצה ז:א

At first glance, the mitzvah of “*sippur yetzias Mitzrayim*” of Seder night appears quite similar, if not identical, to the daily mitzvah of “*zechiras yetzias Mitzrayim*” – remembering the Exodus. Given the apparent similarity, the Rishonim and Achronim attempt to identify the exact differences between these two mitzvos.

Perhaps the most basic difference between the two mitzvos emerges from the opinions of the Ohr Sameach and the Ra'ah. Noting the Rambam's omission of the mitzvah of *zechiras yetzias Mitzrayim* from the Sefer HaMitzvos, the Ohr Sameach (beginning of Hil. Kriyas Shema) suggests that the Rambam maintains that there is no Biblical obligation to remember the Exodus on a daily basis. Rather, the mitzvah of *zechiras yetzias Mitzrayim* is purely a rabbinic imperative. The Ra'ah (Berachos 13b s.v. “Amar”) expresses a somewhat similar view, maintaining that although remembering the Exodus during the daytime is Biblical, the *zechira* of the nighttime is rabbinic. (See also Pri Chadash O.C. 58:1) According to both views, the difference between *zechiras* and *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim* becomes quite apparent: the nightly *zechiras yetzias Mitzrayim* is merely a rabbinic obligation, while *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim* of the Seder night bears the stringency of a Biblical imperative.

Even if one rejects the opinion of the Ohr Sameach and the Ra'ah, R' Soloveitchik (Shiurim L'Zecher Abba Mori I:2), quoting his grandfather, R' Chaim, cited four further distinctions between *sippur* and *zechira*. First, *zechira* applies every night of the year, while *sippur* applies

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For more information, please visit www.feldheim.com

solely on Seder night. Second, *zechira* requires a minimal recollection of the Exodus, while *sippur* demands detailed elaboration of the miracles and wonders which precipitated the Exodus. Third, *zechira* is a personal mitzvah, obligating an individual to remember the Exodus on his own. *Sippur*, however, necessitates recital to one's children and others, in keeping with the possuk "and you shall tell your son on that day" (Shemos 13:8). Fourth, *zechiras yetziyas Mitzrayim* does not constitute an independent mitzvah, but is rather subsumed under the broader imperative of *Kriyas Shema* and *Kabbalas Ol Malchus Shamayim* – "acceptance of the yolk of Heaven." *Sippur*, however, is reckoned independently among the canonical six hundred thirteen mitzvos. R' Soloveitchik himself added a fifth distinction: while *zechira* requires **recollection** of the events of the Exodus, *sippur* demands **praise** and **thanksgiving** to HaKadosh Baruch Hu for effecting the Exodus.

Thus, despite the apparent similarities, significant differences distinguish *zechiras yetziyas Mitzrayim* and *sippur yetziyas Mitzrayim*.

Sippur and the Other Mitzvos of the Night

The Mishnah in Arvei Pesachim quotes the well-known adage of Rabban Gamliel:

"Anyone who does not recite the following three things has not fulfilled his obligation: Pesach, Matzah, and Maror."

Mishna Pesachim 116a

כל שלא אמר שלשה דברים אלו בפסח לא יצא ידי חובתו. ואלו הן: פסח, מצה, ומרור.
פסחים דף קטז.

While Rabban Gamliel is explicit that fulfillment of one's "obligation" hinges upon this recitation, what remains unclear is precisely *which* obligation Rabban Gamliel refers to. Indeed, one could envision two different possibilities. Perhaps, Rabban Gamliel is teaching that the fulfillment of the individual mitzvos of Korban Pesach, matzah, and maror depends upon concomitant recitation of "Pesach," "Matzah," and "Maror." Alternatively, however, perhaps Rabban Gamliel is teaching that fulfillment of the more general mitzvah of *sippur yetziyas Mitzrayim* depends upon mentioning these specific details.

The interpretation of this Mishnah is subject to considerable debate amongst the Rishonim. Tosafos (*ibid.*, as explained by Aruch L'Ner Sukkah 28a s.v. "Lo"), the Ramban (Milchamos Berachos 2b in Rif), and the Rashbam (Hagaddah HaMeyuchas L'Rashbam L'Hagaddah Shel Pesach) all strongly imply that Rabban Gamliel refers to the fulfillment of the mitzvos of Korban Pesach, matzah, and maror. The Ra'avan, Kiryas Sefer (Hil. Chametz U'Matza 7:1), and Aruch L'Ner (*ibid.*), however, maintain that Rabban Gamliel refers to the mitzvah of *sippur yetziyas Mitzrayim*. In quoting the halacha of Rabban Gamliel in the context of his discussion of *sippur yetziyas Mitzrayim*, the Rambam (Hil. Chametz U'Matza 7:1-5) also implies this understanding of Rabban Gamliel's statement.

The understanding of the Ra'avan, Kiryas Sefer, and Aruch L'Ner - that *sippur yetziyas Mitzrayim* depends upon mentioning Pesach, Matzah, and Maror - suggests a close relationship between *Sippur Yetziyas Mitzrayim* and the other mitzvos of the night. The Kehillos Yaakov (10:55) derives further support for this relationship from the Gemara in Maseches Pesachim (116b). The Gemarah questions how Rav Yosef and Rav Sheishes, who were both blind, could recite the

Haggadah on behalf of their respective Seders, in light of Rav Acha bar Yaakov's ruling that a blind person is exempt from reciting the Haggadah. Since an individual who is exempt from a mitzvah cannot exempt an individual who is obligated, Rav Yosef and Rav Sheishes should have been ineligible to exempt the other obligated participants. The Gemara explains their practice by ruling that matzah in the post-Mikdash era is only a rabbinic requirement. Because *everyone's* obligation—even those who are not blind – is only rabbinic, Rav Yosef and Rav Sheishes could exempt their respective parties. The Kehillos Yaakov notes that the Gemara's response is puzzling. If the inquiry of the Gemara pertains to the mitzvah of reciting the Haggadah (*sippur yetziyas Mitzrayim*), why does the Gemara present support for the practices of Rav Yosef and Rav Sheishes from the seemingly unrelated mitzvah of matzah? Apparently, the Gemara understands the mitzvah of matzah to be in fact closely linked to the mitzvah of *sippur yetziyas Mitzrayim*. Hence, if the mitzvah of matzah does not apply Mid'oraisa nowadays, one must by extension assume that the mitzvah of *sippur yetziyas Mitzrayim* is equally inapplicable Mid'oraisa.

The Teshuvos Chessed L'Avraham (Tinyana, O.C. 54) goes even further in describing the relationship between *sippur yetziyas Mitzrayim* and the other mitzvos of Seder night, arguing that one who lacks matzah and maror cannot fulfill the mitzvah of *sippur yetziyas Mitzrayim*. He explains that this critical relationship accounts for the absence of a beracha on *sippur yetziyas Mitzrayim*. In order to warrant a beracha, a mitzvah must exist independently. A mitzvah which is dependent upon another mitzvah, however, does not warrant a beracha. For example, although the Ramban (Sefer Hamitzvos, Shoresh 12) counts the designation of terumah and the giving of terumah to a Kohen as two separate mitzvos, one does not recite a beracha upon giving terumah to a Kohen, because this mitzvah depends upon a prior designation of terumah. Similarly, because *sippur yetziyas Mitzrayim* depends upon the mitzvos of matzah and maror, one does not recite an individual beracha for *sippur*.

The Chessed L'Avraham suggests that this idea also underlies the Terumas HaDeshen's opinion (125) that a minor who elects to participate in *sippur yetziyas Mitzrayim* on the Seder night should also refrain from eating matzah on erev Pesach. By doing so, the minor will retain an appetite to be able to fulfill the mitzvah of matzah on the Seder night. Apparently, the Terumas HaDeshen assumes that *sippur yetziyas Mitzrayim*, even if performed in a rabbinic fashion by a minor, should always be accompanied by the mitzvos of matzah and maror.

R' Ovadya Yosef (Chazon Ovadya I 23) disagrees with the Chessed L'Avraham, maintaining that one can certainly fulfill *sippur yetziyas Mitzrayim* in the absence of matzah and maror. Citing the Pri Megadim and the Oneg Yom Tov, R' Ovadya Yosef argues that *sippur yetziyas Mitzrayim* exists as an independent mitzvah, entirely distinct from the mitzvos of matzah and maror. Hence, failure to consume matzah and maror in no way invalidates one's fulfillment of *sippur*.

R' Soloveitchik suggested a further connection between Sippur Yetziyas Mitzrayim and other mitzvos of the night. The Mishnah (Pesachim 119b) teaches that one may not eat after consuming the *afikoman*. In this context, the Rishonim debate the reason for the institution of the *afikoman*. The Rashbam (ibid., s.v. "Ain") maintains that consumption of the *afikoman* fulfills the primary obligation of *achilas matzah* for the Seder. The matzah eaten earlier in the Seder (during Motzi Matzah) serves a more technical purpose, inaugurating the *seudas Yom Tov*.

The Rosh (Pesachim 10:34), however, disagrees, maintaining that the mitzvah of matzah is fulfilled during Motzi Matzah. The *afikoman* merely serves as a commemoration of the Korban Pesach eaten in the times of the Beis Hamikdash at the end of the Seder.

While the Rashbam and the Rosh state their views explicitly, the Rambam's understanding of *afikoman* is not entirely clear. On the one hand, the Rambam rules (Hil. Chametz U'Matzah 6:1) that a person fulfills his matzah obligation upon consuming a single *k'zayis* of matzah. This ruling implies that the initial consumption of matzah after Maggid fulfills the mitzvah. On the other hand, in explaining the prohibition of eating after the *afikoman*, the Rambam writes (Hil. Chametz U'Matzah 8:9) that this prohibition serves "so that one will conclude the meal with the taste of Pesach or (in post-Mikdash times) matzah in his mouth, שאכילתן היא המצוה, *since their consumption is the mitzvah.*" In referring to the matzah of *afikoman* as "the mitzvah," the Rambam seems to suggest that it is the *afikoman* which fulfills the primary mitzvah of matzah.

R' Soloveitchik suggested that the Rambam's understanding may be rooted in the relationship between *sippur yetziyas Mitzrayim* and the other mitzvos of the Seder night. Although the mitzvah of matzah itself is fulfilled with the initial consumption of matzah after Maggid, the mitzvah of *sippur yetziyas Mitzrayim* throughout the Seder requires the continued presence of matzah and maror in front of the individual. The Rambam maintains that when a person retains the lingering taste of matzah in his mouth for the conclusion of the Seder, Halacha considers the situation *as if* matzah is literally present before the person. This halachic simulation enables an individual to continue to fulfill the mitzvah of *sippur yetziyas Mitzrayim* through the conclusion of the Seder.

R' Soloveitchik's explanation may also shed light upon the opinion of the Ba'al HaMaor. The Ba'al HaMaor (Pesachim 26b in Rif) maintains that the prohibition of eating after the *afikoman* exists only while a person is involved in fulfilling the mitzvah of *sippur yetziyas Mitzrayim*. Once the Seder concludes, however, a person may resume eating and drinking. Based on R' Soloveitchik's explanation, one could explain that the role of the prohibition is to facilitate the lingering "taste of matzah in his mouth" in order to enable continued fulfillment of *sippur yetziyas Mitzrayim*. Once the Seder has concluded, he no longer performs the mitzvah of *sippur*, and thus the taste of matzah is no longer necessary.

In a very different context, the Ramban also underscores the intrinsic relationship between *sippur yetziyas Mitzrayim* and the other mitzvos of the night. In his additions to the Sefer Hamitzvos (positive mitzvah 15), the Ramban objects to the Rambam's conspicuous omission of Birchos HaTorah – the blessings recited upon Torah study – from the Sefer Hamitzvos. If Birchos HaTorah are a Mitzvah D'oraisa, reasons the Ramban, why does the Rambam fail to count them? In light of this omission, the Sha'agas Aryeh (24) suggests that the Rambam believes that Birchos HaTorah are required only Mid'rabbanan. The Kiryas Sefer (Hil. Tefillah 12), however, argues that the Rambam does maintain that Birchos HaTorah are Mid'oraisa, but refrained from counting them independently because they are included as a part of the broader mitzvah of Talmud Torah itself. In challenging the Rambam, the Ramban raises the Kiryas Sefer's possibility, but immediately rejects it, noting that the Rambam always counts mitzvos d'oraisa *independently*, even if they are merely components of a broader mitzvah. After all, reasons the Ramban, if the Rambam counts *Mikra Bikurim* (the passage recited upon bringing

the first fruits) independently from the mitzvah of Bikurim, and *sippur yetziyas Mitzrayim* independently from the mitzvah of Korban Pesach, he should certainly count Birchos HaTorah independently from Talmud Torah. Because the Rambam does *not* list Birchos HaTorah independently, he must understand them to be Mid'rabbanan.

The Ramban's almost parenthetical analogy, comparing the relationship between Birchos HaTorah and Talmud Torah to the relationship between Sippur Yetziyas Mitzrayim and Korban Pesach, is quite revealing. Just as Birchos HaTorah are conceptually linked to the mitzvah of Talmud Torah, so too *sippur yetziyas Mitzrayim* is fundamentally connected to the mitzvah of Korban Pesach. In this context, it is also worth noting that the Ramban's analogy between Birchos HaTorah and Sippur Yetziyas Mitzrayim fits consistently with his general understanding of Birchos HaTorah as a birkas hoda'ah – a beracha of thanksgiving towards HaKadosh Baruch Hu. Because of their encomiastic nature, Birchos HaTorah resemble *sippur yetziyas Mitzrayim*. If Birchos HaTorah were *not* a birkas hoda'ah, however, the analogy to Sippur Yetziyas Mitzrayim would be less clear.

As a final note, the Rosh (Teshuvos HaRosh 24:2) also appears to view the mitzvah of *sippur yetziyas Mitzrayim* as being fundamentally linked to the other mitzvos of the Seder. The Rosh explains that no beracha is recited upon *sippur yetziyas Mitzrayim* because the other mitzvos of the night unequivocally proclaim our mindset to engage in the mitzvah of recounting the Exodus. Because we are eating matzah and maror, no declaration of intent (in the form of a beracha) is necessary for the *sippur* itself, as these practices provide context and meaning for the *sippur*. In essence, the Matzah itself functions as a “quasi-birkas hamitzvah” for *sippur yetziyas Mitzrayim*, calling attention to the greatness of the miracles and the obligation to remember in much the same way of a typical birkas hamitzvah.

What emerges from all of these Rishonim is that the mitzvah of *sippur* is intrinsically connected, on both a practical and conceptual level, to the other mitzvos of the night. This connection thus represents another major difference between *zechiras yetziyas Mitzrayim* of the entire year and *sippur yetziyas Mitzrayim* of the Seder night.

The Scope of Sippur Yetziyas Mitzrayim

The Rishonim debate the minimal recitation necessary to fulfill one's obligation of *sippur yetziyas Mitzrayim*. The Avudraham (cited by Rabbeinu Yerucham, Nesiv Chamishi:4) explains that no beracha is recited on the recital of the Hagaddah because the mitzvah of *sippur yetziyas Mitzrayim* has already been fulfilled by mentioning the three words “*zecher l'yetzias Mitzrayim*” in Kiddush. The Avudraham's reasoning presupposes that *sippur yetziyas Mitzrayim* can be fulfilled through a minimalistic recognition of the Exodus. The Pri Megadim (Pesicha L'Hilchos Kriyas Shema) concurs, explaining that Chazal instituted the Hagaddah at a later point in history, but the basic *D'oraisa chiyuv* merely requires a nominal mentioning of the Exodus on the Seder night. The Nesivos HaMishpat (Haggadah Shel Pesach Ma'aseh Nisim) disagrees, maintaining that the Torah obligation of *sippur yetziyas Mitzrayim* requires an elevated retelling of everything which transpired from beginning to end. The Nesivos draws a parallel to Purim, which is only a rabbinic mitzvah, yet requires the recitation of the entire Megillah in order to fulfill one's obligation. If reading the Megillah requires completeness and thoroughness, then the

Mitzvah of *sippur yetziyas Mitzrayim* should certainly warrant a comprehensive and complete recital. Moreover, adds the Nesivos, grammatically, the phraseology “*v’higadeta*” denotes an extended recounting, not a mere mentioning. R’ Chaim Soloveitchik (cited above) also agrees with the Nesivos, proposing that the mitzvah of *sippur* demands detailed descriptions of the miracles and wonders which HaKadosh Baruch Hu performed on our behalf.

Articulating Sippur Yetziyas Mitzrayim

The Rosh (Teshuvos HaRosh 24:2) writes that the need for “Hagaddah” – “retelling” – in the context of *sippur yetziyas Mitzrayim* is not to be taken literally. Even if one merely contemplates *yetziyas Mitzrayim*, the obligation is fulfilled. The Sefer HaChinuch 21, however, disagrees, maintaining that actual articulation is necessary in order to fulfill the mitzvah. Even a person dining alone must speak the Hagaddah to himself, “for his speech will arouse his heart.” The Pri Megadim (M’Z 474:1) suggests that this debate may depend on the dispute Amoraim (Berachos 20b) regarding whether or not *hirhur*, thought, is tantamount to *dibur*, speech: The Rosh maintains that thought is tantamount to speech, and one may therefore merely contemplate the Hagaddah. The Chinuch argues that thought is not equated with speech, and actual pronunciation of the terms is thus essential.

The Pri Megadim adds that if thought is tantamount to speech, one can account for the absence of a beracha on the mitzvah of *sippur*, as Chazal never instituted a beracha for a mitzvah which can be fulfilled through mere thought. R’ Shlomo Kluger (Hashmatos to Shu”T Haalef Lecha Shlomo O.C. 40) rejects the Pri Megadim’s analysis, maintaining that *sippur* absolutely requires speech, according to both opinions in the Gemarah in Berachos. R’ Kluger explains that the dispute in Berachos pertains only to mitzvos which the Torah specifically demands *dibur*. *Sippur*, however, is different. As opposed to *dibur*, speech, the Torah stipulates “Hagaddah,” which denotes “communication,” an interaction between two individuals. Based on the Torah’s diction, R’ Shlomo Kluger infers that *both* opinions in the Gemarah in Berachos would maintain that one cannot fulfill *sippur yetziyas Mitzrayim* unless it is recited in a manner that could possibly be heard by others.

In light of R’ Kluger’s interpretation, a further distinction emerges between the mitzvah of *sippur* and *zechiras yetziyas Mitzrayim*. Although R’ Kluger argues that *sippur* demands speech, perhaps he would admit that *zechira* can be fulfilled through mere mental contemplation. The Shaagas Aryeh (13), however, rejects this distinction, arguing that even *zechiras yetziyas Mitzrayim* requires verbal articulation. Citing the requirement to verbally articulate *zechiras Amalek* as a model, the Shaagas Aryeh derives that any *zechira* requires verbal declaration.

Even if one accepts the Shaagas Aryeh’s view that both *sippur* and *zechiras yetziyas Mitzrayim* require speech, one can still distinguish between the two. R’ Yehudah rules in Maseches Berachos (15a) that although one must ideally recite the Shema in an audible tone, if one articulated the words inaudibly, one fulfills the obligation post-facto. The Rashba (ibid. s.v. “Amar Rav Yosef”) implies that this rule is Mid’oraissa. Based on this Gemarah, R’ Asher Weiss (Hagaddah Shel Pesach Minchas Asher 4) suggests that although one fulfills the requirement of *zechiras yetziyas Mitzrayim* even if it was recited in an inaudible tone, perhaps the higher standard of “Hagaddah” necessary for *sippur yetziyas Mitzrayim* would necessitate recitation in an audible tone.

Matzah: A Lesson in Trust and Community

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Lest one say, "HaShem gives us food and drink, but without peace there is nothing," the Torah pledged, "I will create peace in the land." This teaches that peace is the equal of all. And so it is written, "Who makes peace and creates evil" This teaches that peace is the equal of all.

Sifra to Bechukotai 1:1

HaShem did not find a receptacle to hold blessing for Israel, other than peace.

Mishnah, Uktzin 3:12

Gatherings of tzaddikim are beneficial for them and for the world. Dispersion of tzaddikim is bad for them and bad for the world.

Kallah Rabti 6:4

שמא תאמרו הרי מאכל והרי משתה
אם אין שלום אין כלום ת"ל ונתתי
שלום בארץ, מגיד שהשלום שקול
כנגד הכל, וכן הוא אומר עושה שלום
ובורא רע, מגיד שהשלום שקול כנגד
הכל.

ספרא בחוקותי א:א

לא מצא הקב"ה כלי מחזיק ברכה
לישראל אלא השלום
משנה עוקצין ג:ב

כינוס לצדיקים, הנאה להם והנאה
לעולם; פיזור לצדיקים, רעה להם
ורעה לעולם
כלה רבתי ו:ד

Without peace there is no blessing, because the dispersion created by the absence of peace eradicates all of the benefits and advantages we hold as individuals. Peace allows for gathering and builds community, and it is **trust** that builds this peace.

So it is that economists and sociologists have come to view trust as a form of currency, "social capital," greasing the wheels of society and enabling its administration. From product safety oversight to social service provision to financial investment and transaction, every engagement of human being with human being or of individual with government requires trust that the other will act in the best interest of the community. As Francis Fukuyama wrote,⁵³ "A nation's well-being, as well as its ability to compete economically, is conditioned by a single, pervasive cultural characteristic: the level of trust inherent in the society."

Halachah recognizes this need for trust as well, and dedicates at least four areas of legislation to its maintenance:

⁵³ *The Economics of Trust*, National Review (August 14, 1995)

- **Standards of Neemanut:** Behaving in a trustworthy way.
- **Darchei Shalom:** Following behaviors which build trust and peace.
- **Marit Ayin:** Avoiding actions which trigger suspicion.
- **Dan l’Kaf Zchut:** Presuming righteousness in assessing others’ actions.

Rav Menasheh Klein⁵⁴ has pointed out that the Talmud Yerushalmi,⁵⁵ regarding the need to remain above suspicion of malfeasance, cited two separate pesukim: “And you shall be innocent from HaShem and Israel,⁵⁶” and “And you shall find favor and a reputation for wisdom in the eyes of HaShem and Man.” Rav Klein explains that that these two separate pesukim are needed to obligate us not only to be trustworthy, but to proactively create a trustworthy and trusting society.

Rav Zalman Sorotzkin identified this theme - the essential nature of trust in building our society – as the key to answering two questions regarding the matzah we eat on Pesach night.

What is the significance of matzah for us?

Rav Sorotzkin⁵⁷ noted that matzah is considered one of the three major themes of the Seder, such that one has not fulfilled his obligations of the night unless he has mentioned all three. As Rabban Gamliel expressed it:

One who has not mentioned these three items on Pesach has not fulfilled his obligation: Pesach, matzah and maror.

Mishnah Pesachim 10:5

כל שלא אמר שלשה דברים אלו בפסח לא יצא ידי חובתו ואלו הן: פסח מצה ומרור
משנה פסחים י:ה

The Korban Pesach is clearly vital for all generations, with its message that HaShem miraculously punished the Egyptians and saved us on that original Seder night. Maror is also of clear cross-generational significance, with its demonstration of the bitterness our enemies inflicted upon us in Egypt and in many other lands since. But what is the message of matzah for the Jew today? What does this artifact of a rushed exodus teach the Jew more than three millennia distant?

What was the significance of matzah for them?

Rav Sorotzkin also asked a second question: What was the significance of matzah for the Jews who escaped Egypt, themselves?

Clearly, matzah was not simply a product of unavoidable haste; HaShem told the Jews exactly when they would eat their korban pesach, and He instructed them to prepare matzah for the meal that night:

And they shall eat the meat on this night; fire-roasted, with matzah, upon marror they shall eat it.

Shemot 12:8

ואכלו את הבשר בלילה הזה צלי אש ומצות על מררים יאכלהו:
שמות יב:ח

⁵⁴ Mishneh Halachot 5:95

⁵⁵ Yerushalmi Shekalim 3:2

⁵⁶ Bamidbar 32

⁵⁷ Haggadah haShir v’haShevach

Further, the Jews knew when they would leave Egypt, and they could have prepared leavened bread beforehand, had they chosen. It appears that matzah was a planned component of the fleeing Jews' diet. But if matzah was not an accidental element of the original Seder, we must ask ourselves: What was its purpose, its message, for the Jew departing Egypt?

We descended to Egypt to learn Trust

Rav Sorotzkin asserted that nations normally begin their existence on their own lands, in peace and harmony. The Jews, in contrast, gasped, opened their eyes and inhaled their first breaths as a nation of slaves in the domain of their oppressors.

The talmudic sages were also troubled by this odd origin of the Jewish national experience, and offered numerous suggestions to justify the Divine plan:

Rabbi Avahu asked, citing Rabbi Elazar: Why was Avraham Avinu punished, and why were his descendants enslaved in Egypt for 210 years? Because he enlisted talmidei chachamim... And Shemuel said: Because he challenged Divine attributes... And Rabbi Yochanan said: Because he kept people from entering the Divine presence...

Nedarim 32a

אמר רבי אבהו אמר רבי אלעזר: מפני מה נענש אברהם אבינו ונשתעבדו בניו למצרים מאתים ועשר שנים? מפני שעשה אנגרייא בת"ה ... ושמואל אמר: מפני שהפריז על מדותיו של הקב"ה ... ורבי יוחנן אמר: שהפריש בני אדם מלהכנס תחת כנפי השכינה.
גדרים לב.

Moshe Rabbeinu asked the same question, and offered an answer of his own:

Moshe was wondering, 'What sin did the Jews commit, to be uniquely enslaved?' When he heard [Datan]'s words, he said, 'They have harmful speech in their midst! How will they ever merit redemption?' And so he said, 'Now, the matter is known' – Now I know why they are enslaved.

Midrash, Shemot Rabbah 1:30

היה משה מהרהר בלבו ואומר מה חטאו ישראל שנשתעבדו מכל האומות, כיון ששמע דבריו אמר לשון הרע יש ביניהן היאך יהיו ראויין לגאולה לכך אמר אכן נודע הדבר עתה ידעתי באיזה דבר הם משתעבדים.
שמות רבה א:ל

And Rav Zalman Sorotzkin presented his own explanation, based on Shlomo haMelech's words:

Always love friends, and a brother will be born in times of trouble.

Mishlei 17:17 (as explained by Rashi)

בכל עת אהב הרע ואח לצרה יולד:
משלי יז:יז

The forebears of the Jewish people lacked unity, and lacked a sense of obedience to a ruler; this deficiency was planned, a trait vital for their break from Mesopotamian and Canaanite society. Had Avraham felt too strong a bond to his family and surroundings, he would never have been able to leave his land and challenge the ideals with which he had been raised. Had Yitzchak and Yaakov felt attached to their neighbors, the earliest seeds of the Jewish people would have been absorbed into the tribes among whom they lived. Yosef and his brothers clearly lacked trust and

obedience; indeed, the history of Esav's monarchy is biblically juxtaposed with the sale of Yosef, highlighting the social cohesion we lacked, and others possessed.

But the rebellion of those early years was not appropriate for building an enduring nation, and so HaShem brought the Jews to Egypt and burdened them with slavery, that they might learn to accept a master. The social strife of their national gestation would not serve creation of a landed society, and so HaShem immersed the Jewish people into a cauldron of suffering, so that brothers would be born in times of trouble.

This, suggested Rav Sorotzkin, is why Avraham does not react with horror at the news that his descendants will be made to suffer in a foreign land. Avraham understands the need for this experience, the national apex which requires this national nadir.

The significance of matzah for them

This may explain why HaShem insisted that the Jews eat matzah at their original Seder: Matzah is a physical symbol of the powerful bonds that that come with trust.

In creating matzah, we combine two representatives of division, flour and water:

- Flour, with its lightweight granules, is the epitome of division – it blows with the wind and scatters in every direction.
- Water flows freely and apart, and so demonstrates division of its own; HaShem's choice of this tool to punish the divisive generation of the Flood, and the Egyptians who created internal strife by taking advantage of a minority, was particularly ironic.

When we combine the divided flour and water, we create a material that coheres and forms a dense unit. Wait too long and the dough will inflate outward and become chametz, but bake it immediately and you have a clear representative of the unity the Jewish people required. This message was crucial for the Jews who would leave Mitzrayim.

The significance of matzah for us

The Yom Tov of Pesach, in every generation, highlights the importance of the Tzibbur. We offer the Korban Pesach, which is identified as a *korban tzibbur*, a communal korban, even though it is brought by individual families. Each Jew is responsible to take membership in a specific Korban Pesach, to establish and demonstrate his commitment to a group of people. Indeed, one prominent view among the tannaim was that a Jew was not permitted to bring a private Korban Pesach; he was required to share with others.⁵⁸ This is the message of communal trust, leading to peace, unity and blessing.

In our own era, when we cannot yet bring the Korban Pesach, we retain a reminder of that unity through our matzah and its cohesion. And so the Jew of every generation must mention matzah, and remember the trust it symbolizes.

May we soon learn the lessons of our matzah, and so merit to eat it in our groups along with the fire-roasted Korban Pesach, atop maror, at the site of the rebuilt Beit haMikdash.

⁵⁸ Pesachim 99a

Collected Insights into the Pesach Seder

Every Day Lessons from the Exodus

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The Pesach Haggada suggests that in addition to the theological importance of the Exodus from Egypt—themes such as the Omnipotence, personal intervention and faithfulness of God vis-à-vis His People—the story should have an important impact upon our psyches as well. “And the Exodus has stood for our fathers and ourselves”. Why? Because Jewish history is perceived as cyclical, eternally repeating itself in one form or another. “Because there was not only one alone [Pharaoh] who has arisen against us, but rather in each generation they arise against us with the intent to destroy us and the Holy One, Blessed Be He, Saves us from their hands.”

R. Simcha Ziesel of Kelm deeply personalizes this message of the Haggada:

All aspects of a person's life are to be derived from the Exodus from Egypt. And all of the actions and ways of a person during his entire life will be found in the Torah within the context of the Exodus from Egypt. And all of the actions and events that affected our ancestors, this is the principle regarding what will happen to every person on a conscious level, the Exodus from Egypt is like an introduction to everything that will happen to the Jewish people in the future.⁵⁹

This giant of mussar advances the evocative suggestion that we should strive to look at the Exodus as a touchstone for our daily, individual existences. Three possible applications come to mind.

On one level, our attention should be directed to the personalities who played key roles in the Exodus, including not only Moshe and Aharon, but also the midwives (Shemot 1:15-21) as well as, according to Shemot Rabba 1:12, Jewish women in general. Each of us regularly faces uncomfortable situations in our work, our families, and our communities. We would do well to emulate the examples of the Jewish heroes of the Exodus and act with courage and resolve for the Sake of Heaven. Secondly, the entire period of the Jews' leaving Egypt was marked by myriad miracles. Assuming that hidden miracles are everywhere to be discerned if only we care to seek them out would be another important lesson of the Exodus. And thirdly, the importance of being able to forthrightly declare our Jewish identities was part and parcel of the Exodus story, at least according to one rabbinic view in Mechilta D'RaShBI, Parasha 6. In Shemot 12:7, the Jews

⁵⁹ The quotation of R. Simcha Ziesel's concept is attributed to R. Meir Rosenstein of Lomzhe in Shalom Meir Volk, Haggada Shel Pesach, Leket Ma'amarei Raboteinu Gedolie Tenuat HaMussar, Tevuna, Tel Aviv, 1988, p. 133.

in Egypt were instructed to place the blood that had been extracted from their Paschal sacrifices on their doorposts. What is unclear is whether the blood was to be placed on the inside or the outside portion of their dwellings. While R. Yishmael and R. Natan posit that the blood was to be placed so that only the Jews inside the house would know that it was there, R. Yitzchak disagrees and may be indicating that the Jews were proud of who they were and were prepared to publicly state their identities, despite the persecutions and difficulties to which they were being subjected. The contemporary implication, at least from the perspective of R. Yitzchak's interpretation, would be that we should be prepared to stand up and identify who we are and what we stand for, even at times when this might be discomfiting and unpopular.

The Jewish Evolution

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The founder of Chassidus, the Baal Shem Tov, makes a cryptic comment. He says that the primary idea of the Egyptian exile was that *da'at* (knowledge) was in exile. Therefore, without knowledge, which contributes to our ability as human beings to speak, it follows that speech was also in exile.

What does this mean that *da'at* was in exile? At the top of the Kabbalistic chain are three attributes – *chochma* (wisdom), *bina* (understanding), and *da'at* (knowledge). These attributes are the big three and are known as “the mothers.” *Chochma* is the initial flash of energy when an idea first reaches the mind. *Bina* is when one begins to try to understand this flash of inspiration. *Da'at* is when one tries to relate to this new found information. Knowledge then is the ability to successfully integrate the material that we learn. This was temporarily lost while in Egypt.

In regards to the Exodus, the Torah teaches:

13. And all of your first born donkeys shall be redeemed for a sheep, and if not you shall break its neck, and all of your first born sons shall be redeemed. 14. And when your son shall ask you 'what's this,' you will say to him that G-d took us out of Egypt with a strong hand from the house of slaves.

Shemot 13

(ג) וכל פטר חמר תפדה בשה ואם לא תפדה וערפתו וכל בכור אדם בבניך תפדה: (יד) והיה כי ישאלך בנך מחר לאמר מה זאת ואמרת אליו בחזק יד הוציאנו ה' ממצרים מבית עבדים:
שמות פרק יג

What's the connection between these two verses? Moreover, why did G-d command that the first born donkey be exchanged for a sheep?

R. Yosef Dov Fishof suggests that the answer lies in the distinction between a donkey and a sheep. There is no animal lower than a donkey. It is worked tremendously hard and it does the majority of load bearing. The food it is given is of the lowest quality. The sheep, on the other hand, is treated as the best of all animals for it has a faithful shepherd leading it through the greenest of pastures. When the Jewish people were in Egypt they were at the level of donkeys, they worked literally like animals, day and night without stop. But G-d had different plans and He eventually took them out and lifted them to the level of sheep. They also had a faithful shepherd in Moshe,

who led them in the right way. This is the connection between the two verses. The Egypt experience taught us that we must evolve.

The *Sefer HaChinuch* (Mitzvah 310) notes that on Pesach the *Korban HaOmer*, the Barley Offering is brought. Seven weeks later we bring the שתי הלחם, actual bread. Why? This is to symbolize our progression, going from animal food, to human food, thus indicating that the Omer process is a time when we work on becoming humans. This is a Jewish Evolution. It is about bringing knowledge out of exile (to use the words of the Baal Shem Tov). In Egypt we were made to feel almost subhuman. We lost the quality that distinguished us from animals – our ability to think freely.

There is a famous debate as to when the Jewish People were commanded to build the *Mishkan* (Tabernacle). According to Rashi (*Shemos 31:18*) the commandment came after the sin of the golden calf. The Ramban (*35:1*) assumes that while the initial commandment to build the Tabernacle came before the sin of the golden calf, the Jewish people were given the commandment again to build the Tabernacle after the second tablets were given.

Why is the building of the Tabernacle supposed to arise in context with the Sinai experience? Some suggest that the Mishkan, then, was supposed to be our personal Sinai wherever we may go. There's only one problem with this approach: why not ask the Jewish people to build something that looks like Sinai, a mini mountain model if you will? It is clear from numerous verses that the Mishkan was in fact supposed to look like a human being (see 25:2, 5, 10, 20, 26, 31, 26:4, 19, 20, 24, 14). The Torah uses its description in terms that are in fact similar to human body parts. The reason for this is because the Tabernacle was supposed to reflect Sinai in the sense that at Sinai we learned how to become full fledged human beings. Full fledged in the sense that we knew how to operate with *da'at*, knowledge. As the Talmud in Sotah states – “there is no knowledge like the knowledge of Torah.” Therefore, the Bnei Yisrael were commanded to build an edifice that looked like a human being, which was what they had truly become after the giving of the second tablets.

A House with Many Rooms and One Table

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Knowing that each of the four questions personified as the *arba banim* heralds from the Torah, the Netziv in his commentary to the Haggadah, *Imrei Shefer*, looks back at the original *psukim* in his analysis of the source of the confrontation with the *ben ha-rasha*:

And it will come to pass when your children say to you, 'What is this service to you?' You shall say, It is a Pesach sacrifice to Hashem, for He passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt when He smote the Egyptians, and He saved our houses. And the people kneeled and prostrated themselves.

Shemot 12:26-27

וְהָיָה כִּי יֹאמְרוּ אֲלֵיכֶם בְּנֵיכֶם מָה
הָעֵבֶר זֶה הַזֶּה אֶת לָכֶם: וְאָמַרְתֶּם זִבְחַ פֶּסַח
הוּא לַיהוָה אֲשֶׁר פָּסַח עַל בְּתֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
כְּמַצְרִים כְּנִגְפוּ אֶת מִצְרַיִם וְאֶת בְּתֵינוּ
הִצִּיל נִיֶּקֶד הָעַם וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ:
שְׁמוֹת יב:כו-כז

While the Haggadah quotes the question verbatim, the answer deviates from the one offered by the Torah, substituting instead a harsh retort aimed at deflecting the impact of the verbal assault:

... Blunt his teeth and say to him: “because of this Hashem did for me when I left mitzrayim”

נֹאֵף אֶתְּהָהּ הַקִּקְהָה אֶת שְׁנֵי נְאֻמֵּי לֹ: בְּעִבּוֹר זֶה עָשָׂה יי לִי בְּצִאתִי מִמִּצְרַיִם.

The Netziv infers that the Haggadah derives this strategy of response based on the wording of the reply found in the Torah itself, where the expression “*v’amartem*” - “and you shall say,” lacks an addressee. If the Torah meant for us to engage the combative pronouncement on its merits, the language of “*v’amartem lahem*” - “and you shall say to them” works better. Instead, the Netziv believes that the Haggadah bids us to listen for the music of the question—tone and language matter—before deciding whether and how to reply. Insults and imprecations spewing from the cynical mouth do not necessarily justify endless debate.

Nonetheless, despite the lack of direct response to the barbs of the *rasha*, the reply which appears in the Torah warrants attention. Why does the Torah mention the saving of houses at the time of *makat bechorot* (“*v’et bateinu heetzeel*”)? Considering that the *Mekhilta* teaches that a Jew in an Egyptian house during *makat bechorot* would be spared even as an Egyptian in a Jewish home would not escape punishment, why does the Torah make the affirmation of our service on Pesach on account of saved houses? The Netziv reads the word *bayit* in this *pasuk* as a reference to households, a proverbial reference to family. As a house contains different rooms—respectable and dignified versus degraded and strictly functional—so must a family include different types of people. A complete household both recognizes an array of rooms even as it keeps everyone seated around the same table—and guides the conversation—lest a room of one’s own soon lead to a house of one’s own. At the time of *yetziat mitzrayim*, but for the merit of a connection to the rest of the family, some of the redeemed did not truly merit their own rescue. Yet, their accompaniment of the rest of the family to make it a “complete house,” permitted their salvation. The reply in the Torah is where we offer our thanks to the Almighty for saving us as “houses,” despite the ongoing reality of the sometimes fractious relationships. To a People that is not yet redeemed, hearing about the very possibility of these impending conflicts with wayward children is a reason for thanks; it both recognizes the prevalence of the challenges of child-rearing, and instills the hope of ongoing dialogue.

As we go around the table soliciting questions from children eager to learn, the *ben harasha* spits out the *seder* with a dismissive challenge. In response, we may throw his fantasy of self-exclusion from the family back at him with the sharp rejoinder that with his attitude he would not deserve redemption alone—but we do not send him from his seat at the table back to his room.

The “Not so Bitter” Herb

Rabbi Shaanan Gelman

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There is a discussion within the *poskim* as to what sorts of vegetables are meant to be used for *maror*, that which we colloquially define as “the bitter herb”. Some *poskim* prefer the romaine lettuce to the white horseradish, which we know is the custom at many of our *sedarim*.

Why would romaine leaves be a preferable option to white horseradish, which has more bitter taste? It is rather difficult to explain the ritual to our children as being based on the misery and

hardship experienced by the Jewish slaves if the reenactment on *leil ha'seder* is a rather pleasant endeavor, or at worst, something which mildly disagrees with our palette!

The classic explanation is that the romaine leaves begin with a sweeter taste and end with a bitter and unpleasant taste, as was the nature of the Egyptian servitude.

In this vein Rav Mordechai Yosef of Radzhin, the *Ishbitzer z"l*, in his Haggada, cites:

And the Egyptians forced the Children of Israel to perform excruciating labor, R' Elazer explained, with a 'soft mouth'
Sotah 11b

ויעבידו מצרים את בני ישראל בפרך
רבי אלעזר אמר בפה רך
סוטה יא:

In other words, there are two distinct traditions as to the nature of the bitterness and the harsh labor in Egypt: 1) that they performed impossible, back breaking work, or 2) that they were seduced with a sweet tongue in a pleasant and alluring manner.

R' Mordechai Yosef adds a fascinating point in explaining this text: According to R' Elazer, the greatest tragedy is not the back breaking labor, but that the Jewish people were led to believe that their experience was not in fact a bitter one at all. They were initially encouraged in their labor and made to feel that it was not particularly arduous.

The greatest exile, he explains, is one of the mind. It is an exile in which man has no idea that he is lost, and no concept of his own pain and grief. That is the *פה רך*, it is the alluring voice which tells us that "it's not truly bitter", that work makes freedom, and that it is actually enjoyable. This perhaps may give us pause when we reflect upon the "fulfilling" nature of certain professions, which have often become nothing short of slave labor, asking employees to put in fourteen hour days, but in an environment equipped with workout rooms, and daycare centers, and other amenities designed to subdue the bite of an endless workday.

Traditionally, the focus of the evening of the seder is to begin in crisis and end in the praise, *מתחיל בגנות ומסיים בשבח*. We fulfill the mitzvah of *maror* to remind us that sometimes even *גנות*, suffering, can take the shape of *שבח* as well.

Avadim Hayinu – Where's Moshe?

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Moshe's name doesn't appear at all in the paragraph of *Avadim Hayinu*. Twice it refers to God taking us out, but nothing about Moshe. To deepen the mystery, Moshe hardly gets mentioned in the Haggada at all. The Vilna Gaon goes so far as to say that it is prohibited to write about Moshe - so as not to attach any 'partnerships' to God. We must understand that it was God, and God alone, who took us out of Egypt.

Why the big secret? Why not make this a night of praise for Jewish heroes as well? Why ignore Moshe's tremendous contribution?

To reach an understanding of this perplexing issue we must first explore Judaism's view on miracles. The Ramban (Exodus 13:16) explains that miracles, and our commemoration of them,

are “faithful witnesses to the truth of the existence of the Creator and the truth of the whole Torah. Because God will not make signs and wonders in every generation for the eyes of some wicked man or heretic, He therefore commanded us that we should always make a sign of that which we have seen with our eyes and transmit that to our children.” This means that God will perform a miracle every once in a while to remind us who is in charge.

Why are only some generations chosen to receive miracles? I would also like to receive a handout from God every once in awhile. Am I undeserving?

Rav Soloveitchik (*Emergence of Ethical Man* p. 188) explains that God’s presence in the natural world, without miracles, is the true ideal. Judaism’s frequent references to the long-ago Exodus from Egypt are to remind us however, that at certain times there is a need for God’s clear, supernatural involvement. “Miracle expresses the idea that whenever the covenant comes to a crisis in its eternal struggle with the forces of indifference, the historical motives will overcome.” Supernatural miracles are only required when there is no other way. In times other than these dangerous and threatening predicaments, we must rely on our God given natural devices to rise above our challenges to sanctify God’s name.

With God’s presence in the natural world as the true ideal, miracles indicate that we have come up short; miracles are necessary interventions by God to set the world back on its natural, intended path. When we celebrate a miracle, we appreciate that God will never forget us. It serves as an inspiration for us to do better and to recognize divine providence in the natural world.

At the Seder, our goal is “to see ourselves as if we personally are leaving Egypt.” Our generation has the power and tools necessary to bring about our own redemption. Open miracles should not be required for this to happen. We have the ability to sanctify the natural world to the greatest extent humanly possible.

Moshe is only minimally mentioned at the seder to remind us that while the redemption from Egypt required a leader of Moshe’s stature, we should not fall into the trap of thinking that only Moshe can lead redemption. Rather, if our generation hasn’t been granted a Moshe, it must mean that we don’t need him. We have a responsibility to put in the effort to bring about our own redemption without miracles, and without Moshe, but rather with the unique strengths, abilities, and challenges that God has given us.

Joseph and the Four Cups of Wine

Rabbi Howard S. Joseph

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Why do we drink the four cups of wine at the Pesach Seder? According to R. Yehoshua ben Levi - in some texts it is R. Shemuel ben Nachman - the four cups of wine are related to the four times that the word 'cup' is mentioned by Pharaoh's jailed butler as he recounts his dream to Joseph in the common prison they share. It is this dream that foreshadows the butler's release from prison and return to service as a trusted member of Pharaoh's court. Joseph's clarification of the dream also leads to his own release from prison: it is this same butler who recalls the unfortunate 'Hebrew lad' who helped him when later Pharaoh is plagued by his recurring dreams. Joseph is

summoned from prison and soon emerges as second only to Pharaoh himself in the rulership of Egypt. Although it is interesting that the word appears four times, we certainly may wonder what this has to do with the Exodus from Egypt which we celebrate at the Seder? What relevance do the troubles of Pharaoh's butler have for us?

We may wonder what Joseph's personal attitude was towards Egypt. Joseph lived in the pre-bondage period and rose to be second in command. He rescued the Egyptian economy during seven years of drought, enriched the Crown and fed the populace, winning honor and glory for himself. By all accounts, Joseph "made it" in Egypt. However, a survey of Joseph's career reveals an interesting trajectory. Initially, he seems totally absorbed in the realm of his responsibility and office. He names his first son Menashe, meaning, "God has made me forget completely my hardship and my parental home." Gone are the troubles of his youth, the fights with his brothers, the sibling rivalries caused by his dreams of glory. Gone, too, are the dreams of Abraham and the special covenant established by God with the family. Joseph is an Egyptian, with an Egyptian name, wife and family. He sits among the mighty in one of the mightiest nations of the ancient world.

However, the name he chooses for his second son is Ephraim, meaning, "God has made me fertile in the land of my affliction." Why is Egypt the land of his affliction? Does it refer to his earlier servitude and imprisonment, or has his view of Egypt begun to change? Is Joseph really a free man or is he beginning to feel some sense of bondage in this foreign land in which his star has risen?

The answer is clear: Joseph realized that he too was a slave. Despite the trappings of wealth and power, ultimately this was not his land. The more he rose in prominence, the more pronounced his sense of alienation. The very prominence, position and power made him more of a slave: the "trappings" were actually a "trap."

So what is the connection between Joseph's four cups and the four cups of the seder? R. Yehoshua ben Levi is reminding us that Pesach is not just for the poor and the oppressed; Pesach is for the Josephs of our people too. While appearances may seem benign, Jews must always be watchful. I do not wish to suggest that Western countries are beginning to turn against us. But let us examine the question from another angle. How did Joseph feel about all of his accomplishments? He had reached the pinnacle of power and contributed mightily to the well-being of the country. Ultimately, however, whatever he produced was not really his; it was Egypt's might and glory that was expanded. Joseph secured temporary safety for his family and temporary fame for himself in Egypt. But soon after there 'arose a new king who not know Joseph.' Soon after that there was nothing for him nor his people. Egypt moved on to a new chapter of its own history. Joseph turned out to be a temporary side-show not even remembered in Egyptian records.

Even without the threat of physical violence, Jews must always ask about our real place in this world. A place not only where we can be secure but wherein our creative accomplishments can be our own and not stripped away from us so easily; wherein we are not guests but fully at home in a society for which we are responsible. Thank God, today we have the State of Israel where millions of our people live today. True enough, they are periodically threatened by violence and hostility. But we constantly witness their tremendous courage and their intense devotion to the land. This attachment comes from a sense of being fully at home and standing firm to protect that home when it is under attack.

Where, indeed, is our place and the place for our children? Where can we really build a special Jewish life for ourselves, our children and our people? Where can we avoid the problem of assimilation which decimates our people even when we are free from physical attacks? We are building a good community here but we know the answer. R. Yehoshua ben Levi suggested it to us a long time ago.

When we drink the four cups of wine, we remember not only the slaves who were freed from their bondage and oppression, but also Joseph who, in his own way, was also a slave to Pharaoh in Egypt. He too was freed by Moses when his bones were taken out during the Exodus. He finally was placed to rest in the homeland he knew was the only homeland that the people of Israel ever had or ever will have.

The Seder of Magid

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There is a reason that Moshe Rabbeinu established that we begin studying upcoming festivals thirty days prior to their commencement. There are laws to review, new situations to assess and insights and renewed inspiration to derive. But nothing compares to the preparations we make for Pesach. For many this *hachanah* translates to a trip to the local Kosher grocery and spending a pay-check or two, hours of cleaning and scouring and perhaps attending shiurim on the latest kosher-for-Pesach rules and regulations. How many of us spend parallel time preparing for our hallowed task of *Sipur Yetzias Mitzrayim*, our annual task to tell the story of our redemption from Egypt? The children come home with projects, songs and *vortlach* – depending on their age. They learn new ideas, angles and commentaries. While their participation is laudable and encouraged, we are the ones leading our s'darim and we too should take seriously the task of telling this most precious story of the miracles, of shame and redemption.

Chazal in their inspired wisdom were ahead of their times regarding pedagogy. The model of the *arba banim* demonstrates their knowledge and appreciation of differentiated instruction. They grasped the notion that people learn better with visual aids (*b'zman shematzah umaror munachim l'fanecha*) and the didactic tactic of asking questions.

While the *tana'im* taught us that we begin with the shame and conclude the story with praise, how else did the *baal haHagadah* organize the materials in the *Magid* section, the portion of the Seder where we fulfill the mitzvah of *Sipur Yetzias Mitzrayim*? We do have a *seder haseder – kadesh, urchatz...* - but that gives us the overview of the entire Seder. I am not familiar with a cute song that teaches us the different parts of *Magid*.

The Malbim in his Hagaddah unlocks the mystery of the *seder* of *Magid*. He opines that *Magid* is ordered based on a verse we all know: *v'higad'ta l'vincha bayom hahu leimor, ba'avur zeh asah Hashem li b'tzeisi mimitzrayim*, 'you shall relate to your son on that day saying because of this Hashem performed for me when I left Egypt' (Shmos 13:8). He argues that the organization of *Magid* bases itself on this verse.

The words *v'higad'ta l'vincha*, you shall relate to your child, refers to the text beginning with *avadim hayinu* and ending with the fourth child. *Bayom Hahu*, on that day, refers to the portion *yachol merosh chodesh*, which addresses when the mitzvah of *Sipur Yetzias Mitzrayim* is to take place. Although the third section corresponds to but one word in the verse, *leimor*, saying, it represents the largest chunk of *Magid*, namely, from *Mitchilah*, in the beginning our ancestors were idolaters, and concludes after *dayeinu*.

The fourth section of *Magid*, *ba'avur zeh*, because of this, is accomplished via the statements of Rabban Gamliel, pointing out the *pesach*, *matzah* and *maror*. Clearly the word *zeh*, this, is key to this understanding, as we are pointing something out at the seder. The next fragment of our verse is *asah Hashem li*, Hashem performed for me. The Malbim teaches us that the paragraph *b'chol dor vador chayav adam liros es atzmo k'ilo hu yatza mimitzrayim*, in each generation man must see himself as if he himself was taken out of Egypt, accomplishes this. Here the word *li*, to me, is the key. Finally, the last two words of the verse *b'tzeisi mimitzrayim*, as I left Egypt, refer to the first two paragraphs of Hallel, which specifically reference the exodus.

Just as the *kadesh urchatz* song helps us prepare for a long glorious night of stories, matzah, maror and hallel, the Malbim's insight should help set the table for *Magid*. It helps pace the mitzvah of *Sipur Yetzias Mitzrayim*, and organizes the order of this night which is so crucial to the transmission of our holy *mesorah*.

Lifting the Veil of Shir HaShirim

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The debate over including Shir HaShirim in the Tanach is well known. Our tradition tells us that Rabbi Akiva was one of the voices who argued in favor of including Shir HaShirim in the Tanach (Yadayim 3:5). Therefore, it is not surprising to learn that many seek to contrast Rabbi Akiva's personal biography with his attitude toward Shir HaShirim and superficially this makes sense. Rashi does describe the plight of the maiden in Shir HaShirim as that of a "living widow" who longs for her husband and her youthful love for him. Rabbi Akiva's wife lived a similar life for twenty-four years and as she waited for her husband to return from his Torah studies she too was described as a living widow (Ketubot 62b). Others point out that in Shir HaShirim the male works as a shepherd and the maiden is described as a *bat nadiv*, the daughter of a wealthy family. As it turns out, Rabbi Akiva worked as a shepherd for the wealthy Kalba Savua and later married his daughter, Rachel. (Kalba Savua means "satiated dog" for whoever came into his home, even if they were as hungry as a dog, would leave fully satiated.)

It is true that the parallels between Rabbi Akiva's life and Shir HaShirim are startling. Shir HaShirim is about love and Rabbi Akiva's life was turned around by the love he had for the daughter of Kalba Savua, who agreed to become his wife if he would commit to Torah study. The imagery of Shir HaShirim includes a shepherd and the daughter of a wealthy family who becomes "a living widow." Thus, some suggest that it would not have been difficult for Rabbi Akiva to see himself and his wife in this imagery. When Rabbi Akiva declares that whoever sings Shir HaShirim in pubs and bars has no share in the world to come (Tosefta Sanhedrin 12:5), he was chastising

those who would make light of the power of love, leaving it for that crude and light headed atmosphere where people drink and sing without thinking.

One of the rabbis of the modern era famous for his great love is Rav Kook, who wrote about *ahavat hinam*, love that knows no reason. This is why it is so meaningful to note that Rav Kook, this modern master of love, in his introduction to Shir HaShirim (Olat Re'iyah II:3ff) takes issue with those who would limit Rabbi Akiva's adoration of Shir HaShirim to the personal biography of his life. Rav Kook writes that such people are unable to truly comprehend what Rabbi Akiva was talking about when he declared Shir HaShirim to be the sanctum sanctorum of Jewish scripture.

Rav Kook points out that Rabbi Akiva's love had the capacity to transcend the personal and the scope of his love was not bound by the limits of his own romantic interests. If one is inclined to draw parallels between the life of Rabbi Akiva and his defense of Shir HaShirim, then one is better served by looking beyond the relationship of a husband and a wife. Instead we should recall that upon seeing foxes trampling where the Beit HaMikdash once stood, Rabbi Akiva was able to laugh because his heart was filled with love for a vision of a blissful future where Rome was gone and Israel returned to glory and this love that filled his heart could transcend the present sorrow and desolation (Makkot 24b). Rav Kook urges us to recall the martyred Rabbi Akiva whose love of Torah transcended fear of death and whose love of God transcended the pain of torture so that as he declared God's unity he was able to let go of his worldly life as he declared God's unity (Berachot 61b). This is the Rabbi Akiva, overflowing with love that transcends his personal situation, who sees the holiness of Shir HaShirim. Thus, to draw parallels between the private love of Rabbi Akiva and Shir HaShirim is to never lift the veil of allegory that covers over the meaning of this holiest of songs. If we wish to lift that veil then we must go beyond that love which is rooted in our private concerns.

The Matzah Experience

Rabbi Uri Pilichowski

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More than a simple wafer eaten thousands of years ago, matzah represents the entire Exodus experience, from the pain of slavery to the joy of emancipation. The Egyptians fed us matzah when we were slaves; it was a high-carbohydrate, low-cost, filling way to feed their slaves. Matzah came to represent bitterness to the Jewish people. However, as much as matzah was the bitter bread of affliction for so many slaves, in an instant it became the eternal bread of freedom for a nation.

The significance of matzah illuminates its many qualities and shows how it is not merely something we consume, but an experience that transcends simple symbolism. While we would expect to find many intricate laws of Pesach that would best express the nature of matzah, I'd like to show how it is specifically laws on erev Pesach that best reflect matzah's meaning. Hopefully this will add a new experience to each and every bite of matzah consumed this Pesach.

In contrast to Sukkos and Shavuos, where we simply commemorate past events, on Pesach we relive the Exodus experience. It is not enough to raise our matzos in the air and pronounce that this matzah comes to represent our past tribulations and salvation, but with each and every bite

we are to return to the times of our ancestors, feel what they felt, eat what they ate, all in order to best understand the gratitude they felt towards their Creator. As we chew our matzah, each painstaking bite is designed to put us back in the desert, enduring backbreaking labor and rejoicing over the sweet taste of freedom, all in order to better understand the gratitude we have towards our Creator for continued freedom. The newfound appreciation of our Creator lifts us to new heights of perfection, making us better people with a stronger connection to God.

Rambam states three laws in regards to matzah on erev Pesach: a prohibition of eating matzah on erev Pesach, designed to act as a marker for the night's uniqueness; a prohibition of eating a meal close to mincha on erev Pesach, a general prohibition on erev Shabbos and Pesach to increase one's appetite for the meal, but dissimilarly aimed at whetting one's appetite specifically for matzah; and the practice of limiting eating on the entire day, intended to ensure the matzah's consumption be with extreme hunger, and to ensure that we treasure all mitzvos.

These laws of erev Pesach, unique to all other erev Shabbos and Yom Tov laws seem to point to a different explanation of the mitzvah to eat matzah. It would seem it is not sufficient to merely eat matzah, but one must eat it out of anticipation, hungering for its taste. We've all eaten matzah, and while we might hunger for the main course's vast array of delicacies, it is rare to find someone clamoring for a piece of matzah.

Eating matzah out of dire hunger is unrealistic; this is not the correct understanding of these laws. Matzah wasn't supposed to be eaten out of a ravenous desire for the taste of a dry cracker; it is the experience we are to anticipate. We aren't holding back from the taste of matzah on erev Pesach, but rather it is the reliving of the transformation from slavery to emancipation that we desire. It is this experience of joy that leads to gratitude which strengthens our relationship with God that we are to await for. The mitzvah of matzah lasts seven days, and if we put our minds to it, so can our experience.

The Seder of Magid

Rabbi Moshe Teitelbaum

Rabbi, Young Israel of Lawrence-Cedarhurst

We read in the Haggadah "*vayar Elokim et Bnei Yisrael vayeida Elokim*" God saw the Jewish people and He knew them. The Medrash explains: "*R' Yehuda ben Lakish omer, ra'ah she'osim teshuvah v'heim lo ra'u zeh et zeh.*" [Mechilta, Yitro 19] God saw that the Bnei Yisrael were repentant, but they didn't see that in each other. They were returning to God, but privately, secretly, in unrevealed devotion. Underneath the trappings of mere slaves stirred the spirit of servants of God soon to comprise the kingdom of priests – the *mamlechet kohanim v'goy kaddosh*. But none of this was overtly recognizable.

This hidden teshuva doesn't seem to be because the Egyptians would punish a Jew for exhibiting belief in Hashem. Quite to the contrary, the tribe of Levi were granted reprieve from slave labor because they were accepted as Hebrew religious leaders or members of a priestly caste. Rather, it seems that the effect of *galut* – perhaps its most deleterious effect – was this reluctance on the part of the Hebrew man or woman to show open signs of being an *eved Hashem*. Therefore, in

Egypt, while God knew and witnessed the movement of His beloved children back to Him, the children of Israel themselves were unaware and could not perceive the changes taking place all around them as their loved ones, friends and peers allowed their faith in God to manifest within their souls but not to openly emerge.

Our Rabbis tell us that the Bnei Yisrael had been quite involved in Egyptian life. Assuredly, they are credited for remaining somewhat distinct by their refusal to alter their style of dress, their Hebrew names and their spoken language. However, chazal also point to their practice of *avodah zarah* - at the least, to their emotional attachment to the cultural and religious symbols and icons of Egypt. The command to designate and prepare an animal that would serve as a *korban Pesach* was a call to abandon those Egyptian deities. "*Mishchu u' kchu lachem tzon*" is understood to mean "*mishchu yedeichem m' avodah zarah*". God was urging Bnei Yisrael to pull away from the idolatry they had for so long practiced. Therefore, because of this influence, even when Bnei Yisrael began to return to God, any Jewish identity that we beheld in one another was only skin deep. The greatness and holiness of our Jewish identity within was known to God alone – "*vayeida Elokim*".

In this regard, how different are we from the Jews of Egypt? As far as outward appearances are concerned, the majority of American Jews have little that lets anyone know that they are of the Jewish faith. Even in the observant community we are far from perfect when it comes to the issue of Jewish appearance and an overt Jewish identity. We can't even boast with the bragging rights of the Egyptian Jews of yore; our (commonly used) first names, our language and our dress are – in the main – very much the same as those of the non-Jews with whom we live and work. Why and how can this be acceptable to us?

Perhaps it is because we today have so much that does identify and define us as Jews and does so from the inside, not merely through outward appearances. There is Torah that we study, *tefilah* that we engage in three times a day, and the four sections of *Shulchan Aruch* that we follow moment to moment, which announces very boldly who we are and to Whom we belong. We are, therefore, less dependent upon the distinctions of name, dress and language. Thus, we are able to see, recognize and appreciate the Jewish character of our friends and neighbors.

When we gain true freedom, we are thoroughly comfortable (even proud) to be seen as Jews. However, Jewish name, dress and language alone do not form this appearance. Virtuous, Torah-prescribed behavior and attitudes displayed in every area of our lives form the *Kiddush Hashem* that proceeds from what we see in each other and what others see in us. They are the substance of the mission upon which we have been sent as we move from exile to redemption.

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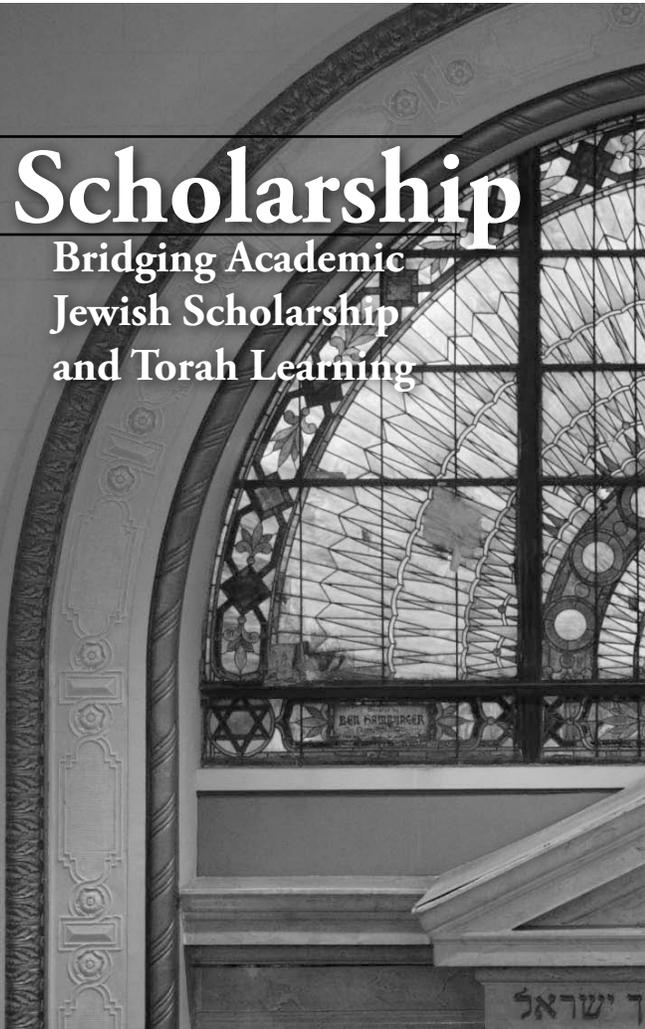
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Rosensweig
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10:30am
Rabbi Hayyim Angel
Avigayil and David: The Role of That Narrative in Sefer Shemuel

Rabbi Shalom Carmy
Halakha and Rape: Three 20th Century Perspectives on One Rambam

Rabbi Daniel Feldman
Bound by Time? Women and Sefirat Ha'Omer

Mrs. Nechama Price
Strong or Weak? Women in Tanach

11:30am
Rabbi Mark Dratch
Love, Honor and Obey? Marital Relations and Relationships in the Talmud

Rabbi Shmuel Hain
Family Redeemed and Marriage Sanctified: An Overview of Seder Nashim

Dr. Aaron Koller
Rabbinic Readings of a Radical Book: Esther in Hazal

Mrs. Shoshana Schechter
Reflections on the Mirrors of Mitzrayim: Looking Forward to Make Change

12:30pm
Rabbi Yosef Blau
Halakhic Responses to the Changing Role of Women in Society

Rabbi Benjamin Blech
If Brit Milah is the Sign of our Covenant with G-d, What About Women?

Mrs. Yael Leibowitz
Polarity In Tanach: How David And Goliath Shed Light On Our Understanding Of Megillat Ruth

Rabbi Menachem Leibtag
The Women in Tanach Who Have No Name

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