

A Night of Questions

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The Talmud (*Pesachim* 115b) quotes Shmuel who teaches that matzah is called “*lechem oni*, bread of affliction” (Devarim 16:3), because it is bread upon which we are to answer many questions; *lechem she'onin alav devarim harbeh* (the root ענה in this verse connotes poverty, but it could also connote answering). However, a careful examination of the Haggadah indicates that while we ask many questions, we do not always give direct answers.

The Mishnah (*Pesachim* 116a) teaches that after the first cup of the night is utilized to recite Kiddush, a second cup is to be poured. Rashi (s.v. *Vekan Haben Shoel*) points out that it is most unusual to start a meal and then have a second cup of wine without having yet eaten any bread or matzah. This unusual behavior is meant to trigger questions from the children, who will ask the *Mah Nishtanah*; why is this night different? The Mishnah lists four topics that the child is to question. Why on this night are we only eating matzah and not having bread and matzah? Why are we only eating marror? Why are we only eating the roasted meat of the *korban Pesach*? Finally, why are we dipping vegetables twice during the meal? The Mishnah concludes with the fact that the father is to answer the child based on his intellectual abilities.

The answer is our Maggid. In the Maggid section, we read the statement of Rabban Gamliel:

Rabban Gamliel taught that anyone who does not explain these three items on Passover has not fulfilled his obligation: korban Pesach, matzah and marror.

Pesachim 116b

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

The seder leader answers three of the questions. When he explains that we eat matzah because Hashem took us out of Egypt in a rush, he answers the question of why do we eat matzah on this night and not chametz? When he explains that the marror is because the Egyptians embittered our lives with harsh labors, he is explaining why we eat marror and not other vegetables. When he explains that we are to eat a roasted lamb to commemorate Hashem passing over Jewish homes, he is answering the question, “why on this night is the meat roasted?”

But there is no explicit answer to the question, “why do we dip twice on this night?” Why have questions with no answers?

On an even more basic level, the entire night is called the seder. Seder means order. This night, each stage is in its spot, in its correct setting. Yet on this night we eat matzah and then we eat marror. Marror is eaten to remind us of the slavery and the bitterness we experienced. Matzah is eaten to remind us of the freedom. The quickly baked bread is a reminder of Hashem rushing us out of the land of Egypt. We were slaves and then we were freed. Shouldn't we first eat the marror, and remember the affliction, and only afterwards eat the matzah and remember salvation and freedom?

Rav Moshe Wolfson shlit”a¹ points out that at the end of the Haggadah, we have the Chad Gadya (one goat) song. According to many commentators, the goat is a symbol of the Jewish nation. In the song we declare that the one goat was purchased by [my] father for two *zuz*. This, many explain, refers to the two *luchos* (tablets) and reminds us of the revelation of Sinai. Through the Sinai experience, Hashem purchased us and we became His. If so, the cat who bites the goat is not a symbol of the positive features of the world. A nation that would harm God's nation is certainly bad. Many take the cat to refer to the Egyptians or the Babylonians, peoples who enslaved the Jews. The dog that bit the cat that bit the goat would be a force of goodness. Those who struggle with the enemies of the Jews are good. If this is so, the song ends with an impossibility. If the dog is good, then the stick that hits the dog is bad, then the fire that burns the stick is good, and the water that puts out the fire is bad, and the ox who drinks the water is good, the slaughterer bad, the angel of death is then ... good?! How could the angel of death be good? And the next stanza presents the Almighty as killing the angel of death, and in light of our reasoning, this would leave the Almighty with an untenable classification. Thus, at the very end of the seder, we are left with a question; why on this night of answers, do we leave with such difficult questions?

The deeper answer is that as people of faith we can live with questions. Faith is not that there are answers to all questions. Faith does not mean that we understand all that happens and why. Faith means that our soul is attached to the Almighty. Hashem is beyond all matters limited and physical. His existence is greater than our existence. As people of faith, we feel the truth of His existence. He does not need to explain Himself to us. We know that we are in His hands and He is taking care of us. He is beyond the grasp of our intellect. This is why on the seder night, some questions are left without answers. Once we have faith we do not need answers. We have faith, which contains all the answers.

Matzah is the bread of faith. When we eat matzah and remember Hashem taking care of us, we feel the security of faith that resolves all questions. Perhaps this is another layer of meaning to *lechem sheonin alav devarim harbeh*; the bread itself provides many answers, for it strengthens our feelings of *emunah* and *bitachon*.

Even during the darkest moments of our history, when we were faced with horrific challenges to our faith, our Torah leaders held on to faith and with faith felt that the questions were not a problem.

A vivid description of such an episode is found in the writings of Rav Tzvi Hirsch Meisels,² the Rabbi of Vac, Hungary, who found himself deported to Auschwitz in the Spring of 1944. Rav Meisels relates how his tallis was adorned with an atarah (ornament) which he received as a gift from his father-in-law³ that once belonged to the author of Yitav Lev.⁴ When the Nazis came to take him to Auschwitz, he wore the tallis with the atarah until it was taken away from him at Auschwitz. He managed to find

¹ *Emunas Itecha*, Volume 3, pages 17-18.

² The entire story appears in Rav Meisel's introduction to *Mekadshei Hashem* pages 17-19. The introduction was translated to English in *The Forgotten Memoires* by E. Farbstein pages 281-285.

³ Rabbi Chaim Yaakov Teitelbaum.

⁴ Rabbi Yekusiel Yehudah Teitelbaum, 5568-5646, 1808-1883, was a great *tzadik* and Chassidic Rebbe in Sighet, Romania. He authored the work *Yitav Lev*. He was a grandson of the author of the book *Yismach Moshe*, and the grandfather of the Satmar Rebbe, Rav Yoel Teitelbaum o.b.m.

where the stolen possessions were stored and retrieved his tallis, but knowing that he would not be able to wear the tallis as is, he cut it so that he could wear it under his clothing without the Nazis knowing.

One day, Rav Meisels was leaving the bathroom when a guard decided to inspect him and discovered the garment. When the guard asked Rav Meisels what the garment was, he answered that it was a "Godly garment." The guard started to beat him mercilessly and said: How can you mention God when your people including your own family members are being killed? The guard then said that if Rav Meisels didn't give a good answer, he would be killed. Rav Meisels answered him with the following parable:

What is this similar to? To a world famous surgeon known for a particular operation to treat a dangerous illness. He was called to perform this operation on a distinguished individual and in order to perform the operation, he began to make a large incision in the body as well as some other smaller incisions as were necessary. Imagine that there is a shoemaker watching from the side who doesn't know anything about the illness and how it is treated. He will begin to wonder why the surgeon is torturing this poor patient for no reason at all. Is the patient not suffering enough from his illness that he should be subjected to much greater pain? Why is he cutting his body to pieces? When I fix shoes, I would never cut the leather in a place that looks nice! Would we expect the surgeon to stop his surgery because the shoemaker, who doesn't understand what the surgeon is doing? The fact that others don't understand what he is doing is not a reason to prevent him from finishing what he sees as necessary.

The same applies to the actions of the Creator. The truth is that we don't understand or comprehend all of His actions and why He makes a cut at the finest part from within the Jewish people. Nevertheless, we should know that the fact that, we, who have limited minds, people of flesh and blood, cannot comprehend or understand His ways, doesn't minimize, Heaven forbid, His greatness.

Mekadshei Hashem pg. 19

למה הדבר דומה לפראפעסער גדול המפורסם בכל העולם שהוא איש מוצלח לעשות נתוח על גוף חולה ומסוכן, ופעם נקרא לשר גדול לעשות לו נתוח כזה, וכדי לבצע את הנתוח התחיל לחתוך חתך עמוק ורחב בתוך גופו של החולה וגם חתך בתוך גופו חתיכות שונות כפי מה שראה לנחוץ. לדוגמא אם אומן מנעל מסתכל מן הצד במעשי הפראפעסער ואינו מבין שום דבר על דבר המחלה ודרך רפואתה, ישתומם ויחשוב בלבו, ראה נא כיצד הוא מענה ומייסר את החולה האומלל הזה ללא תכלית וסיבה, לא די לו במחלתו הנוכחית שהוא בא ומוסיף לו עוד יסורים נוראים גדולים כאלו בחתכו את גופו הנאה באמצע הגוף לחתיכות, הלא אם אני מתקן מנעלים לא אחתוך העור במקום היותר נאה ומשובח, וכי ס"ד שהפראפעסער לא יגמר מה שנחוץ לו לעשות מכח אומן הזה שאינו מבין ומשיג מה הוא עושה. דע"י זה שאין אחר מבין ומשיג מה הוא עושה לא יפסיק הוא מלגמור מה שרואה נחיצות לעשות. כך הענין עם הנהגות הבורא יתברך שמו, האמת כך הוא שאנחנו אין משיגים ואין מבינים כל הנהגתו, ולמה עושה החתיכה במקום היותר נאה בתוך כלל ישראל, עכ"ז עלינו לדעת, שבזה, שקצרי דעת כמונו, אנשי בשר ודם, אין משיגים ומבינים הנהגתו יתב"ש, עי"ז אינו מתקטן ח"ו אצלינו.
מקדשי השם עמ' יט

The guard was impressed with Rav Meisels' answer and not only allowed Rav Meisels to live but told him that Rav Meisels should visit the guard's block whenever he needed some extra food.

Seder night is the night of questions, it is the night of eating matzah and reliving the Exodus and feeling faith, it is thus the night when we do not need an answer to why we dip twice, eat matzah before marror, or seemingly have the angel of death positioned in a place of goodness. With faith, we have trust in Hashem, and that is enough.