

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

THE BENJAMIN AND ROSE BERGER
TORAH TO-GO[®]

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Dedicated in memory of
Cantor Jerome L. Simons

Featuring Divrei Torah from

Rabbi Kenneth Brander • Rabbi Assaf Bednarsh

Rabbi Josh Blass • Rabbi Reuven Brand

Rabbi Daniel Z. Feldman

Rabbi Lawrence Hajioff • Rona Novick, PhD

Rabbi Uri Orlian • Rabbi Ari Sytner

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Insights on Yom Haatzmaut from

Rabbi Naphtali Lavenda

Rebbetzin Meira Davis

Rabbi Kenny Schiowitz



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For nearly a decade, the **Benjamin and Rose Berger Torah To-Go®** series has provided communities throughout North America and Israel with the highest quality Torah articles on topics relevant to Jewish holidays throughout the year. We are pleased to present a dramatic change in both layout and content that will further widen the appeal of the publication. You will notice that we have moved to a more magazine-like format that is both easier to read and more graphically engaging. In addition, you will discover that the articles project a greater range in both scholarly and popular interest, providing the highest level of Torah content, with inspiration and eloquence. We would like to acknowledge the continued dedication and efforts of Rabbi Rob Shur and Rabbi Josh Flug in progressing this publication to the highest levels of excellence. In addition, we thank Rabbi Hyman and Ann Arbesfeld for their continued vision in supporting Torah initiatives at Yeshiva University that are truly transformative for our entire community.

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Introduction

While the Pesach Seder as a whole focuses on the notion of redemption, the Haggada divides into two thematic parts.

The first is the pre-meal section of the Haggada. In it, we tell the story of Israel's slavery and eventual redemption from Egypt. We express the story both verbally, by reading and discussing text and narrative, and experientially, by consuming symbolic foodstuff—matza, wine, maror and charoset. These activities simultaneously emphasize the hardship and transformation that we underwent in our emergence from Egypt as a nation moving towards its promising destiny.

The true purpose of Pesach is to remove the chametz found in our heart and soul; the obstacles, the barriers, the stagnation that hinders our engagement with a purposeful lifestyle.

There is a second—critical—section of the Haggada that is often ignored: the portion of the Haggada recited



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after the meal. This section represents the second theme of Pesach night. It focuses not on the past salvation, but on the future redemption of our people and of society.

The post-meal section of the Haggada begins as we pour a cup of wine reserved for Eliyahu—the figure who is to usher Mashiach into our world. We open the door to welcome Eliyahu and recite *Shefokh Chamatkha*, in which we call on Hashem to destroy evil nations that have persecuted the Jewish people throughout the diaspora experience.

In the pre-meal Maggid section of the Haggada, we only recite the first two chapters of Hallel. This is because these psalms focus on the Egyptian saga. The third and the remaining chapters of Hallel are recited in the post-meal section of the Haggada as these psalms focus on the Messianic era (see *Pesachim* 118a). Following these, we read poems and prayers that, through allegory and symbolism, focus on the future—an era of peace and prosperity for our people and society at large.

The Kabbalists remind us that the true purpose of Pesach is to remove the chametz found in our heart and soul; the obstacles, the barriers, the stagnation that hinders

our engagement with a purposeful lifestyle. The Seder begins with reflections of the past as a means to inspire us to help shape a vision for a future enabling redemption to become a reality. And it ends with foresights of that redeemed future, giving us a glimpse of what we strive for in our lives.

We hope that the learning found in this edition of *Benjamin and Rose Berger Torah To-Go* gives us pause as individuals, families, and communities finding new ways to realize the dream: “Next Year in a completely safe and rebuilt Yerushalayim.”



The Message of Maggid

We might suppose that the text of Maggid, the section of the Haggadah in which we fulfill the mitzvah of telling the story of *yetzias Mitzrayim*, would focus on the elucidation of that narrative. When we take a closer look at the actual text of the Haggadah, though, we find a surprising phenomenon. Directly following a one-sentence answer to the Mah Nishtanah, we find ourselves meandering through ten paragraphs of various halachic discussions before we finally reach the story of the Exodus.

First, we learn who has to perform the mitzvah of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim* (even great sages) and how long we have to spend on it (the longer the better), and in order to prove this, we read the story of five sages who spent all night discussing the Exodus. Then we learn whether the obligation extends to every night of the year (it does), and how to properly fulfill this mitzvah (in four different ways for different types of children). We end by pinpointing exactly when we are commanded to perform this mitzvah (not on Rosh Chodesh, not on the afternoon of Erev Pesach, but on the Seder night). This halacha shiur, replete with explorations of the different halachic opinions and the sources for each conclusion, is interrupted only by the paragraph, *Baruch HaMakom baruch Hu*, in which we praise Hashem for giving us the Torah, and make no mention of *yetzias Mitzrayim*. We may well wonder: why do we spend so much time teaching our children halachos, some of which do not even pertain to



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the Seder night, instead of relating the story of the Exodus?

Upon reflection, it seems that this is exactly the deeper message that the Haggadah is trying to convey. Don't rush into the actual mitzvah of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim*, the Haggadah tells us, until you have learned all the halachos that pertain to it. If we look carefully, we see this message explicit in the answer to the wise son — *af atah emor lo k'hilchos Pesach*; we teach the learned son the laws of Pesach and not only the story of the Exodus. And while the five sages mentioned in the Haggadah spent all night engrossed in the story of the Exodus, the Tosefta (Pesachim 10:11-12) tells us that Rabban Gamliel and his colleagues stayed up the entire Seder night learning Hilchos Pesach, and uses this story to prove that "*chayav adam la'asok b'hilchos Pesach kol halailah* — one is obligated to analyze the halachos of Pesach throughout the Seder night." This is not just an insight, then, but an actual halacha — the mitzvah of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim* demands that we learn not only the story, but the halachos of telling the story as well. But now the question becomes even sharper. Why should this be so? Why should the minutiae of halacha be considered a part of the story of the Exodus?

Perhaps we can suggest an explanation based on an understanding of the purpose of *yetzias Mitzrayim*. We may have noticed that in Sefer Shemos, Moshe Rabbenu asks Paroh time and again to let the Jews go, but he never actually asks him to set them free from slavery. Rather, he requests over and over that Paroh allow them to worship Hashem in the Sinai desert. Why didn't Moshe just tell Paroh the truth, that the Jews wanted freedom? Many answers have been suggested to this question,¹ but perhaps the simplest answer is that he *did* tell Paroh the truth. Hashem's reason for redeeming us from Egypt was not so that we could be free, but so that we could be free to accept the Torah at Har Sinai and serve Hashem. The language of the commandment of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim* is:

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

*You shall tell your son on that day, and say: because of **this**, Hashem performed the Exodus for me when I left Egypt.*

Shemos 13:8

Rashi asks the obvious question: because of *what* did Hashem redeem us? His answer is based on the interpretation found in the halachic section of Maggid "*b'sha'ah sheyesh*

matzah umaror munachim lefanecha,” *sippur Yetzias Mitzrayim* can only be fulfilled when the matzah and maror are lying on the table. It is because of the matzah and maror lying on the table, because of the mitzvos that we do, that Hashem knew we would accept on Har Sinai and would perform loyally to this very day, that He took us out of Egypt.² Perhaps this is why this verse was chosen as the answer to the wicked son, who wants freedom devoid of obligation, freedom without Torah and mitzvos. We tell him *ba’avur zeh*, because of this — the reason Hashem miraculously changed the course of history and redeemed us from slavery was not to give us more leisure time, but to grant us the opportunity to become deeper and nobler people, to grow spiritually and connect with the Divine, to realize our full potential as human beings by serving Hashem and performing His mitzvos.

This explains the position of Rav who argued with Shmuel in *Pesachim* (116a) about the proper interpretation of the requirement of *maschil b’gnus umesayem b’shevach* – to begin with a depiction of the lowly state of the Jewish people initially and conclude by describing their exalted status after the Exodus. What type of contrast must we emphasize? Shmuel explained “*Avadim hayinu*,” that we were slaves and then freed, but Rav preferred “*Mitechilah ovdei avodah zarah hayu avoseinu*,” that we were originally idolaters and then taught to worship Hashem. Shmuel focused on the physical story of the redemption, while Rav focused on the purpose for which we were taken out of slavery; which is our spiritual redemption and ennoblement. Our Haggadah incorporates both opinions. We fulfill the commandment of “*vehigadeta*

l’vincha, you shall tell your son on that day, and say: Hashem performed the Exodus for me,” by telling the story of our redemption from physical slavery, and we fulfill the crucial element of “*ba’avur zeh*, because of this,” by telling our children that the purpose of the Exodus was not to attain physical comfort and economic success, but rather to accept the Torah and strive for spiritual perfection.

This insight also explains the seemingly irrelevant passage beginning *Baruch HaMakom baruch Hu*. Before the description of the four sons, we abandon the topic of Pesach entirely and praise Hashem for giving us the Torah, in language reminiscent of our daily *Birkat HaTorah* – “*Baruch shenasan Torah l’amo Yisrael*, Blessed is He who gave the Torah to His nation Israel.” It might seem peculiar to stop and say *Birkat HaTorah* in the middle of the Haggadah, but if we understand that we cannot fulfill the mitzvah of Maggid properly without recognizing the purpose of the Exodus, which is receiving the Torah, then it becomes clear that appreciating the value of the Torah is an essential element of understanding *yetziat Mitzrayim*.

We can now appreciate the profundity underlying the structure of the Haggadah. If we immediately began the Maggid by telling our children the story of the Exodus, we would miss the point of the story. Rather, we first tell them that we’re doing a mitzvah tonight, and that we are fulfilling this mitzvah in the detailed fashion prescribed by the halacha. Instead of merely telling our children that the best use of our freedom is to serve Hashem, we guide them through the experience of halachic living, and share with them the process by which a Torah Jew fulfills the mitzvos in the exacting and precise fashion that befits

one who is commanded. By framing the narrative of the Exodus in the context of Hilchos Pesach, we ingrain the message that the only appropriate context for freedom is the striving to fulfill the will of Hashem.

Perhaps this also explains why we call the Pesach experience a “Seder,” meaning order or structure, and we are careful to announce at each turn that we are following the structure, “*kadesh*,” then “*urchatz*,” all the way to “*nirtzah*.” Freedom is misused if it is seen as an absence of responsibility. It becomes an excuse for laziness and the shallow pursuit of ephemeral gratification, devoid of meaning or purpose. The Hagaddah teaches us to view freedom as an opportunity to take responsibility, to seek out the purpose of our existence and strive to live up to it. We are commanded to impose structure on our freedom in order to harness it towards the pursuit of higher goals instead of descent into anarchy and nihilism. What better way to begin teaching this crucial lesson than to hold a “Seder,” a halachically structured celebration, finely calibrated to further the sublime agenda of growing spiritually and infusing our lives with meaning. The “Seder” of Pesach transforms freedom from emancipation into redemption, from emptiness into fulfillment, and from chaos into glorious opportunity.

Notes

1. See Ibn Ezra to 11:4, Rabbenu Bahye to 3:18, and *Akedat Yitzchak* ch. 35.
2. See also Ibn Ezra who expands on this theme, *Chizkuni* who interprets similarly but with a subtle distinction, and Rashbam, Ramban, and R. Yonah Ibn Janach (quoted by Ibn Ezra) who interpret this verse in a completely different fashion.

Freedom Revisited

The central motif of Pesach is that of both remembering and experiencing *cheirus*, freedom. While every chag has the element in some measure of recreating and reenacting the events of the past, the necessity of firsthand experience is especially vivid in our retelling of the Pesach narrative (*Emek Beracha, Inyanei Haggadah*). This experience of freedom doesn't stop at the door of a general national feeling but demands to be experienced by each and every individual as conveyed in the paragraph that serves as the apex of the Seder:

בכל דור ודור חייב אדם לראות את עצמו
כאילו הוא יצא ממצרים.

In every generation, each person is obligated to view himself as if he went out from Egypt.

The immediacy of the experience is amplified by the language in the Rambam's version of the Haggadah: *k'ilu hu ata yatzah MiMitzrayim*, as though he was released *now* from the shackles of slavery (Rambam, *Chametz U'Matzah* 7:6).

In a literal sense, the obligation is to both deeply feel the sense of *shibud ligeulah*, slavery to freedom, that was experienced by our forefathers and to find avenues to recreate and embody those emotions. Yet there would seem to be an even further imperative. Namely, the time of Pesach reminds us to contemplate the nature of true freedom and encourages us to contemplate all of the ways in which we find ourselves trapped between servitude and redemption. We explore in which ways are we truly



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b'nei chorin, free people and in which ways we are still shackled to masters, some perhaps invisible, whose hold on us is no less palpable than the one that the Egyptians exerted over our forefathers. This point is underscored by many of the *ba'alei machshava* (Jewish thinkers) who differentiate between the words *chofesh* and *cheirus* — the former being free from a physical servitude (Shemos 21:2) and the latter relating either to a state of mind or to the idea of *cheirus l'*, freedom that leads to a more elevated and noble state. As many of the *meforshim* note (see *Sefer HaChinuch* no. 306), Exodus with its resulting freedoms is meaningful only in the context of acceptance of the Torah. Indeed the narrative of the desert with all of its dramatic highs and lows is really about a nation who were *chofshi* but who hadn't really become *bnei chorin* in the deeper psychological sense.¹ Pesach is the most propitious time to scrutinize our own life and to ask ourselves to just what degree we are free? To what degree can we say with confidence that we have emerged from slavery and are not full *bnei chorin*?

While there are many avenues which relate to this dynamic, let me suggest five areas to give thought to.

1. Freedom from Addiction

The Ibn Ezra (BaMidbar 6:7) posits that the root of the word *nazir* comes from the word *nezer*, crown. While there is an open question about whether the path chosen by the *nazir* is the ideal one, the *nazir* in a sense wears his *nezirus* like a crown with the accompanying regal feeling of a king who has risen above the all-consuming needs of the body. In a way, the *nazir* is the paradigm of the man who has exerted control over himself and his needs and has allowed for the emergence of complete *bechira chofshis*, free will. The necessity of this complete unassailable *bechira* is emphasized by the Rambam (*Teshuva* 5:1) and lies at the heart of why we bore a hole through the ear of the Jewish slave who chooses to continue his servitude (*Kiddushin* 22b). How can a person, who is supposed to be completely free — subservient only to G-d's word — willingly give up that freedom? Sadly, modern man lives with the constant challenge of this lack of absolute freedom. Internet addiction, substance addiction, and the incessant, almost addictive need to check one's smart phone are challenges that affects almost every family to some degree. In my position in the Yeshiva, a week doesn't go by in which a young man doesn't speak to

me about his challenges in functioning due to the fact that he spends six or seven hours a night watching Netflix. While the above is only anecdotal, it reflects a reality that no yeshiva, institution or family is untouched by. While our freedom of movement and communication has never been more advanced, the complete freedom of choice as described by the Rambam poses an enormous challenge for many in our communities.

2. Freedom of Perspective

The Gemara, *Pesachim* 115b, provides two different explanations as to why matzah is called *lechem oni*. According to one opinion it refers to *aniyus* — remembering our days of poverty and servitude, and according to a second opinion it refers to the redemption — *lechem she'onim alav devarim harbeh*, bread that is used for responding to a lot of ideas. The *meforshim* are puzzled as to why the same object is utilized for two opposite emotions — surely the Torah could have thought of a different expression for either servitude or freedom?

Perhaps the point is that we are given a choice as to which perspective we want to adapt in thinking about our national narrative. We could choose to focus on the poverty, the backbreaking labor and the humiliation or we could choose to sing a *shira chadasha*, a new song, about what was the ultimate conclusion of those dark chapters.

This might be the answer to the question posed by many rishonim as

to why the first mitzvah given after the Exodus is that of *kiddush hachodesh*, sanctification of the new moon.

The *ba'alei machshava* highlight the exceptional nature of this mitzvah in that *kiddush hachodesh* reflects man's ability to sanctify the moon, which in turn determines when bread becomes chametz, determines which day one is subject to *kares* for not fasting (on Yom Kippur) and a whole host of other critical halachos. According to the *Kedushas Levi*, the verse (Shemos 12:2) *rishon hu lachem*, it is a first for you, is essentially saying that Hashem, the “Rishon,” is given over to Bnei Yisroel through their ability to sanctify the moon. What a transformative mitzvah to begin the Jews' sojourn through the desert! Bnei Yisroel had the choice to view themselves as slaves still dealing with the reverberations of hundreds of years of slavery, or they could view themselves as regal *bnei melachim*, princes, as an *am segulah*, a treasured nation. Beginning the journey with the mitzvah of *kiddush hachodesh*, and all that it implies about the grandeur of man and specifically Am Yisroel as a *mamleches kohanim*, allowed Bnei Yisroel to frame their experiences in a psychologically healthy and productive fashion. We are given a choice how to view *yetzias Mitzraim* specifically, and Jewish history in its entirety, through the prism of the downtrodden “*aniyus*” or through the perspective of *geulah*.

In a real sense many are enslaved by the narrative of their lives — how one looks back on a difficult childhood, how one deals with suffering, with

setbacks — and they frame their lives through the prism of fatalistic negativity. To some degree there is a certain spirit of *cheirus* that comes with choosing to write a positive narrative of one's life. To genuinely feel that I have the ability to transform every incident that has ever befallen me, or will befall me, into opportunities for real growth and meaning. That is also a freedom of sorts.

3. Freedom from Feelings of Hopelessness

The *Beis HaLevi* (*Derasha* no. 2) and others discuss the fact that Bnei Yisroel had fallen to the 49th level of *tumah* (impurity) and as a result, the Exodus had to have happened immediately (see the beginning of the Rambam's Haggadah — *b'vehilu yazatzanu MiMitzrayim*, we left Egypt in a hurry). The Maharal in the beginning of *Netzach Yisroel* deals with the implicit question of why there was a necessity for Bnei Yisroel to have experienced the depths of exile before tasting redemption. The Maharal answers that by definition, *geulah* can only be fully realized (and appreciated) if it's an outgrowth of *galus*, exile. A full state of personal and national wholeness is only experienced if it comes on the heels of darker moments.

This concept of the Maharal is so significant for one who finds himself trapped by his own limitations and humanity and a feeling that true change is beyond their grasp.

We could choose to focus on the poverty, the backbreaking labor and the humiliation or we could choose to sing a *shira chadasha*, a new song, about what was the ultimate conclusion of those dark chapters.

We always believe that there are brighter tomorrows and that change is always possible. Talmudic and Midrashic literature is full of statements of one who acquires the next world in a single moment or the effectiveness of sincere *teshuva*, even in the last moment of a person's life. The matzah that represents both poverty and redemption is a symbol that we are always finding ourselves on a certain continuum and that one stage, even a suffocatingly dark stage, does not have to represent a final chapter. There is a freedom in understanding that our personal journeys reflect a circuitous path and that change/*teshuva*/transformation are all possible over the course of a lifetime. We never have to feel that we are unable to move beyond our own perceived limitations.

4. Freedom from Other Perceptions and Expectations of Ourselves

There is a beautiful comment of the Vilna Gaon (*Biur HaGra* to Mishlei 16:24) who makes a very profound observation. The Gemara in *Niddah* 30b, teaches that Man is taught in his mother's womb the amount of Torah that he specifically is capable of learning in his lifetime. Man's purpose, argues the Vilna Gaon, is to simply learn and accomplish that which is expected of him, based on his own abilities, skills and talents.² This point of knowing oneself and judging oneself based on no criteria other than an internal barometer is the major point of emphasis of many of the *ba'alei mussar* (see *Alei Shur* 1:36-38, 157-165). This is a trait best defined as *anochiyus*, loosely defined as individuality. The Gemara in *Berachos* 17a, famously records the statement of Rav Alexandri who said that Man is unable to fulfill the will of G-d due to the *s'or sheb'iasah*, the yeast in the dough. Rashi understands this statement that the yeast is a reference to the evil inclination and to haughtiness. Rav Kook in *Olas Ra'ayah* (pp. 244-245) understood the Gemara differently. Rav Kook felt that the yeast refers to anything external to ourselves; anything that is not genuine to our true nature that has the ability to corrupt and change us. The *avodah* (service) of Pesach, said Rav Kook, is *biur chametz*, eliminating all of the external factors in our life that are not true to ourselves and that are just reflections of lives that are not our own. Only then can a person taste *cheirus*.

Sadly many people have no real sense of *anochiyus*. They have no real sense of who they are, what Hashem



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expects of them and what are their unique abilities and potential contributions. One's life and sense of self are often shaped by a myriad of external factors that have nothing to do with genuine personal growth and more to do with the general expectations and standards of the world at large. *Cheirus* begins with this elusive search for *anochiyus*.

5. Freedom through Torah and through Meaning

The Mishna in *Avos* 6:3 states:

אין לך בן חורין אלא מי שעוסק בתלמוד תורה.

The only free man is one who engages in Talmud Torah.

Many interpretations are offered including that of Rav Hirsch and the *Tiferes Yisroel* who stress that spiritual ambition, as symbolized by Talmud Torah, frees a person from the necessity of becoming one with the culture of the street and brings one to a somewhat more exalted state of being. While Rav Hirsch is undoubtedly correct in his assertion,

The connection with spiritually ambitious pursuits, be it Talmud Torah or the building of Mishkan, frames our freedom in such a way that elevates rather than diminishes the individual.

I believe that the point is broader. The Gemara both in *Kiddushin* 30b, and *Sukkah* 52b, describe the necessity of one who is under the “thumb” of the evil inclination to drag the *yetzer hara* to the *beis medrash* (study hall). Additionally, the Ramban (introduction to Shmos) in commenting on the fact that Sefer Shmos is referred to as *Sefer HaGeula* (the book of redemption) said that the redemption from Mitzrayim was not complete until the Mishkan was built. The idea of all of these sources and many others seems to be one and the same, namely that the connection with spiritually ambitious pursuits, be it Talmud Torah or the building of Mishkan, frames our freedom in such a way that elevates rather than diminishes the individual. A person who is connected to Torah and *talmidei chachamim* (Torah scholars), a person whose life feels imbued with genuine meaning and a sense of *hashra'as HaShechinah* (Divine presence) as reflected by the Mishkan, is simply a different person with a different outlook and a different set of priorities. His ambitions, values, decisions and yearnings all reflect the spiritual center that resides in one's core.

I remember hearing a story in which Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky was asked for advice about how to navigate the tricky landscape of dealing with *mechutanim* who might have drastically different expectations about the upcoming wedding. Rav Yaakov answered with a smile on his face that he had only one policy — namely to never get upset about anything that truly doesn't matter. Focus only on the happiness of the *chassan* and *kallah* said Rav Yaakov, focus only on that which is fundamental and don't allow your

life to become derailed by smallness. I always thought that this story was a beautiful reflection of the aforementioned Mishna — freedom in its truest sense of the word is only fully possible in the context of a Torah life that is able to meaningfully cultivate and shape values and priorities.

Let me conclude with an idea from the *Chidushei HaRim*. He comments on the first of the four languages of *geulah*, “*v'hotzeisi eschem mitachas sivlos Mitzrayim*, I will take you out from under the oppression (*sivlos*) of Egypt (Shemos 6:6). The word *sivlos* is used because Hashem will redeem those who can be *sovel*, tolerate the Egyptians. He will free those who may not even realize that they are enslaved. According to the *Chidushei HaRim*, that is the first step of freedom — recognizing that one is not completely free. Once we have that full recognition, we can set a course for ourselves, sometimes only internally driven and at times with the help of others, to seek a meaningful path of traversing the landscape between slavery and redemption.

This should be a true *zman cheiruseinu* for us and for all of Klal Yisroel. We should merit to not only relive the time in our past in which the powerful hand of Hashem was revealed, but also continue to experience and work towards genuine and deeply realized freedom in our own lives.

Notes

1. Ibn Ezra, Shemos 14:13, Ramban BaMidbar 11:1. See as well, the works of Viktor Frankl and Erich Fromm who deal with these issues at length.
2. See the *Ohr Sameach* at the beginning of *Hilchos Talmud Torah* for an important point that dovetails with the Vilna Gaon.

The Marshmallow Test

A Model for Success

Without a Beit Hamikdash for nearly two millennia, most Jews find it difficult today to relate to the concept of Temple service, the world of *kodashim* (realm of Temple sanctity) and *korbanot* (sacrifices). Even in the world of Torah study, Temple service is in a separate category. When one opens a volume of the classic Vilna edition of the Talmud, one finds the Gemara accompanied by its classic commentaries including Rashi, Tosafot and Rif. However, in the tractates of *Kodashim*, the Rif and accompanying super-commentaries are absent, since the Rif's work is meant to be a practical summary of the Talmud, and *Kodashim* does not have a practical application today.

However, there is one time each year that the world of *kodashim* takes center stage in our Jewish lives: the night of the Pesach Seder. Even today, when the actual offering is not present, the mitzvot of the Seder and its structure and practices all revolve around a korban — the korban Pesach. Many customs of Seder night are meant to remind us of life in the Beit Hamikdash generally, including wearing a *kittel*, washing before dipping, and how we treat the meat we will eat at the Seder dinner.¹ A question arises in this context: what can we learn from the world of *kodashim* generally, and the



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korban Pesach specifically, that can help inform and inspire our service of Hashem on Pesach and during the rest of the year in the absence of a Beit Hamikdash?

To begin thinking about this question, perhaps we should consider another fascinating juxtaposition: Pesach and *Chag HaMatzot*. When looking closely at the verses in Shemot chapter 12 and Vayikra chapter 23, we learn that there are actually two distinct holidays that overlap in Nissan. The first is Pesach, which occurs on the 14th of Nissan and concludes before the morning of the 15th of Nissan. The second is *Chag HaMatzot*, which begins on the eve of the 15th of Nissan and continues for seven days. These holidays have separate mitzvot as their central motif. Pesach is focused on the slaughtering and eating of the korban Pesach; *Chag HaMatzot* is focused on a weeklong holiday, much like Sukkot, and the requirements of eating matzah and prohibiting chametz. The two holidays overlap on the night of the Seder, fusing the concepts of the korban Pesach and matzah. We can wonder: why must these mitzvot

be blended together? Why are the mitzvot intertwined so that one may not slaughter the korban Pesach with chametz in one's property? Why must the Pesach be eaten with matzah? What is the meaning of the relationship between the holiday of the korban Pesach and the holiday of matzah and chametz?

Additionally, we may wonder about the placement of *korbanot* in our national development. Nissan is the time of the birth of the Jewish people. Although we observe Rosh Hashana in the Hebrew month of Tishrei, the lunar calendar and the schedule of our holidays begins in Nissan (as the Gemara in *Rosh Hashana* 4b explains). The Torah informs us that Nissan is the first month of the year: *Hachodesh hazeh lachem rosh chodashim* (Shemot 12:2). We are a people symbolized by the moon; hence, we are born as a nation during Nissan. In this light, the Midrash describes *yetziat Mitzrayim* as a birthing process:

ויושע ה' ביום ההוא את ישראל מיד מצרים ... כאדם שהוא שומט את העובר ממעי הפרה. מכילתא דרבי ישמעאל בשלה - מסכתא דויהי פרשה ו

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And God saved the Jewish people on that day from the hands of Egypt... Like a person that removes a fetus from the womb of a cow.

Mechilta, Beshalach, Masechta Vayehi no. 6

Just as when a child enters the world, its future is shaped largely by its experiences during its formative years, our nation was influenced at its inception, shaped by its first mitzvah, the korban Pesach.² It is fascinating that Hashem chose a korban as the first charge for the Jewish people as they became a nation and that the transition from slavery to peoplehood occurred in the context of *kodashim*.

In essence, every Jewish home in Egypt became a miniature *mikdash*, with the placement of blood on the doorpost instead of the altar and the eating of a sacrifice in its confines. Why is the world of *kodashim* the first one we enter as we begin our covenantal journey with Hashem?

Discipline

The answer to these many questions can be found in one word that is essential to *kodashim* and definitional to Judaism: discipline. It is difficult to capture the scope and detail of the regulations and minutiae that govern the world of *kodashim*; to say it is exacting is an understatement. Every aspect of a korban must be fulfilled with complete precision, from the specifications of the offering and the manner in which the offering is

consecrated to how it is treated and even where its owner stands in the Beit HaMikdash. The kohanim, similarly, have an extremely regimented set of guidelines and procedures for each offering that governs their every movement and even their mindset. The Rambam teaches:

שלוש מחשבות הן שפוסלין את הקרבנות. ואלו הן. מחשבת שינוי השם. ומחשבת המקום. ומחשבת הזמן. מחשבת שינוי השם כיצד. זה השוחט את הזבח שלא לשמו: כגון שהיה עולה ויחשב שהוא שלמים ... מחשבת המקום כיצד. כגון ששחט את הזבח לשמו על מנת לזרוק דמו. או להקטיר ממנו דבר הראוי להקטרה חוץ לעזרה ... מחשבת הזמן כיצד. כגון ששחט את הזבח לשמו על מנת לזרוק דמו מאחר שתשקע החמה שאינו זמן זריקתו. רמב"ם, הלכות פסולי מוקדשין יג:א

There are three types of thought that invalidate sacrifices and they are: thoughts relating to a change in designation, thoughts relating to a change in place and thoughts relating to a change in time. What is an example of thoughts relating to a change in designation? One who slaughters an animal for the wrong purpose, such as one who slaughters an olah thinking that it is a shelamim. ... What is an example of thoughts relating to change in place? Such as one who slaughters the sacrifice with the correct designation but with intent to sprinkle the blood or sacrifice a part that is worthy of sacrifice outside of the Azarah ... What is an example of thoughts relating to a change in time? Such as one who slaughters an animal with the correct designation for the purpose of sprinkling

the blood after sundown, which is no longer the time the sprinkle blood.

Rambam, Hilchot Pesulei HaMukdashin 13:1

Even an errant intent can ruin an otherwise perfectly good sacrifice. This emphasis on discipline and obedience is rooted in the Torah's description of the construction of the first sanctuary — the Mishkan.³ According to the *Beit HaLevi (Ki Tisa)*, the Torah reiterates the phrase *ka'asher tziva Hashem* — as Hashem commanded — repeatedly in Parshat Pekudei for precisely this reason:

וכיון דעיקר חטאם בעגל היה מה שרצו להתחכם מעצמם לעשות ע"פ ידיעתם והכמתם מעשה אשר לא נצטוו עליו ולזה במעשה המשכן שבא לכפר נאמר על כל אשר עשו כאשר צוה ה' ... היה כל כוונתם רק כאשר צוה ה' ונתכוונו רק לעשות ציווי ורצונו יתברך לא משום שהשכל של עצמם מחייבת לעשות כן, וזהו שכיפר להם על חטא העגל.

Since the primary sin of the Golden Calf was that they wanted to be autonomous and act based on their own knowledge and wisdom and they performed an act that they were not commanded, when the Mishkan, which was to atone for their sin, was built, it says regarding everything that they did "as Hashem commanded." ... Their entire intent was only to do what Hashem commanded and they did so only because Hashem commanded them, not because their own thoughts led them to that conclusion, and this is what atoned for the sin of the Golden Calf.

While the realm of *kodashim* may be unique in its extreme emphasis on discipline, its character is symptomatic of Jewish life in general, which is defined by this central concept. Torah life expects us to abide by specific guidelines; the word mitzvah means commandment, not good deed. We are expected to

The halacha — the path along which we lead our lives — directs all aspects of a person's existence, much like a guard rail follows the highway.

discipline all aspects of life, even beyond those that are formally forbidden by the Torah. This is how Ramban (Vayikra 19:2) defines the mitzvah of *kedoshim tihiyu* — being holy:

והענין כי התורה הזהירה בעריות ובמאכלים האסורים והתירה הביאה איש באשתו ואכילת הבשר והיין, א"כ ימצא בעל התאווה מקום להיות שטוף בזמת אשתו או נשיו הרבות, ולהיות בסובאי יין בזוללי בשר למו, וידבר כרצונו בכל הנבלות, שלא הוזכר איסור זה בתורה, והנה יהיה נבל ברשות התורה. לפיכך בא הכתוב, אחרי שפרט האיסורים שאסר אותם לגמרי, וצוה בדבר כללי שנהיה פרושים מן המותרות.

The idea is that the Torah warns of sexual transgressions and forbidden foods, but the Torah also allows sexual relations between husband and wife and allows eating of meats and wines. Therefore, a lustful person will take advantage and have multiple wives or will be a savage when it comes to drinking wine and eating meat, speaking in a vulgar manner. He will do as he pleases because there is no prohibition in the Torah. However, he will be vile within the permissions of the Torah. Therefore, the Torah after enumerating the actual prohibitions presents as general rule that we should [even] refrain from permissible acts.

The halacha — the path along which we lead our lives — directs all aspects of a person's existence, much like a guard rail follows the highway. With its specific positive and restrictive mitzvot, the Halacha serves as a guide and governor for each individual in public and private settings. Each precept itself has specific parameters and requirements that fill the innumerable pages of Talmudic learning, commentaries, responsa and codes that endeavor to define them. Beyond the realm of action, Judaism requires that we discipline our minds and hearts. The Gemara, *Berachot* 12b, states that the prohibition against straying after one's heart (Bamidbar 15:39) refers to having thoughts and beliefs that are antithetical to Judaism, and the prohibition against straying after one's eyes refers to having thoughts of committing a sin. Judaism even calls upon us to discipline our emotions; the commandment not to covet others' possessions is one example.⁴ The disciplined life of the Jew, which requires self-control and sacrifice, is all encompassing and serves as a model of heroism, *eizeheu gibbor hakovesh et yitzro*, who is strong? One who conquers his inclination (*Avot* 4:1).⁵

This self control is the ultimate goal for which we strive. Hence, we can appreciate why Hashem chose *kodashim* to serve as the context for our initial, formative experience as



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a people: it is the paradigm for a life of discipline. Now we can understand why the korban Pesach was chosen as the first mitzvah, and we realize the significance of its many specifications. Those who participate in the korban Pesach must be disciplined in preparation by avoiding any contact with *tumah* that would disqualify them. They must consume the korban in a designated place and at a specific time within their specific group. Even the manner in which the meat is cooked and eaten is regulated in detail. Imagine looking back on such an achievement of fulfilling the korban Pesach with its fullest discipline and expressing the sentiment:

חסל סידור פסח כהלכתו ככל משפטו
וחוקתו.

The Seder is now concluded according to halacha, following all of its laws and statutes.

The connection between Pesach and the mitzvah of matzah is clear as well. Matzah and its corollary prohibition of chametz are both focused on regimen and discipline. As we know, matzah must be baked in a specific way in a fixed amount of time. Chametz is an acutely severe prohibition, as it carries the punishment of *karet*, and we are required to be exceedingly punctilious about it. Even the slightest trace of chametz can render a food prohibited on Pesach, unlike other non-kosher foods that are generally nullified in amounts less than 1:60. This prohibition of chametz is an added level of discipline, restricting a food that is otherwise kosher all year round. Tosafot (*Pesachim* 2a) notes that it is precisely because of this general familiarity that we must search for chametz before Pesach, lest we find it and inadvertently forget about the new stricture against eating it

during this special week. We clearly carry over the discipline and rigor of *kodashim* on the holiday of Pesach to the weeklong holiday of *Chag HaMatzot*.

A Modern Dilemma

All of this may give an onlooker, or even a seasoned and committed Jew pause: how should we view a life of such discipline? It sounds as though, as the Talmud teaches, we have simply substituted one servitude for another:

לשעבר הייתם עבדי פרעה מיכן והילך אתם
עבדי ה' .
ירושלמי פסחים ה

In the past, you were servants of Pharaoh and from now on, you are servants of Hashem.

Yerushalmi, Pesachim ch. 5

How are we to understand this statement? Are we supposed to be so focused on our spiritual other-worldly goals and the discipline necessary to achieving them that we completely reject our current physical existence? How can a lifestyle that is so rigid, inspire a generation of Jews living in a culture that celebrates autonomy as a primary value?⁶

The Torah and our sages have answered these questions in a way that has become increasingly compelling in recent years: Hashem wants us to succeed in this world and discipline is, in fact, a key to accomplishing this goal. While we know that this world is merely an antechamber to the next world (*Avot* 4:21), Hashem does want us to embrace our life in this world (*Midrash Aggadah, Ki Teitzei* no. 22).

The Torah's description of reward for our achievements in Parshat Bechukotai is given in material terms, which reminds us that Hashem wants

us to live fulfilled lives that include enjoyment and accomplishments in the eternal spiritual world and also in our this-worldly existence. This idea is carried to the extreme by a passage in the Talmud Yerushalmi:

רבי חזקיה ר' כהן בשם רב עתיד אדם ליתן
דין וחשבון על כל שראת עינו ולא אכל.
ירושלמי קידושין ד

R. Chizkiyah and R. Kohen said in the name of Rav: A person will have to give an accounting [in Heaven] for all that he saw and didn't eat.

Yerushalmi, Kiddushin ch. 4

While these physical benefits are not an end in and of themselves and are expected to be utilized in achieving our mission of bringing Godliness into our world, they point to a value in creating a meaningful life in this world.⁷ To this end, the Torah's disciplined way of life doesn't just enable us to achieve spiritual goals, it facilitates and enables us to create a more meaningful life in this world as well.

The Marshmallow Test

Our service of Hashem, unlike that of Paroh, which was meant to degrade and diminish the Jewish people, is actually a gift to us to raise us up and enable our achievement in this world. On the most basic level, a life of discipline refines and ennoble:

רב אמר לא נתנו המצות אלא לצרף בהן את
הבריות, וכי מה איכפת ליה להקב"ה למי
ששוהט מן הצואר, או מי ששוהט מן העורף.
בראשית רבה, פרשת לך לך פרשה מד

Rav said: The mitzvot were only given to refine people. Does it affect Hashem if someone slaughters from the front of the neck or the back of the neck?

Bereishit Rabbah, Lech Lecha no. 44

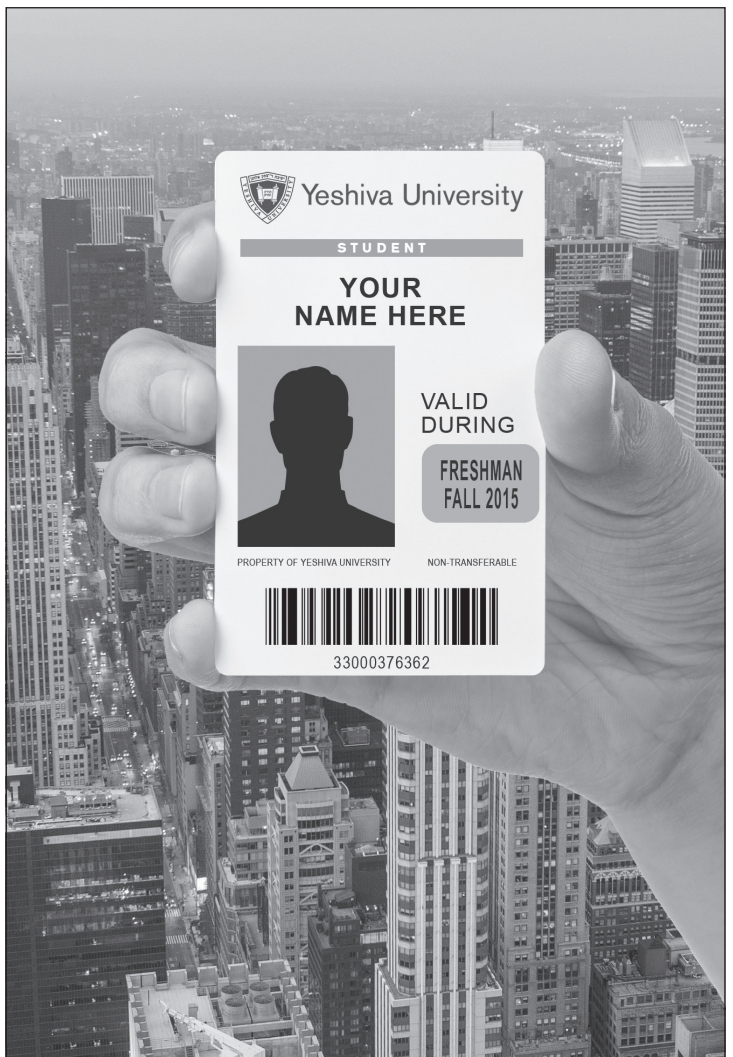
Yet there is a much more profound and far reaching impact of leading this

life of discipline and limits. It enables us to accomplish and succeed more than had we been left unfettered. By guiding us in a life of self-control, idealizing the *gibbor* who controls his impulses, we are opening doors to greater achievements in all areas of life, as our Torah tradition teaches *charut* of Torah enables true *cheirut*, freedom to accomplish (*Avot* 6:2).

This concept has become the focus of major psychological and social research. In a landmark study that has become a blueprint for continued expanded research, renowned psychologist Walter Mischel found that children who were able to demonstrate self control and delay self-gratification achieved greater success over their counterparts — even decades later — in all major aspects of life. They tested this ability of self discipline by placing a single marshmallow in front of a 5-year-old and offering the child the choice of eating it immediately or waiting several minutes, at which point the child would receive two marshmallows.⁸ This impact of discipline on an individual is magnified when it is in the context of an entire society, as the abstract of a recent paper presented at the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America outlines:

Policy-makers are considering large-scale programs aimed at self-control to improve citizens' health and wealth and reduce crime. Experimental and economic studies suggest such programs could reap benefits. Yet, is self-control important for the health, wealth, and public safety of the population? Following a cohort of 1,000 children from birth to the age of 32, we show that childhood self-control predicts physical health, substance dependence, personal finances, and criminal offending outcomes, following a gradient of self-control. Effects of children's self-control could be disentangled from their intelligence and social class as well as from mistakes they made as adolescents. In another cohort of 500 sibling-pairs, the sibling with lower self-control had poorer outcomes, despite shared family background. Interventions addressing self-control might reduce a panoply of societal costs, save taxpayers money, and promote prosperity.⁹

Hashem charged the Jewish people with the lofty goal of serving as a *mamlechet kohanim v'goy kadosh*, a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. We are each individually meant to serve as a kohen, with an impeccable, disciplined uniform code of conduct and to collectively create a nation that is holy, which the aforementioned Ramban said refers to discipline. Hence, while our lives may be distant from the actual Mikdash, the ability to



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live a life of *kedusha* is here and now, and it provides us with the freedom to achieve all of our goals both in this world and the next.¹⁰

Joy

We can identify one final imprint of a disciplined life: joy. Psychologists have noted that even adolescents, who often challenge boundaries and authority, crave a measure of discipline in their lives to provide meaning and satisfaction.¹¹ True joy is found in a sense of accomplishment, the satisfaction of sustained and focused effort that produces results. It is the *yegia kapecha*, the toil of your hands that brings about good (Tehillim 128:2). It is no wonder, then, why Judaism places such an emphasis in the service of Hashem on *simcha*, joy (Tehillim 100:2).

The Maggid of Mezritch would say: *The main thing is that you should always be happy. This is especially true when you are bound to God. Without joy, it is impossible to be attached constantly to God.*¹²

We can appreciate why, according to the Talmud (*Arachin* 11a), song is an integral and according to some opinions, indispensable part of the service in the Beit Hamikdash. It is precisely in the context of the discipline of *kodashim* that we feel and express the gladness of heart that is manifest in song. It is, therefore, in this place that we find the apex of a joyous Jewish experience: the Simchat Beit Hashoeva on Sukkot in the courtyard of the sanctuary:

מי שלא ראה שמחת בית השואבה לא ראה
שמחה מימיו.
טובה נא.

Whoever did not see the Simchat Beit Hashoeva, never saw true joy in his lifetime.
Sukkah 51a

The fullest experience of happiness is found in the Beit Hamikdash, with the celebration of the service of Hashem. A similar experience of service and song is also found on the holiday of Pesach, focused on the Mikdash. Both during the slaughtering of the korban Pesach in the Beit Hamikdash in the afternoon and again when families came together to eat the korban in the evening, the Jewish people sang the song of Hallel. This was the song of joy that accompanied the accomplishment of being devoted servants of Hashem. Today, each of us at our Seder re-enacts the rare experience of *kodashim* with our commemoration of the korban Pesach, and we experience a sense of joy. This happiness is not only because we accomplished and fulfilled the mitzvot of the Seder with all of their specifications. It is a profound, perhaps even subconscious feeling of happiness and contentment with having a life whose discipline and focus bring such richness and meaning. We express these feelings by singing Hallel — the same songs that our ancestors sang centuries ago when the Beit Hamikdash still stood.

Notes

1. This concept is developed by Rabbi Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin (Netziv) in his introduction to *Haggadah Imrei Shefer*.
2. The mitzvah of Pesach was the first commandment to the nation as a whole; the fulfillment of milah in Egypt was only performed as a preparatory step for the korban, as the Torah teaches, *kol arel lo yochal bo*, "an uncircumcised male may not eat the korban Pesach."
3. According to the Rambam (*Moreh Nevuchim* 3:32) the entire institution of sacrifices in the Mikdash was to discipline the Jewish people in their worship: to channel these offerings away from idols into the service of Hashem.
4. For a discussion of this mitzvah of *lo tachmod* and the issue of commandments

which relate to emotions, see "*Lo Tachmod*" in Nechama Leibowitz's *Studies on Sefer Shemot*.

5. See Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik zt"l's essay "Catharsis" published in *Tradition* (Spring 1978) by for a fully developed presentation on this concept of restraint in all areas of Torah life.
6. Rabbi Jacob J. Schacter develops an approach to this challenge of submission to the will of Hashem in an age of autonomy in his article "Halakhic Authority in a World of Personal Autonomy" published in *Radical Responsibility*.
7. The Maharal in several places notes that the word *chamor*, donkey, shares the same root as *chomer*, material. Avraham, Moshe and the Mashiach are all described in Tanach as riding a *chamor*, which we can understand as utilizing the material world as a vehicle for accomplishing spiritual feats.
8. See *The Marshmallow Test: Mastering Self-Control*.
9. "A gradient of childhood self-control predicts health, wealth, and public safety," Terrie E. Moffitt, Louise Arseneault, Daniel Belsky, Nigel Dickson, Robert J. Hancox, HonaLee Harrington, Renate Houts, Richie Poulton, Brent W. Roberts, Stephen Ross, Malcolm R. Sears, W. Murray Thomson, and Avshalom Caspi, Edited by James J. Heckman, University of Chicago, Chicago, IL, and approved December 21, 2010 (received for review July 13, 2010).
10. In his New York Times editorial on April 15, 2014, David Brooks comments on the holiday of Pesach and this notion of the benefits of living a life of self-control, concluding, "The 20th-century philosopher Eliyahu Dessler wrote, 'the ultimate aim of all our service is to graduate from freedom to compulsion.' Exodus provides a vision of movement that is different from mere escape and liberation. The Israelites are simultaneously moving away and being bound upward. Exodus provides a vision of a life marked by travel and change but simultaneously by sweet compulsions, whether it's the compulsions of love, friendship, family, citizenship, faith, a profession or a people."
11. Dr. David Pelcovitz, a renowned psychologist, has noted that often his least happy patients are those who lack structure and self-control in their lives.
12. *The Light Beyond: Adventures in Chassidic Thought* by Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, p. 298.

Every Step Counts: Making it Through Sefirah Complete

This year, we tell ourselves, we will make it. Even if in the past, despite our best intentions, we have dropped out of the “*sefirah* with a brachah” category some time before the count is complete, this year will be different ... we hope.

Absent-minded and distracted people are at a distinct disadvantage regarding the mitzvah of *sefiras ha-omer*. The halacha defers to the minority view of the Behag¹ that disallows one from counting with a brachah if he or she has missed any single day of the *sefirah*, as the Torah’s term “*temimos*” (complete) in describing the weeks of the *omer*, would no longer apply.² It is not clear why such a stringent approach, so challenging for fallible, forgetful humans, is necessary. Many have suggested that the Behag’s opinion differs from that of other rishonim in the consideration of the following question: Should the 49 days of *sefiras ha-omer* be seen as one big mitzvah, or as 49 separate *mitzvos*? If the entire *sefirah* is one mitzvah, it is understandable that any missing part disqualifies the whole. On the other hand, if the *sefirah* count actually entails 49 separate *mitzvos*, it would seem that each day is independent, and missing one day should not affect any other day.³

Rav Soloveitchik, however, understood the matter differently.⁴ In his view, *sefirah* is made up of 49 individual *mitzvos*. If so, why is it an issue to miss a day? He explained



Rabbi Daniel Z. Feldman

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that the concern is actually not that missing one part of the whole invalidates the whole. Rather, the issue involves the definition of counting. If one were to, for example, declare “five” on the fifth night, but not count the previous numbers, this would not be called counting, but rather “saying a number.” Counting, by definition, requires a deliberate process of marking all of the elements of a set. If earlier items are uncounted, then later items, even if a number is attached to them, are also uncounted.

Rav Soloveitchik’s explanation has a significant impact on how the mechanics of *sefiras ha-omer* are understood, and affects a number of issues. One major question begins as a theoretical/philosophical one but becomes practical. When one misses a day and may no longer count with a brachah, what does this say about all the previous days that had been counted with a brachah? If indeed all of *sefirah* is one mitzvah, and that is why a missed day invalidates the future countings, it should have this effect retroactively as well. It would seem, then, that all those *berachos le-vatalah*, unjustified, and this was

indeed the view of the *Chida*.⁵ This question takes on a practical nature when considering one who knows he is likely to miss a day, for example, one who will be undergoing major surgery and will be unconscious for more than a day; perhaps one in a situation such as this has no right to begin counting with a brachah, even before the missed day.⁶

However, within Rav Soloveitchik’s approach, this is not a concern. The missed day only affects days that come afterward, when it is no longer considered “counting.” Every day counted before that point would still be valid.

A fascinating and complex question was posed by R. Ben Tzion Neshet.⁷ What would happen if Reuven would choose to fulfill *sefiras ha-omer* one night through listening to the count of Shimon. A week later, he learns that Shimon missed a day, and may no longer count with a brachah. Perhaps all of Shimon’s countings that year are retroactively revealed to be non-*mitzvos*, and thus Reuven is disqualified also, as he used one of these invalid actions for his own counting, and is now also burdened with a flawed and incomplete mitzvah?



According to Rav Soloveitchik's approach, this concern is negated twice over. Once, because there is no retroactive disqualification; and twice, because even if Reuven did lose his mitzvah fulfillment that night, he would still have maintained the structure of the count, which allows him to continue, even without the mitzvah.

That split — maintaining the count structure without the mitzvah — could also explain the surprising ruling of the *Shulchan Aruch*,⁸ that one who is praying with a *minyan* before dark, and is worried that he may forget later to count, may count the next day's count without a brachah, and if he does remember afterwards, may count with a brachah. This is difficult; if it is too early to count before dark, what is he accomplishing? If he does fulfill the mitzvah then, why is he allowed to count again later with a brachah?

According to Rav Soloveichik's approach, this ruling can be understood. The earlier count does not fulfill a mitzvah, as it is before the appropriate time, and thus does not prevent one from reciting a brachah on a later count. It is helpful, though, because it maintains the counting structure, and thus allows counting to resume the day after if he indeed forgets that night.⁹

This distinction between the mitzvah fulfillment and the maintenance of the counting structure is also helpful for a

number of other frequently discussed questions, such as allowing an *onen* (one who lost a relative and has not yet performed the burial), who may not perform *mitzvos*, to nonetheless preserve his ability to resume counting with a brachah after the *aninus*;¹⁰ and to allow a bar mitzvah boy or a convert to join the *sefirah* count in the middle of the cycle, if they have established a structure by counting prior to their obligation in *mitzvos*.¹¹

Rav Soloveitchik's halachic analysis may also be relevant, in a homiletic sense, toward understanding one of the more difficult aspects of *sefiras ha-omer*. While this is not described in the Torah, the observance of the *sefirah* period has taken on a character of mourning.¹² While there are many theories to explain this, the most well-known explanations link the observance to the statement in the Talmud (*Yevamos* 62b):

אמרו שנים עשר אלף זוגים תלמידים היו לו
 לרבי עקיבא מגבת עד אנטיפרס וכולן מתו
 בפרק אחד מפני שלא נהגו כבוד זה לזה ...
 תנא כולם מתו מפסח ועד עצרת ... כולם מתו
 מיתה רעה מאי היא א"ר נחמן אסכרה.

Twelve thousand pairs of students of Rabi Akiva died, and all perished in the same (segment of) time. This because they did not conduct themselves respectfully each with one another... They had died from the time of Pesach until Atzeret (Shavuot)... they died a bad death, what was it? R. Nachman

said from (that disease of) 'askara.'

A slightly different version of the events appears in the *midrash* (*Bereishis Rabbah*, section 61a) that ends with the words, "So, set your minds not to conduct yourselves that way [like the students]."

This passage is always difficult to consider. The notion that Rabi Akiva, who held up "*v'ahavta l'reacha kamocho*," love your neighbor like yourself, as the crucial principle of the Torah,¹³ should have so many students who treated each other so disrespectfully that they deserved to die, is a deeply painful thought that has caused many to struggle to understand. My father, Rabbi Dr. David M. Feldman, z"l, (*hareini kaparas mishkavo*), was pained at the thought of insensitivity on the part of holy Torah scholars, and brought to my attention the essay of R. Eliezer Levi in his work *Yesodot HaTefillah*, who builds upon the statement of Rav Sherira Gaon in his *Iggeret*, that the students of Rabi Akiva died as a consequence of resisting *shmad*, efforts to force conversion upon them, during the time of the rebellion of Bar Kokhba.

In this understanding, as Rav Levi displays, the Talmud is, out of political necessity, discussing the situation *b'remizah*, in hinted, coded language. Thus, the relevant passages can be read as essentially the opposite story: the students did treat each other

respectfully, and we are told to be like them, rather than to be unlike them. However, both versions, as different as they are on the facts, emerge as two different ways of saying the same thing: the mourning period of *sefiras ha-omer* is a time to focus on treating each other with proper respect.

Perhaps, the halachic perspective on the counting and the thematic perspective on the time period can be viewed as connected. The mitzvah of *sefiras ha-omer*, in Rav Soloveitchik's assessment, requires us to perform 49 independent, deliberate acts of counting, each separate from each other, but each unable to take place if any of the previous countings have not happened. Maybe the homiletic message is this: the *sefirah* is the countdown to the receiving of the Torah, the defining moment in the history of the Jewish people. That moment most certainly deserves tremendous focus, perhaps of the single-minded fashion. However, that comes with a risk.

Imagine a student in the shiur of Rabi Akiva, privileged to learn at the feet of one of the greatest sages of all time, one of the most accomplished scholars the Jewish people has ever seen. One who is on his way to this lecture might well run with such single-minded focus that anyone in his way, even a fellow student, becomes unimportant; and if that other student must be rudely pushed aside, isn't getting to the shiur a greater priority? It is possible to be so intently focused on the important "main event" that other important concerns are given short shrift. It is reminiscent of the 1973 experiment conducted at the Princeton Theological Seminary, in which seminarians in a hurry neglected to stop to help people — actually, actors — who seemed to be

in need, due to their rush to deliver a sermon about the topic of stopping to help people in need.

The message of *sefiras ha-omer* is that focusing on that which is most important can never allow us to miss all the other important steps along the way. We eagerly count down to the *kabala HaTorah*, but we do so by carefully marking every step of the process. We are trained to recognize that we cannot properly accept the Torah if these steps are neglected. Rav Yisrael Salanter, the revered founder of the *mussar* movement, was asked why he diverted talented students from the study of Talmud to spend time studying character development, and would respond that even more important than *gadlus*, Torah greatness, is *shleimus*, completeness of *middos* and personality.

The Mishna (*Avot* 3:17) teaches:

אם אין תורה אין דרך ארץ אם אין דרך ארץ אין תורה.

If there is no Torah, there is no derech ertz and if there is no derech ertz, there is no Torah.

Rabbenu Yonah suggests that *derech ertz*, usually rendered as the possession of refined character traits, is necessary if the Torah's values are to take root; without *derech ertz*, any Torah the individual studies "lacks a home."

Yes, absent-minded and distracted people are at a distinct disadvantage regarding the mitzvah of *sefiras ha-omer*. But perhaps that is the point: *sefiras ha-omer* reminds us that even the understandable distraction of the sharply focused scholar comes at a cost, and asks us to correct for that. Indeed, at the end of the path of *sefirah*, the main event, the *kabala haTorah*, awaits — but it is necessary

first to infuse that acceptance with the message of all of the days that lead up to it; the memory of Rabi Akiva's students demand nothing less.

Notes

1. *Tosafos*, *Menachos* 66a and *Megillah* 20b.
2. *Orach Chaim* 489:8.
3. See *Pri Megadim* in *Eishel Avraham*, 489:13.
4. Similar approaches can also be found in *Shut Even Y'karah*, 176 and by the Lubavitcher Rebbe in *Shut*, 106, and *Chiddushim U'Biurim al HaShas*, I, 37; see also *Tiferes Torah*, 11, commenting on Mordechai, *Megillah*, 803.
5. *Avodas HaKodesh* 7:217. See, however, *Shut Chasam Sofer*, YD 320, who argues against the concept of retroactive *brachos le-vatalah* in a different context.
6. Regarding this question, see *Shut Kinyan Torah Bahalachah*; *Shut Even Pinah*, 38-39; *Ohr HaMoadim*, 10; *Shut Minchas Aviv*, pp. 50-56; *Mishmeres Chaim*, I, *Inyanei Sefiras Ha-Omer*, 2; *Marpei Lanefesh*, IV, 28:17; *Shut B'Tzel HaChokhmah*, V, 97-99; *Shut Teshuvos V'Hanhagos* III, 147.
7. *Shut Shavei Tzion* 14.
8. O.C. 489:3, from *Machzor Vitry*.
9. The alternative explanation is that the original count was conditional, and negated once the later count is performed (*Magen Avraham* 489:7). See *Shut Chazon Nachum* I, 32; *Beit Av*, 54; *Sdeh Elchanan*, 133; *Shut Divrei Or*, 17; *Knesses Avraham*, 26.
10. See *Shut Noda B'Yehudah*, kama, OC, 27; *Shut Ksav Sofer*, YD 181; *Shut Divrei Moshe*, 29; *Shut Divrei Sofrim*, 39; *Shut Kinyan Torah Bahalachah*, III, 99; *Shut Mishneh Shleimah*; *Marpei LaNefesh*, IV, 28:10; *Shut Chelkas Yaakov* OC 207; *Shut Teshuvos V'Hanhagos*, II, 611.
11. See *Minchas Chinuch* 306; *Shut Maharam Shick*, 269; *Shut Har Tzvi*, OC, II, 76; *Shut Eretz Tzvi*, II, 36; *Aruch Hashulchan*, 489:15; *Shut Minchas Elazar*, III, 356; *Tziyunim LaTorah*, 12; *Shut Avnei Nezer*, OC 539; *Birkei Yosef*, OC 489:20; *Shut Pri HaAretz*, III, 7; *Shut Tzitz Eliezer* XIV, 55; *Shut Chesed L'Avraham*, tinyana, OC, 56; *Shut Maharash*, VII, 112; *Shut Ksav Sofer*, OC 99; *Shut Shevet HaKehasi*, IV, 141; *Avnei Chefetz* II, 25; *Hod Tzvi*, 1; *Shut Yachel Yisrael*, I, 1; *Mishnat Rabi Gershon*, 21; *Shut Tehilos David*, I, 123; *Birkas Yosef*, II, 2.
12. See *Orach Chaim* 493.
13. Talmud Yerushalmi, *Nedarim* 9:4.

Feel as Though You Left Egypt, But I Was Never There!

The Jewish people left Egypt around 3,327 years ago. Once a year, ever since that momentous occasion in our history, we sit around a table with our families, friends and guests in order to commemorate that experience at the Pesach Seder. We do a variety of actions to remember that Exodus from Egypt. We eat matzah, drink four cups of wine, eat bitter herbs, lean like free people and read the Haggadah. As well as eating, drinking, leaning and talking, there is a mitzvah that many people skip over during the Seder without even realizing. That mitzvah is to feel as though you were in Egypt and G-d took you out. What is this mitzvah all about?

I Wasn't Ever in Egypt!

Right after the Torah tells us that we have an obligation to eat matzah on Pesach and that we are to remove the chametz from our homes, we are told that we should be engaging our children in discussion about the Exodus:

וְהִגַּדְתָּ לְבִנְךָ בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא לֵאמֹר בְּעִבּוּר זֶה עָשָׂה
ה' לִי בְצֵאתִי מִמִּצְרָיִם.
שְׁמוֹת יג:ח

And you shall tell your son on that day, saying 'It is on account of this that Hashem did for me when I left Egypt.'

Exodus 13:8

The author of the Haggadah uses this verse as a proof text to make the following statement:



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בכל דור ודור חייב אדם לראות עצמו כאלו
הוא יצא ממצרים.

In each and every generation a person is obligated to see themselves as though they left Egypt.

Since the verse speaks in the first person, “did for me,” the Haggadah is telling us to feel as though ‘you’ left Egypt. Don’t just eat the matzah, remove the chametz, eat the bitter herbs and read the story of our salvation, as though it only happened to your ancestors, but feel as though you yourself were there! You were a slave, you had backbreaking work, you met Moses and saw the wonders and miracles of the plagues and then you were personally delivered from the slavery of Egypt, and you passed through the Red Sea to the freedom that G-d gave you.

Are we expected to fool ourselves? Are we expected to imagine something in our mind that we never went through and feel as if we did?

I would like to look at a few different ways to understand this crucial part of the Pesach Seder experience, which could not only change the way we see this part of the Seder, but how we look at the Jewish people and Jewish history.

Okay, You Weren't Really there, But They Were.

The clearest explanation of the question as to how we are expected to feel as though we personally left Egypt is given in the *Siddur of Rashi*, written by one of Rashi's students. He explains that the Haggadah is attempting to invoke a feeling of gratitude on our part. Our ancestors were actually in Egypt. Through an incredible display of miracles that G-d displayed in Egypt, our ancestors were taken out. Had they not been released from Egypt, they would have totally assimilated into Egypt and we would never have left at all.

Our history came down to that one crucial moment, do we stay or do we go? According to the commentators many Jews decided that they actually did not wish to leave and after over 200 years, they felt more Egyptian than Hebrew. Many of them died out in the plague of darkness, but many others remained and became part of Egyptian society and culture. Their descendants are not considered Jewish. They never made it to Mount Sinai which would have sealed their destiny as part of the Jewish people. However, hundreds of thousands did

leave with a faith in G-d and Moses his messenger.

By recalling that fateful decision our ancestors made all of those years ago, we can sit at our tables and say, “had they not been taken out, we would still be there.”

By recalling that fateful decision our ancestors made all of those years ago, we can sit at our tables and say, “had they not been taken out, we would still be there, so it’s as though were taken out ourselves.”

Act it Out!

In the *Laws of Chametz and Matzah* chapter 7:6, the Rambam discusses in detail the mitzvah to discuss the Exodus from Egypt. He explains that telling the story of the incredible events that happened at that time is a positive mitzvah from the Torah. In the seventh chapter he quotes our piece of Haggadah that each person should see themselves as though they left Egypt. But the Rambam does something very subtle, he adds one letter which gives a very different understanding of what he believes this command is expecting us to do:

בכל דור ודור חייב אדם להראות את עצמו כאילו הוא בעצמו יצא עתה משעבוד מצרים.
In each and every generation a person is obligated to display themselves as

though they just left the slavery of Egypt.

In the Haggadah we are told to see ourselves as though we left Egypt. The word to see yourself is “*lirot*.” The Rambam adds the letter *hay* to the word so it now reads “*leharot*.” It’s a small change, but it makes a big difference. The word “*lirot*” is “to see,” but the word “*leharot*” means to “be seen” or to display in a certain way. What does the Rambam expect us to do? It is exactly as he says, act it out! Everything we do at the Seder is meant to be a reliving of the experience. They ate matzah, we do too, they were free and ate their Pesach Seder as free people, we do too by leaning. They ate bitter herbs, so do we.

This doesn’t only apply to the mitzvot that we do, it also applies to the many customs that each family and community has added to the Seder. For example, many Persian communities have the custom during the recitation of the Dayenu song to run around the table and hit each other on the back with a large scallion! (This is actually a custom in my family and can give guests unfamiliar with the custom quite a shock). The reason behind this is to relive the experience in some small way, the beatings our ancestors felt at the hands of the Egyptians. Why a scallion is used, I believe may be connected to a later description in the Torah where the Jewish people complain to Moses about the lack of food in the desert that they had plenty of in Egypt — the list includes fish, meat, melon, garlic and onions. So we take the food they complained about and use it against them by gently hitting them with it to show their lack of gratitude.

Other communities literally act out parts of the Exodus by wrapping matzah in cloth napkins and walking around with them on their shoulders to remember how our ancestors left Egypt in a hurry with matzah on their backs. Some jump over water to remember the splitting of the sea. Each of these and many others are customs handed down from generation to generation as a way of displaying as though we were there.

Actually You Were There! You Just Don’t Remember.

One of the most intriguing answers in how we are expected to see ourselves as though we left Egypt comes from Rav Shimon Schwab in his book *Maayan Beit Hashoeiva*, Shemot 13:8. His mind-bending interpretation is that you were there, you just don’t remember being there. When the Torah says “What Hashem did for me” that is a literal verse -- it is not speaking in metaphorical or theoretical language; the Torah says it because the Torah means it. You were in Egypt, and you were taken out.

He explains this phenomenon in the following way: Your body is made up of many parts. It is a known fact that the body you have now is not the same body you had as a baby or even as a child. Over your many years living on earth your body has changed. You not only have grown, but billions of your cells have died out and new ones have appeared. If you were to look at a picture of yourself as a newborn, you most likely wouldn’t have realized it was you without your mother telling you that you are the cute baby in the photo. That baby doesn’t look like you, sound like you, smell like you or feel like you, but it is still you. You don’t



even remember being a newborn! But that was you whether you remember it or not.

The Jewish people are very much the same. Our ancestors are not different people who we descend from, they are us, just an earlier version of us, just like that baby was us all those years ago. The fact that those Jews in Egypt sounded, looked and acted differently is irrelevant. You are looking at the Jewish people the wrong way, says Rabbi Schwab — we are one large organic being that spans thousands of years of Jewish history. We were “born” as a people in Egypt over 3,000 years ago and have slowly been growing as a people ever since then.

According to this view, you were in Egypt and G-d took you out. You don’t remember being in Egypt? That’s okay, you don’t remember being born either, but others have told you that you were and can describe to you what the experience was like.

I believe another way we can understand this is by recognizing that we have personal memories of

the past, but there also is a collective national memory that we as a people are part of as well. By sitting at the Seder and performing the mitzvot, we are tapping into our national memory and consciousness that we have been part of for thousands of years.

This idea is alluded to in the way the Torah describes Jacob and his family in contrast to his brother Esau and his family in the Torah. When Esau travels with his family, the Torah (Bereishit 36:6) uses the words “*et kol nafshot beyto*, all the souls of his home.” When Jacob’s family is counted at the beginning of Sefer Shemot, the Torah states that he has “*shivim nefesh*, 70 soul” in his family. The word soul for Jacob is in the singular even though there are 70 of them, to illustrate the combined soul nature of Jacob and his family.

It’s All About the “Time” of our Freedom.

The Torah refers to Pesach in a few different ways, one of them is “*zman cheruteinu*” which means the “time of

our freedom.” In order to understand this expression Rabbi E. E. Dessler in the book *Sanctuaries in Time*, based on a lecture he gave on Pesach 1944, gives us a deep and kabbalistic understanding of the Jewish view of time which we can use to explain how we are expected to see ourselves as personally leaving Egypt.

We usually understand time as being made up of past, present and future, in the form of a “timeline.” When we experience something, we live it in the present and the present has no real connection to what happened during that time in the past. For example, we celebrate Thanksgiving on the fourth Thursday in November. That date has no inherent connection to the theme of giving thanks. It was a random date chosen by President Abraham Lincoln to celebrate the blessing of the harvest and the preceding year. The exact date has no real connection to any experience. Any date could have been chosen. The Jewish view of time is totally different. It’s less of a timeline and more of a time spiral.

When the Haggadah says we should see ourselves as though we are leaving Egypt, it means that we have the potential to access the experience of freedom available during the time period and go free as well.

We travel through the year very much like a person travels on a train and arrives at various stations along the way. Each of these “stations” gives us something we can experience at that time. For example, the period in which Passover occurs is a time of freedom, and we experience an element of freedom as we pass through that time. Shavuot is the time of the giving of the Torah, so as we pass through that time period, we experience a re-acceptance of the Torah that propels us throughout the year. Sukkot is a time of happiness and faith, so as we leave our homes and move into the sukkah at that time of year, we acquire faith in G-d and the happiness that ensues from this. Yom Kippur is a time of forgiveness, which means held within that time is the ability for us to cleanse ourselves of past mistakes. This is true of all the other holidays.

When we arrive at Passover we are in a place of potential freedom. Just

as our ancestors were able to tap into that energy and go free from Egypt, so too, we are able at that time to free ourselves from all that enslaves us from being who we really can be. When the Haggadah says we should see ourselves as though we are leaving Egypt, it means that we have the potential to access the experience of freedom available during the time period and go free as well. That is the power that Pesach has within it.

It's All About Your Imagination.

Rabbi Dr. Abraham Twerski in his Pesach Haggadah *From Bondage to Freedom* explains that we are expected to really use our imaginations at the Pesach Seder. “Our imaginations are very creative as evidenced by how vividly we can dream in our sleep and daydream while we are awake,” he writes. Based on this, he recommends

that you “create three dimensional scenes in rich color. You should meditate and create scenes in your mind. See yourself in the straw pits, mixing it with mud, baking it into bricks. You can hear the scolding of the Egyptian taskmasters and feel the lashes in your back.”

You can now visualize the plagues that were brought into Egypt and see yourself leaving Egypt with the throng of Jewish people by your side. Finally you stand at the Red Sea and hear the thunder of Pharaoh’s chariots approaching, you feel the terror of being trapped and then see the glory of G-d as the waters divide.

He concludes that this is the requirement to feel as though you left Egypt, as the “sweet taste of liberty cannot be appreciated as long as oppression is only an abstraction.” This use of imagination allows you to appreciate the greatness of the Exodus and properly acknowledge our gratitude to G-d.

May we all truly connect to the true spirit of Passover, and feel the freedom that it can bring us to ultimately free us from the exile we are presently in and to bring the ultimate return of our people to Israel as we say “Next Year in Jerusalem!”



Lirot Et Atzmo, Going Beyond Empathy: A Psychological Perspective

A central component of the Seder night is the retelling of the story of the Exodus of B'nai Yisrael from the slavery of Mitzrayim. Towards the close of the Maggid section is a statement unlike any other in Jewish liturgy:

בכל דור ודור חייב אדם לראות את עצמו
כאילו הוא יצא ממצרים.

In every generation, each person is obligated to view himself as if he went out from Egypt.

This is a remarkable requirement. Typically, holidays specify behaviors and observances to commemorate historic events. On Sukkot, we live in booths to remember the Jews' experience in the desert. On Chanukah, we light the menorah to mark the miraculous rededication of the Beit HaMikdash. There are some holidays that specify an emotional response: On Purim, and from the inception of Adar, we are expected to be happy, at Kol Nidre we are to be penitent. Only on the Seder night, however, are we not only expected but *commanded* to experience ourselves in a time and place other than our own. How and why do we, on this night so different from all others, do the seemingly impossible? How do we envision ourselves personally experiencing the journey from slavery



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to freedom, and to what purpose?

When I work with educators and students at Jewish day schools on the *middot* of *bein adam l'chavero*, interpersonal character traits, the critical skill of empathy is often an important focus. At first blush, it might seem that this psychological phenomenon of empathy is what the rabbis are asking of us. Empathy is defined as the ability to experience the feelings of another, to reactively experience *with* another person.¹

Empathy, neuroscientists have suggested, is an important factor in species' survival, with mothers' empathy contributing to their response to their infant's cries.² We are somewhat pre-wired for empathy. Individuals viewing pictures of injured limbs and told to imagine it as their limb will display neurologic evidence of pain.³ Neuroscientists have discovered "mirror" neurons in the brain's motor system which provide the capacity for us to mirror

others, to share others' experiences by enabling one person to project oneself into the minds, emotions, and actions of others.⁴ Clearly, the psychological ability to feel as others do is important; it contributes to our compassion and caring. But this form of empathy is not sufficient for the Haggadah, which requires more than caring about the plight of the slaves in Egypt.

Perhaps an alternate conceptualization of empathy comes closer to the Haggadah obligation to *lirot et atzmo*. The cognitive or perspective-taking view of empathy involves the ability to see the world as another does, to put oneself in their shoes. Early Piagetian research discovered that this skill is acquired developmentally. Young children are totally ego-centric, incapable of recognizing that others perceive and experience things differently than they do. As we grow, the cognitive ability to recognize and assume the perspective of another develops. We become able to identify



with characters in the books we read and the films we see, and the people we know. As we read the Haggadah, this cognitive empathy allows us to imagine the lives of the slaves, severely oppressed by the Egyptians.

Since the Haggadah requires that each of us relive the redemption as if we personally experienced it, cognitive empathy is not enough. Imagining the feelings of slaves experiencing freedom, or considering how we might have felt were we to have been there, might provide powerful understandings. On Pesach night, however, they will not suffice. We must become slaves redeemed from Egyptian tyranny. We must personally experience redemption.

The Rambam's version of *b'chol dor v'dor*, with slight changes in wording, makes it clear that we are required to go beyond empathy:

בכל דור ודור חייב אדם להראות את עצמו כאילו הוא בעצמו יצא עתה משעבוד מצרים. רמב"ם, הלכות חמץ ומצה ז:ו

In each and every generation a person is obligated to display himself as though he just now left the slavery of Egypt.

Rambam, Hilchot Chametz Umatza 7:6

The addition of the words *b'atzmo* (himself) and *ata* (just now) make it clear that we must do more than *identify* with ancestors who experienced historic redemption, we are to experience, at the Seder table, the remarkable redemption and the experience of freedom. Rav Elazar Menachem Man Shach, the Ponevezh Rosh Yeshivah, explains that only when we feel as if we had moments ago experienced the Exodus can we have the proper, powerful feelings towards the event. "One cannot compare the emotional excitement felt at the time of a tremendous personal salvation to the feelings one has toward that event when it is recollected later."⁵ The Lubavitcher Rebbe elaborates that it must be not only personal but specific. "It is not sufficient merely to feel that *you yourself had been a (generic) slave and were set free and redeemed* as Rambam writes. Rather, one must perceive oneself as an Egyptian slave who was liberated from the uniquely harsh persecution of Pharaoh."⁶

Interestingly, there is only one psychological parallel for going beyond empathically feeling for others or seeing through their eyes,

to actually experiencing an event, and it comes from research on trauma. When we experience trauma it is common to find that sights, sounds, or even smells reminiscent of the trauma can evoke memories of the event. A subset of traumatized individuals will have flashbacks or nightmares in which they fully re-experience the trauma, reliving the event as if it is happening at that moment. This re-experiencing is often so painful and distressing that trauma victims may avoid people, places and things that serve as reminders, so as to preclude memories and prevent flashbacks. Successful treatment for traumatic re-experiencing engages victims in developing the ability to focus on areas of mastery and control, even as they remember and re-experience traumatic events.

With elegant pedagogic skill, the Haggadah teaches us how to re-experience the trauma of slavery from the position of freedom and mastery. Our Seder tables are a model of good teaching technique. Using powerful narrative, embellished with characters that draw us in, we tell and retell the story. We are engaged in the story through the use of visuals and

On the Seder night, we personally experience being strangers in exile, oppressed and abused, and this personal experience should color how we relate to others in similar circumstances.

song. In some traditions, participants even enact the drama of the Exodus. Yet while we speak extensively of the trauma of our years of slavery and affliction, we do so from the perspective of free men and women. We eat the maror and matzoh of slavery, but we recline, dip twice, and drink wine, signs of free men, and of royalty. As our telling the story and engaging in the rituals assists us in stretching our cognitive and emotional capacities beyond empathy, and we are able to view ourselves as having gone out from Egypt, our Seder takes us on an emotional journey.

Why does the Haggadah require this of us? Why must we personally journey from the devastation of slavery to the joy of redemption? Rabbi Chaim Friedlander, in *Siftei Chaim*, argues that the obligation to feel as if one was redeemed from Egypt is not an end in itself, but a means to a larger goal.⁷ The true

purpose is to have us express our deep and genuine gratitude to Hashem. Immediately following the Haggadah's imperative to personally experience the redemption, it continues with *l'fichach anachnu chayavim l'hodot, l'halel*, we therefore are obligated to recite praise and thanksgiving, making clear our obligation to thank Hashem. It is because we experience the Exodus ourselves, Rabbi Friedlander explains, that we can feel the personal need to express gratitude to our Redeemer.

A second explanation for the seemingly difficult requirement to see ourselves as slaves and as redeemed is to inculcate in us a prominent and lasting empathy for others. Freed from slavery, we are now masters, and the prescription of the *Haggadah, l'ivot et atzmo*, cautions us to be vigilant in our concern for others, particularly those who are strangers. The Chatam Sofer, *Parashat Ki Teitzei*, states that one of the goals of this personal reliving of the Pesach story is so that we empathize with the convert. As the Torah tells us:

וְאֶהְבֶּתֶם אֶת הַגֵּר כִּי גֵרִים הָיִיתֶם בְּאֶרֶץ
מִצְרָיִם.
דְּבָרִים י:ט

You should love the proselyte, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.

Devarim 10:19

On the Seder night, we personally experience being strangers in exile, oppressed and abused, and this personal experience should color how we relate to others in similar circumstances.

These two reasons provide compelling answers to the question of why the Haggadah demands that we go beyond empathy to experience the Exodus personally. The *Ba'al*

Haggadah understood that while reviewing history and perspective taking can impart important knowledge, the best teacher is personal experience, and the most powerful lessons come from our lived and experienced journeys. Both the gratitude to Hashem that Rabbi Friedlander suggests is the Haggadah's underlying goal, and the empathy for others outlined in the Torah and that the Chatam Sofer cites, are critical in shaping our psyches and influencing our actions well beyond the Seder night. As we go beyond empathy to personally travel from slavery to freedom, we learn that our gratitude to our Redeemer cannot be limited to a moment in time. We learn that wherever we are and whatever befalls us, we must know, always, who we are, how far we have come, to Whom we owe our salvation, and what is forever expected of us.

Notes

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4. Rizzolatti, G., & Craighero, L. (2004). The mirror neuron system. *Annual Review of Neuroscience*, 27, 169-192.
5. *Rav Shach Haggadah*, p.137.
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7. *Moadim*, Vol II pp. 355-363.

Anatomy of a Sale:

Demystifying Mechirat Chametz

Smartphone apps download in seconds and enable complex technological tasks to be performed by novices. But behind the app that made its way to Google Play or the Apple App store lie thousands of hours of concept development, technological improvements and programming tweaks.

The *mechirat chametz* model that our community rabbis use to sell chametz has similarly developed from the basic idea of selling chametz to a sophisticated legal design. This article will outline the historical and halachic background that have brought the *mechirat chametz* process to its present form.

The Problem

Aside from the biblical prohibitions of consuming and deriving benefit from chametz, there exists an independent biblical prohibition to maintain ownership of chametz from midday on the eve of Pesach (from when the korban Pesach could be brought) until the holiday's conclusion. The Torah states:

שְׁבַעַת יָמִים שָׂאֵר לֹא יִמָּצָא בְּבֵיתְכֶם...
שְׁמוֹת יֵב:יט

For seven days fermented dough shall not be found in your homes...

Shemot 12:19

It is this prohibition that obligates each Jewish home to remove all chametz from its domain. Not only



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are there negative commandments that prohibit ownership, there is also a positive mitzva to destroy chametz on the day before Pesach:

שְׁבַעַת יָמִים מִצּוֹת תֹּאכְלוּ אֹךְ בְּיוֹם הָרֵאשׁוֹן
תִּשְׁבִּיתוּ שָׂאֵר מִבְּתֵיכֶם...
שְׁמוֹת יֵב:טו

For seven days you shall eat Matza, but on the first day you shall destroy fermented dough from your houses...

Shemot 12:15

These biblical injunctions were further buttressed by a rabbinic enactment that prohibits any benefit from chametz that was kept in Jewish possession over Pesach. For these reasons, selling one's chametz to a non-Jew became an essential part of the preparation for Pesach.

The History of Mechirat Chametz

The original form of *mechirat chametz*, which looked very different from ours, is described in the Mishna, *Pesachim* 21a:

כל שעה שמותר לאכול - ... מוכר לנכרי.
During the time that it is permitted to

eat, one can... sell to the gentile.

This Mishna portrays a classical sale: the seller hands the product to the gentile buyer, who takes it home, without any expectation of either party to reverse the sale following Pesach.

A more complicated transaction is recorded in the Tosefta, which describes the sale of chametz in a situation where the chametz is transferred out of the Jewish possession for Pesach, with the assumption that it will be repurchased at the holiday's conclusion:

ישראל וגוי שהיו באין בספינה וחמץ ביד
ישראל: הרי זה מוכרו לנכרי ונותנו במתנה
וחוזר ולוקח ממנו לאחר הפסח.
תוספתא, פסחים ב:יב

If a Jew and gentile were traveling by boat [such that there is no means of replenishing one's food stock after the holiday] and there is chametz in the hands of the Jew: He may sell it to the gentile or give it as a gift, and subsequently repurchase it from him after Pesach.

Tosefta, Pesachim 2:12

While the Tosefta adds the repurchase aspect of *mechirat chametz*, both

the Mishna and Tosefta involve the physical transfer of the chametz from Jewish to non-Jewish domain. This was the form of *mechirat chametz* throughout ancient and medieval times, until the 1600's, as highlighted by the *Shulchan Aruch*:

חמץ של ישראל שעבר עליו הפסח, אסור בהנאה... ואם מכרו או נתנו לאינו יהודי שמחוץ לבית קודם הפסח, אע"פ שהישראל מכרו לאינו יהודי ויודע בו שלא יגע בו כלל עד לאחר הפסח ויחזור ויתננו לו, מותר ובלבד שיתננו לו מתנה גמורה בלי שום תנאי. שולחן ערוך אורח חיים סימן תמה:ג

It is prohibited to benefit from chametz that belonged to a Jew over Pesach... and if he sold it or gave it to a Jew outside of his home before Pesach, even though the Jewish seller knows that the gentile will not touch the chametz at all until after Pesach, and afterwards, he will return the chametz, it is permitted, so long as the Jew gave it as a complete gift without any stipulation.

Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 448:3

In the 1600's harsh anti-Semitic decrees precluded Jews from many professions. Among the professions that Jews were able to enter was whiskey production. While the original model of handing the box of chametz to the gentile next door was fine for small quantities, Jewish whiskey manufacturers needed to find a halachic means of transferring the ownership of their extensive chametz inventory in a way that would not involve moving an entire distillery's worth of barrels to gentile domain. Furthermore, the cash value of a distillery's inventory may appear prohibitive to a potential [gentile] chametz buyer. A number of suggestions were made to resolve these two issues and these discussions provide the foundation for modern day *mechirat chametz*.

Kinyan

Property is transferred from one individual to another only via a *kinyan* — a formal act of acquisition. Will and intent do not suffice to transfer ownership. Different types of property are transferred via different *kinyanim*: real estate, animals, and *metalt'lin*, movable items [like chametz] each has its own manner of acquisition.

While discussing the prohibition of *ona'ah*, price gouging, the Torah outlines precisely how movable objects are transferred:

וְכִי־תִמְכְּרוּ מִמְּכָר לְעַמִּיתְךָ אוֹ קָנָה מִיָּד עַמִּיתְךָ אֶל־תֹּנֶנּוּ אִישׁ אֶת־אָחִיו: וַיִּקְרָא כה: יד

When you sell merchandise to your compatriot, or purchase from the hand of your compatriot, do not overcharge a man to his brother.

Vayikra 25:14

Armed with this pasuk, the Talmud presents an argument regarding what *kinyan* to utilize for selling *metalt'lin*:

אמר רבי יוחנן: דבר תורה מעות קונות... ריש לקיש אמר: משיכה מפורשת מן התורה. מאי טעמא דריש לקיש - אמר קרא: ... או קנה מיד עמיתך - דבר הנקנה מיד ליד. בבא מציעא מז:

Rabbi Yochanan said, "Coins acquire according to Torah law."... Reish Lakish said, "Meshicha (pulling the item with one's hand) is explicit in the Torah." What is Reish Lakish's reasoning? The verse states "or purchase from the hand of your compatriot" - something that can be transferred from hand to hand.

Bava Metzia 47b

While R' Yochanan assumes that transfer of property is effected upon payment, Reish Lakish takes note of the superfluous words "from the hand" to learn that a sale is only effected by taking from the hand

of the seller, literally, regardless of whether or not payment has occurred.

The Talmud, *Bechorot* 13a,¹ points out that this discussion of effective *kinyanim* is limited by the term *amitecha*, your compatriot, which would indicate that the *kinyan* specified relates only to a sale to a fellow Jew, as opposed to a gentile. Hence, if we assume that a *Jew* acquires an object through a cash payment, it would follow that a *gentile* acquires in the opposite way — through taking it by hand, *meshicha*. If a *Jew* acquires by taking it, a *gentile* would acquire via payment.

Transferring Chametz via Cash Payment or Hand-off?

How do we rule in this question? Since *mechirat chametz* involves transferring *metalt'lin* to a gentile, we must clarify if cash payment will suffice, or if each and every bit of chametz in each and every household will need to be lifted up by the hands of the gentile purchaser, which would make our modern *mechirat chametz* wholly impractical, if not impossible!

Rashi, *Kiddushin* 14b, follows Reish Lakish that a Jew acquires via *meshicha*, and a gentile, therefore, is *koneh* via cash payment. Rashi's grandson, Rabbeinu Tam,² on the other hand, rules inversely, like R' Yochanan, that a Jew acquires via money alone, and a gentile would therefore need to lift up an item in order to acquire it from the Jewish seller. Because of this dispute, Tosfot [in the context of selling an animal to a gentile] rules:

והרוצה לחוש לדברי רש"י ור"ת המקנה בהמה לעובד כוכבים לפוטרה מן הבכורה צריך שיתן העובד כוכבים כסף וגם משיכת העובד כוכבים. תוספות, עבודה זרה עא.

In order to account for the opinions of both Rashi and Rabbeinu Tam, if one wishes to sell an animal to a gentile in order to exempt it from the first-born-obligations, the gentile must pay for it with money in addition to pulling it by hand. **Tosfot, Avodah Zarah 71a**

For this reason, our *mechirat chametz* does require the gentile to provide a cash payment to the seller before Pesach. But how will the gentile fulfill the *kinyan meshicha* on all of the boxes and bottles of chametz to satisfy Rabbeinu Tam's requirement of taking the merchandise in hand for the sale to be effective?

This question is what has led to the complexity and intricacy of the modern *mechira*. To ameliorate the possibility that the cash payment is not sufficient, and *meshicha* is necessary, yet not physically possible, rabbinic literature has suggested the performance of additional modes of *kinyan*, each of which carries additional complications, in the hope that between them all, a definitive and reliable transfer of chametz from Jewish owner to gentile buyer will transpire.

Kinyan Chatzer

The Torah teaches that a person's *chatzer*, courtyard, can acquire on his or her behalf. This means that if a property owner wishes to take possession of an item that is situated upon his property, the item belongs to the property owner. The Talmud clarifies the nature of this *kinyan*:

מר סבר: חצר משום ידה איתרבאי, כי היכי דאית לה יד - חצר נמי אית לה. ומר סבר: חצר משום שליחות איתרבאי בבא מציעא י'

One opinion holds that chatzer is extended from the hand: just as a person

can acquire by taking into their hand, so too, into their property. The other opinion holds that chatzer functions like an agent.

Bava Metzia 10b

Just as halacha recognizes the actions that a person's agent performs as though the act was performed by the person him or herself, so too, a person's real estate can serve as the agent to acquire objects on the property owner's behalf.

Accordingly, the Jew first sells or rents to the gentile³ the space in the kitchen/pantry/wine-cellar where the chametz is stored. Once the gentile acquires legal rights to that [tiny] bit of real estate, he can subsequently acquire the Jew's chametz that is situated upon that plot via this *kinyan* of *chatzer*, thereby bypassing entirely the potential need for a *meshicha* of each and every chametz item.

Kinyan chatzer, however, has its shortfalls as well, that make it problematic to rely upon as a substitute for the *meshicha*. The aforementioned Gemara in *Bava Metzia* mentioned the possibility that *chatzer's* efficacy is premised upon the halachic construct of agency — that a person's property can acquire whatever is resting upon it. When applied to *mechirat chametz* specifically, there arises a fundamental obstacle:

The Talmud notes that when the Torah introduces the concept that a *shaliach*, agent can accomplish on behalf of his sender, it limits agency to “*attem*” - “you.”

מה אתם בני ברית, אף שלוחכם בני ברית. קידושין מא:

Just as you are people of the covenant, so too, your agents must be people of the covenant.

Kiddushin 41b

This teaches that the halachic concept of agency is limited to Jews specifically. The aforementioned Gemara, *Bava Metzia* suggested that *kinyan chatzer's* effectiveness is because the property serves as an agent to acquire whatever is situated upon it, on behalf of its owner. If so, *chatzer*, which works through agency, should not be an effective mode of *kinyan* for a gentile to acquire chametz.

Kinyan Chalipin

A similar issue may arise with another type of *kinyan*. In the Book of Ruth, we read

וְזֹאת לְפָנִים בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל עַל־הַגְּאוּלָּה וְעַל־הַתְּמוּרָה... שְׁלַף אִישׁ נַעֲלוֹ וְנָתַן לְרַעְיוֹ וְזֹאת הַתְּעוּדָה בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל:
רות ד:ז

And this was the custom in Israel regarding sale and exchange... a man shall take off his shoe and hand to his friend, and this was the proof in Israel.

Ruth 4:7

This verse is the source for the *kinyan* of *chalipin*, exchange, where one party⁴ hands some item of value [in Ruth, a shoe was mentioned] to the other as a symbolic exchange, which in turn, transfers ownership of the actual item they wish to transfer. As such, the gentile should hand a personal belonging to the Jewish seller, thereby acquiring the Jew's chametz. The *Shach* (*Choshen Mishpat* 123:30), however, argues that *kinyan chalipin* should not work for a gentile. This can be supported by the very verse that is the source for *kinyan chalipin*, which concludes “*and this was the proof in Israel*” - which indicates its effectiveness as a mode of transfer in Israel, but not for a gentile.

There was a time when the famed 47th Street diamond industry in New York City was primarily composed of European Jews who signaled the conclusion of a deal with a handshake and an utterance of “*mazal u’beracha!* — luck and blessing!”

Kinyan Situmta

Because of the impossibility of *meshicha*, and the questionable efficacy of *kesef*, *chatzer*, and *chalipin* as modes of acquisition, the contemporary *mechirat chametz* utilizes an additional, fourth *kinyan* — *situmta*.

האי סיטומתא קניא. למאי הלכתא?...
באתרא דנהיגו למקני ממש - קנו.
בבא מציעא דע.

This Situmta acquires. For what purpose?... In a place where this is used to actually acquire, it acquires.

Bava Metzia 74a

Rashi explains that *situmta* means a label that was marked onto the wine merchant’s barrels to indicate that a customer had purchased this part of his inventory. Rabbeinu Chananel,⁵ however, suggests that *situmta* is a handshake that merchants commonly

do to indicate the closing of a deal. He adds that so too, any other customary industry or region specific acts that demonstrate the mutual agreement of buyer and seller can also function as a halachically acceptable mode of acquisition, even though they aren’t outlined in scripture or in the Talmud.

There was a time when the famed 47th Street diamond industry in New York City was primarily composed of European Jews who signaled the conclusion of a deal with a handshake and an utterance of “*mazal u’beracha!* — luck and blessing!” Rabbeinu Chananel would view that industry specific custom as a legally binding method of transfer for halachic purposes, as well.

In the U.S., auto sales are generally concluded with the signing of a lease or document of sale. Accordingly, even though use of a contract is not a recognized mode of acquisition for a car purchase in the eyes of halacha, it would be recognized as a binding *kinyan situmta* by virtue of it being the customary method of transaction. It follows, therefore, that our *mechirat chametz* incorporates both a signature and a handshake as an additional way of transferring chametz from Jew to Gentile.

This *kinyan*, too, may not be independently sufficient for our *mechira*. Inasmuch as the source for this mode of acquisition is a single section of the aforementioned Talmud, not all Rishonim interpret this passage as teaching us this new type of *kinyan*. The Ritva, indeed, offers an alternate explanation: *situmta* is merely a token that merchants hand to one another as a *kinyan chalipin*. The Ritva concludes his explanation by stating that customary modes of transaction do not have the capacity

to substitute for an established, Torah-acceptable *kinyan*.

Kinyan Agav

In the effort to cover all bases, yet another *kinyan* is employed in the sale of chametz — *agav* — which literally means “on the back of,” but can be understood as a “piggyback transfer.” Consider the beracha recited on a bagel with cream cheese. Inasmuch as the cream cheese is secondary to the main food, the bagel, a beracha is recited only on the bagel, but extends to cover the cream cheese as well. This obviates any need for an independent beracha on the *tafel*, secondary food, the cream cheese, because it piggybacks on the *ikar*, primary food. Similarly, explains R’ Shimon Shkop,⁶ the variety of possession in this world can be divided into two populations: real estate, and everything else. As the word “real” estate indicates, land ownership is in a position of significance above other possessions because it cannot be destroyed.⁷ *Kinyan agav* states that by dint of performing a *kinyan* on a piece of land, which is preeminent, the effect of that *kinyan* [the transfer of ownership] will simultaneously apply also to the less significant, moveable objects that are for sale.⁸

Accordingly, the *mechirat chametz* will include a sale or rental of any piece of land to the gentile buyer,⁹ and by dint of that real estate acquisition [which is *ikar*], the buyer will simultaneously acquire all chametz [which is *tafel*] owned by the Jewish seller, wherever that chametz may be.¹⁰

Commentators dispute whether this piggyback *kinyan* is *de’oraita*, learned from scripture, or if it was created as a rabbinic institution. If *agav* is

indeed rabbinic, its application to *mechirat chametz* may be questionable, as follows: The entire enterprise of *mechirat chametz* is in order to prevent the Torah [ie. biblical] violation of owning chametz. Accordingly, the chametz should be removed from Jewish possession by a method of transaction that the Torah itself recognizes, so that according to biblical law, the chametz items are not owned by the Jew. Would *agav*, which is not a Torah authorized *kinyan* at all, rather merely rabbinically recognized as a method of transfer, have the capacity to make the chametz leave Jewish possession in the Torah's eyes? In other words, can a rabbinic *kinyan* work to obviate a biblical prohibition? Perhaps not.

Summary of *Kinyanim*

In summary, the only definite way to transfer moveable objects [such as chametz] to a gentile is by cash payment (*kinyan kesef*) coupled with lifting each piece of chametz (*kinyan meshicha*). Since the latter is not feasible, the gentile also performs *kinyan chatzer*, *chalipin*, *situmta*, and *agav*, despite the shortfalls in each, in the hope that between all the *kinyanim*, the chametz will surely transfer from Jew to gentile.

If I Sold My Chametz, Where is the Money?

People often question the legitimacy of the chametz sale, after all, the chametz stays put, and the seller does not receive any compensation

from the alleged buyer. These issues notwithstanding, the sale is indeed for the full value of every bit of chametz. The way in which the finances are arranged are based on the Talmudic¹¹ concept of *zakef alav b'milveh*, which, loosely translated, means a down payment.

If the chametz is worth \$5,000, a down payment of [let's say] \$100 will be handed over. This will constitute a *kinyan kesef* through which the gentile will acquire all \$5,000 worth of goods at that moment [before Pesach], and the outstanding \$4,900 will be converted into a loan that is due at some later date. [The sale is absolute, such that even if the gentile defaults on the outstanding loan, the effect of the sale will not be negated].

For the purposes of a chametz sale, the ideal due date would be the night after Pesach concludes. At that time, the gentile must pay the outstanding \$4,900. If he chooses to pay in cash, the monies will be carefully divided among the sellers to compensate them for the chametz that was purchased from them. If the buyer prefers, he can repay the outstanding \$4,900, not in cash, but in the form of the \$4,900 worth of chametz that he now owns. If he chooses this latter option, which most chametz buyers do, the gentile's chametz sitting in the kitchens and pantries of the Jews' homes will revert back to its original, Jewish ownership in place of its value being returned in cash.

This financial setup enables the chametz to be entirely out of Jewish possession for the duration of Pesach,

but, if the gentile so desires, revert back to Jewish ownership immediately after the chametz prohibition expires.

The Moral of the Mechira

Rabbinic literature views chametz as symbolic of the *Yetzer Hara*, evil inclination. The dough that has been left alone until it has the opportunity to sour and rise represents man's tendency towards laziness, sloth and procrastination.

Mechirat chametz is but one of numerous attempts to rid ourselves of all chametz in our possession. It can be included with *bitul*, nullification of chametz, *bedika*, searching out chametz, and *bi'ur*, destroying chametz. May our involvement in these chametz- eradicating activities be an outward expression of our inner desire to rid ourselves of those negative traits that chametz embodies, releasing us from the shackles of bondage to our inner weaknesses, so that we may become free on this holiday of freedom.

Notes

1. Which deals with selling an animal to a gentile in order to avert the need to sacrifice its first born offspring.
2. Cited in Tosfot, *Kiddushin* 14b.
3. While there is a dispute if a gentile acquires *mitalt'lin* through cash or *meshicha*, it is agreed that he can rent real estate via cash alone [real estate purchases may require signing a document of sale in addition to a payment]. So our *mechirat chametz* will involve two cash payments: one for the chametz, and a separate payment to acquire the real estate upon which the chametz is situated.
4. There is a dispute in *Bava Metzia* 47b, whether the buyer hands the symbolic item to the seller, or vice versa.
5. Cited in Rosh, *Bava Metzia* 5:72.
6. *Sefer Sha'arei Yosher*.
7. This is reflected in secular law, as well, inasmuch as certain law codes recognize the sale/transfer of land only when a deed

Can a rabbinic *kinyan* work to obviate a biblical prohibition? Perhaps not.

is filed with the appropriate governmental authority, while all other possessions can be sold with cash alone.

8. Whereas the aforementioned *kinyan chatzer* means that land that is my possession can acquire moveable items that rest upon it, *kinyan agav* means that *as I* acquire a portion of land, the moveable items,

wherever they may be located, will transfer ownership under the umbrella act of acquisition performed on the land.

9. As discussed above in *kinyan chatzer*, there is no dispute that land can be rented to a gentile via a cash payment.

10. See *Shu't Rashba* v1:934 & 935, that even if the seller does not own land to sell or

rent to the buyer, moveable items can be transferred by allowing the buyer access to the seller's *makom kavua* — set seat in the synagogue, and piggybacking the moveable items atop that transfer.

11. *Bava Metzia* 115a, *Bava Kama* 109a.

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Making God Part of the Passover Experience

One of the most humbling experiences a parent or educator can have is spending a few minutes with an inquisitive child. The curiosity and innocence of children will often compel adults to dig deeper in search of answers.

It is for this reason that the Hagada includes a very specific set of conversations between parents and children. The framework for these discussions is all in place — however, what we do with it is up to us. Upon closer examination of the dialogue between the *arba banim* — the four children — one will discover that it follows a rigid structure. First, the child poses a question, utilizing language taken directly from the Torah. Then, we counter their question by quoting another verse from the Torah to serve as the answer.

The wise child (quoting Deuteronomy 6:20), curiously inquires of the statutes, ordinances and laws surrounding Pesach. His profound question is dignified with an answer regarding the intricate laws of the *afikoman*. This exchange stands as the paradigm of a model student eager to ask, learn and practice.

Yet when the wicked child similarly inquires (invoking the text of Exodus 12:26), “*mah ha’avodah hazot lachem* — what is this service to you?,” he is harshly reprimanded, punished and even labeled an apostate!



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Why, if the wicked child was only quoting a verse from the Torah, would he be so critically penalized? Ostensibly, by asking his question he did nothing different than the wise child who is praised for his question?

Rashi suggests that the language used by the wicked son should have been *lanu* and not *lachem*. He could have asked why do “we observe this service”; instead, he phrased his question as “why do *you people* observe this service?” It was his exclusionary tone – setting himself apart from the community, which warranted criticism.

Yet every parent knows that no two children are alike. Perhaps we should cut the *Rasha* some slack and not hold him to the same high standard as the wise child. Maybe the *Rasha* is not quite as erudite as the *Chacham* and deserves some more leniency?

The Avudraham answers that the wise and wicked sons are of equal intelligence. He notes that the order of the four children, strangely, does not follow the sequence of the Torah. The *Chacham*, listed first in the Hagada, is referenced in a verse

from Deuteronomy. The *Rasha*, listed second, is quoting a verse from Exodus. Why does the Hagada not follow the chronological order of the Torah and list the *Rasha* first?

He answers that the Hagada lists the four sons in order of their intelligence. We start with the wise, followed by the wicked, simple and finally, the one who is unable to frame a question. The Avudraham notes that in reality, the intelligence of the *Rasha* and *Chacham* are on par with one another. However, due to his deliberately wicked ways, the *Rasha* was relegated below the *Chacham*.

Nevertheless, despite his superior intelligence, one cannot help but feel as if the *Rasha* is given an overly harsh treatment. After all, we are all human and make mistakes. Nobody is perfect and when we err, we ought to be granted the opportunity to recompense. Yet when the wicked child presents his misdirected question, not only is he strongly reprimanded, but he is labeled an apostate — *kafar b’ikar* — having denied the foundations of our faith! Why does the response seem to be so

It is important to remember that the end game is not to simply fulfill the many customs, but to maintain our children's attention — for the higher purpose of connecting them to God's miracles and providence in the Exodus from Egypt.

disproportionate, particularly as his question made no allusion to denying the fundamentals of our faith?

The *Shibolei Haleket*, in his commentary on the Hagada answers that if you compare the verses of the wise and wicked child, you will notice that the wise child does not merely ask about the statutes and laws, but he concludes his question with the words “*asher tziva Hashem Elokeinu etchem*, that God our Lord commanded you.” For the wise child — God is a part of the equation! The nature of his questions informs us that he recognizes God and yearns to better understand His will. However, the wicked child chooses to deliberately leave God out of the question as he asks, “why do you people observe this service?”

The faux pas of the wicked child was that his exclusionary tone was not simply aimed at himself vis-à-vis the Jewish community, but it was aimed at separating himself from God. For him, God was neither present in Egypt, nor today at the Pesach Seder. The wicked child resentfully sits at the Seder and does not see his past or his destiny. He sees a group of outdated people carrying on with songs and traditions that appear completely irrelevant in his atheistic worldview. For that reason he is labeled an apostate and must be challenged.

By contrast, we get a better sense of the wise son's question when we look at the whole verse containing the wise son's question:

כִּי יִשְׁאַלְךָ בִּנְךָ מָחָר לֵאמֹר מָה הָעֲדוֹת וְהַחֻקִּים
וְהַמִּשְׁפָּטִים אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ אֲתָכֶם.
דְּבָרִים ו':כ

If your son shall ask you tomorrow saying: What are the testimonies, statutes and laws that God our Lord commanded you.

Deut. 6:20

What is the relevance of the ostensibly superfluous word *machar*, tomorrow, which is found both in reference to the wise and simple sons, but not the wicked?

The *Kli Yakar* (Exodus 13:14) suggests that the term *machar* implies that the wise child only asks ex-post-facto, after having actively participated in the commandments. His observance is not conditional upon someone proving the existence of God to him. The wise child is the epitome of the Sinai generation who declared *na'aseh v'nishmah*, we will do and then we will hear — whose faith in God was so foundational, that he would gladly take action first, only to ask questions later.

Empowering Children to Ask Difficult Questions

This is an important concept in Jewish education. For millennia we have taught our young children to go through the motions of reciting blessings, prayers and fulfilling rituals at an early age — even though they do not fully understand the reason or meaning behind them. The goal is to

orient and acclimate them, so that as they grow and develop, they will be able to integrate the presence of God into their daily actions.

The Gemara in *Pesachim* (109b, 114a) explains that additional customs, such as lifting the matzah or dipping our food twice, are innovations added to the Seder experience for no inherent reason, other than to pique the curiosity of the children and keep them engaged. Within this context, it is important to remember that the end game is not to simply fulfill the many customs, but to maintain our children's attention — for the higher purpose of connecting them to God's miracles and providence in the Exodus from Egypt.

In listing the 613 mitzvot, the Rambam writes:

מצוה ראשונה ממצוות עשה לידע שיש שם
אלוה-ה' שנ' אנכי ה'.

The first positive commandment is to know that there is a God as it states “I am God...”

As a child, I recall asking questions about God and being told not to ask, for in the minds of my teachers, the questions themselves suggested that I was a non-believer. This could not be farther from the truth, as I was genuinely curious and yearning for answers. Many of our children today are receiving wonderful Jewish educations and upbringings, where their minds are being fed, but too often, their hearts

and souls are not being sufficiently nurtured. That there exists in society the notion of bifurcating the two entities of religious observance and relationship with God seems unimaginable. It is for this reason that that just like the *Chacham*, our children, whether at the Seder, or throughout the year, should be encouraged to ask questions and talk openly about what faith, belief and trust in Hashem means. A 1995 research study published in the *Journal of Psychological Reports*, found that children, regardless of which cognitive developmental stage they are in, have the ability to comprehend and learn about faith in God (Pierce & Cox).

Many parents have told me that they are afraid to discuss the concept of God with their children because they simply do not feel equipped to properly answer their questions. “What if they ask me something I do not know?— I don’t want my ignorance to cause them to stop believing in God!”

However, I once heard a great insight in the words of *Ein K’Elokeinu*, which children are encouraged to sing as part of the concluding morning prayers. Logically, the passage should first ask, “Who is like our God, Who is like our master, Who is like our king,”

to be followed by the answer of “*Ein K’Elokeinu* — there is none like our God.” Yet the prayer opens with the answer first, as if to lay the foundation of faith that there is none like God. When one acts as the *Chacham*, they first affirm their belief in God. Once we declare what we believe and feel some security in our decision, can we then be free to ask the important questions and explore our faith further from a place of comfort.

The Seder demonstrates that it is the *modus operandi* of the *Rasha* to blatantly refrain from asking any questions about God — instead he completely ignores God’s existence. On the other hand, it is the *Chacham* who strives to know more about Hashem. Asking a question is not a lack of faith — it is a declaration of one’s thirst to know more.

One of the highlights of our family’s weekly Shabbat table is a discussion about our encounters with *hashgacha pratit*, Divine intervention. The tone of such conversations, where we can share inspiring moments wherein we felt a real connection to Hashem, conveys the presence of God in our everyday lives. It reassures our children that it is safe to talk about God and encourages them to seek a personal relationship with their creator.

Yetziat Mitzrayim as a Lesson in Faith

There is a common misconception that the name of Moshe does not appear at all in the Hagada. In truth, it appears one time in passing, while quoting a verse describing the splitting of the Sea. It is certainly no accident that Moshe’s name is generally omitted from the Hagada. This is done so that one should not be misled to believe that redemption was brought about by Moshe, when in fact, it was the hand of God. This further emphasizes the importance of maintaining a true focus during the Seder on our personal and collective relationships with God.

The Vilna Gaon notes that that the singular appearance of Moshe’s name is specifically in the following verse:

וַיֵּרָא יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת-הַיָּד הַגְּדֹלָה, אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה ה' בְּמִצְרַיִם, וַיֵּרָאוּ הָעָם, אֶת-ה'; וַיֹּאמְרוּ, בְּה', וּבְמֹשֶׁה, עַבְדּוֹ.
שמות יד:לא

And Israel saw the great work which the Lord did upon the Egyptians, and the people feared the Lord; and they believed in the Lord, and in His servant Moses.

Exodus 14:31

The only time on Seder night that we reference Moshe is in the verse that first declares Jewish people’s awareness and belief in God. Only after that disclaimer has been made and we are reminded of the primacy of our faith, can we mention Moshe. Even at that, Moshe is described as *avdo* — the servant of God, further solidifying the point that the focus during the Seder is on Hashem.

This can be further seen in the manner in which the plagues were carried out. Consider the fact that if Hashem truly wished to free the Jewish people with



one swift and harsh plague, He could have saved a lot of time in doing so. Why then did Hashem employ a slow and drawn-out Exodus process over the course of 10 plagues?

The Abarbanel, Shemot ch. 10, teaches that the purpose of the plagues was not merely to punish the Egyptians, but to show the Jewish people that God created and continues to actively watch over the world.

This notion of finding God can be seen in the narrative throughout the unfolding of the plagues.

In anticipation of the plagues, Hashem told Moshe:

וַיִּדְעוּ מִצְרַיִם כִּי-אֲנִי ה', בְּנִסְתִּי אֶת-יָדִי עַל-
מִצְרַיִם:

And the Egyptians shall know that I am God, when I stretch forth My hand upon Egypt. (7:5)

With the plague of **blood**, the Torah states: (7:17)

בְּזֹאת תִּדְעֶה, כִּי אֲנִי ה'.

With this they will know that I am the Lord.

With the plague of **frogs** the Torah states: (8:6)

לְמַעַן תִּדְעֶה, כִּי-אֵין כֵּה' אֶלְקֵינוּ.

So they will know that there is none like God.

With the plague of wild **beasts**: (8:18)

לְמַעַן תִּדְעֶה, כִּי אֲנִי ה' בְּקִרְבֵּי הָאָרֶץ.

So they will know that I am God throughout the land.

With the plague of **hail**: (9:14)

בְּעִבּוֹר תִּדְעֶה כִּי אֵין כְּמוֹנִי בְּכֹל הָאָרֶץ.

In order that they know that there are none like Me in all the land.

With the plague of **locusts**: (10:2)

וַיִּדְעֻתֶם, כִּי-אֲנִי ה'.

And they will know that I am God.

More than the message of freedom, the essence of Pesach is to see Hashem in the pages of the Hagada and appreciate the love that He has for us. There is no better time than when surrounded by family at the Seder and among the warmth of many Pesach meals to engage in these important conversations. We do so, not with

skepticism, but with genuine curiosity, relating to each of the four children on their own level.

If we are honest about it, we will acknowledge that nearly every child will naturally have questions. However, unlike any prior generation, today they have unfettered access to finding their own answers. This is where Pesach provides a golden opportunity. Amid an evening replete with significant customs and practices, it can be easy to get swept away in the details and minutiae of Seder night. Therefore, rather than leaving it to our children to turn to their friends Google and Siri to discover their own answers to life's questions, the Seder empowers every adult to accept their responsibility to pass the torch of faith to the next generation.



A Haggadah Lesson in Divine Justice

Y*etziat Mitzrayim*, the account of our Exodus from Egypt, may be taken as a local story, of interest specifically to Jews. From the plague of blood through the miraculous march out of Egypt, G-d fulfilled His pledge¹ to free Avraham's children from their captivity, to judge their captors and to ensure that the Jews emerged with great wealth.

On a second level, in a narrative which has been adopted by enslaved and suffering populations for centuries, *yetziat Mitzrayim* is a Divine rejection of brutal slavery. Notwithstanding the Torah's own version of slavery, we are commanded to remember the abuses we suffered in Egypt, and to avoid emulating them ourselves.² This provides a lesson for mankind.

And on a third level, *yetziat Mitzrayim* is a story of justice, of Divine supervision of our world, and of punishment for the guilty. It is a story not only of human behavior, but also an insight into Divine conduct. This facet of the story is made most clear by an oft-overlooked portion of the Haggadah, as it is explained by Rabbi Naftali Tzvi Yehudah Berlin.

Haggadah Mathematics

Toward the end of Maggid, after listing the Ten Plagues and before singing Dayyenu, Jews the world over recite the views of three sages who counted how many times the Egyptians were struck in Egypt and at



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the Sea. As the traditional text of the Haggadah reads:³

רבי יוסי הגלילי אומר מנין אתה אומר שלקו המצרים במצרים עשר מכות ועל הים לקו חמשים מכות? במצרים מה הוא אומר, "ויאמרו החרטמים אל פרעה אצבע אלקיים היא." ועל הים מה הוא אומר? "וירא ישראל את היד החזקה אשר עשה ד' במצרים וייראו העם את ד' ויאמינו בד' ובמשה עבדו." כמה לקו באצבע? י' מכות. אמור מעתה במצרים לקו עשר מכות ועל הים לקו חמשים מכות. רבי אליעזר אומר מנין שכל מכה ומכה שהביא הקב"ה על המצרים במצרים היתה של ארבע מכות? שנאמר "ישלח בם חרון אפו עברה וזעם וצרה משלחת מלאכי רעים." אפו עברה אחת, וזעם שתיים, וצרה שלש, משלחת מלאכי רעים ארבע. אמור מעתה במצרים לקו ארבעים מכות ועל הים לקו מאתיים מכות. רבי עקיבא אומר מנין שכל מכה ומכה שהביא הקב"ה על המצרים במצרים היתה של חמש מכות? שנאמר "ישלח בם חרון אפו עברה וזעם וצרה משלחת מלאכי רעים." חרון אפו אחת. עברה שתיים. וזעם שלש. וצרה ארבע. משלחת מלאכי רעים חמש. אמור מעתה במצרים לקו חמשים מכות ועל הים לקו חמשים ומאתים מכות

Rabbi Yosi HaGlili said: How do you know that the Egyptians were struck with ten plagues in Egypt, and fifty upon the sea? In Egypt it says, "And the chartumim said to Pharaoh: It is

the finger of G-d." Upon the sea it says, "And Israel saw the strong hand G-d had performed to the Egyptians, and the nation feared G-d, and they trusted G-d and Moshe His servant." How many times were they struck with the "finger"? Ten blows. Then in Egypt they were struck ten times, and upon the sea they were struck fifty times.

Rabbi Eliezer said: How do you know that each blow G-d brought upon Egypt was of four blows? Tehillim 78:49 says, "He sent upon them the ferocity of His anger: Evrah, za'am, tzarah, harmful angels." 'Evrah' is one, 'za'am' is two, 'tzarah' is three, 'harmful angels' is four. Then in Egypt they were struck forty times, and upon the sea they were struck two hundred times.

Rabbi Akiva said: How do you know that each blow G-d brought upon Egypt was of five blows? Tehillim 78:49 says, "He sent upon them the ferocity of His anger, evrah, za'am, tzarah, harmful angels." 'The ferocity of His anger' is one, 'evrah' is two, 'za'am' is three, 'tzarah' is four, 'harmful angels' is five. Then in Egypt they were struck fifty times, and upon the sea they were struck two hundred and fifty times.



The blows inflicted upon Egypt at the Sea provide a lesson that we are meant to convey to our descendants.

Like much of the Haggadah, this passage originates in a midrashic explanation of Tehillim 78:49;⁴ indeed, at first blush it seems to say far more about that verse than about *yetziat Mitzrayim*. How do the descriptions of Divine punishment recorded in Tehillim contribute to the retelling of our departure from Egypt? And the intent of Rabbi Yosi haGlili, Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Akiva is opaque; in what way were the Egyptians struck fifty, two hundred or two hundred and fifty times at the Sea?

Understanding our Passage

Rabbi Naftali Tzvi Yehudah Berlin⁵ offered insight into this midrash. Rabbi Berlin, also known as Netziv, contended that when the sages said that the Egyptians were struck multiple times, they meant that members of the Egyptian nation suffered a great variety of punishments. Each type of punishment was targeted to a particular element of the Egyptian population, based on its conduct toward their Jewish slaves. He wrote:⁶

הגיע לכל א' מרודפי ישראל מיתה משונה לפי מעשיו שהרעו לישראל בהיותם בקרבם. ועל זה אנו אומרים בברכת ק"ש "את רודפיהם ואת שונאיהם בתהומות טבע." היינו חיל המלוכה נקראו "רודפיהם" שלא משנאה עשו אלא בעבודת המלוכה, אבל שאר המון מצרים מכונים "שונאיהם", ומי שנתחייב על פי רשעו נטבע וגם מת בהשגחה במיתה הראויה לעונשו.

Each of the pursuers of Israel met an unusual death, according to the way he had harmed Israel when they had lived in Egypt. Thus we say in the blessings of Shema, "He drowned their pursuers and their enemies in the depths." The king's forces are termed "pursuers" because they acted not out of hatred but out of service to the king; the rest of the Egyptians are called "enemies." One who was liable for his wickedness drowned, but also

died under Divine supervision, with an appropriate punishment.

In other words, Rabbi Yosi haGlili, Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Akiva were not only justifying the wording of Tehillim 78:49; they were also demonstrating that the Egyptians were punished for their crimes, measure-for-measure, at the Sea.

Netziv's read is consistent with the introduction to this passage in *Shemot Rabbah*, which invokes Tehillim 9:17, "G-d is known, He has performed justice." It also matches the introduction to this passage in *Mechilta d'Rabbi Yishmael*, "And Israel saw Egypt, dead' — abnormal deaths, each death harsher than the next, for He brought many blows upon them at the sea."

The explanation offered by Netziv also matches a related midrash on the experience of the Egyptians in the waters of the Sea:⁷

ירדו במצולות כמו אבן. זו כת בינונית שבהן
כשרים שבהן מיטרפין כקש. בינוניים כאבן.
רשעים צללו כעופרת...
"They descended in the depths like stone"
— this was the intermediate group. The
kosher among them were thrown about
as straw, the intermediate as stone, the
wicked sank like lead.⁸

The message of this midrash, then, is not only a commentary to Tehillim 78:49 or an exercise in "Can you top this?" mathematics. Rabbi Yosi haGlili, Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Akiva want the student to understand that Divine justice is highly attuned to the actions of the individual, as was displayed at the Sea.⁹

"You Shall Tell your Child"

Rambam omitted this passage from his Haggadah, consistent with his statement in *Mishneh Torah*¹⁰ that the

mitzvah of Pesach night is to speak of the miracles performed on the night of the fifteenth of Nisan, specifically. As Rabbi Hershel Schachter has explained,¹¹ this narrow focus is a function of the Torah's instruction¹² to tell our children and grandchildren of G-d's actions "in Egypt."

However, with Netziv's explanation, we may suggest that this passage does fit with the events in Egypt, even though it describes events which took place a week later. G-d promised Avraham, "I will judge the nation whom [the Jews] will serve." In that light, the events at the Sea are a necessary part of the Exodus itself, and not a separate story: they illustrate the promised Divine justice, and so they form an integral part of the story.

To return to our opening remarks, Rabbi Yosi haGlili, Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Akiva highlight the lesson in Divine conduct embodied in *yetziat Mitzrayim*. Beyond serving as the coda for our personal Egypt experience and the Divine rejection of abusive slavery, the blows inflicted upon Egypt at the Sea provide a lesson that we are meant to convey to our descendants. The Torah commands us, "And you shall tell your children on that day" of the miracles G-d performed on our behalf, and you shall also tell them of the justice G-d executed.

This lesson in justice remains important in our own day. Our children perceive a world in which the innocent are abused, and their abusers often seem to escape penalty. Here, our sages offer an alternative look at the world. There are many means at Divine disposal, and G-d is watching the deeds of humanity. The denouement will not always be visible, but at least once in our history we were able to witness the hand of

Divine justice as it delivered to each person that which he deserved.

May we merit to see the day when not only is Divine punishment visibly inflicted, but when Divine reward will be likewise demonstrated before the eyes of the world.

Notes

1. Bereishit 15:13-14.
2. See Devarim 24:17-22.
3. Rambam omits this in the edition of the Haggadah appearing in *Mishneh Torah*; we will return to this point later.
4. Varying editions appear in *Shemot Rabbah* 23:9, *Mechilta d'Rabbi Yishmael, Beshalach* 6, *Mechilta d'Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai* 14:31 and *Midrash Tehillim* 78:15.
5. *Birkat haNetziv, Mechilta d'Rabbi Yishmael Beshalach* 6.
6. Ibid.
7. *Mechilta d'Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai* 15:5.
8. It is worth noting that Rashi to Shemot 15:5, reverses this midrash, claiming that the better Egyptians died more quickly.
9. Netziv also uses this explanation to analyze Shemot 14:31, "And Israel saw that mighty Hand G-d had wielded against Egypt, and the nation feared G-d, and they believed in G-d and in Moshe, His servant." Per Netziv, the Jews were impressed by the degree to which the punishment of the Egyptians aligned with their crimes. This broadcast a message: G-d watches the deeds of each individual, and He punishes wrongdoing based on its specific character. This was more impressive than the broad miracles performed when we left Egypt; the range of sentences testified to Divine attention on an individual level. As impressive as our salvation was, the destruction of the Egyptians was still more striking. This approach is similar to the view of Rabbi Elazar in *Sotah* 11a, that Yitro was most impressed by the way Egypt was destroyed in a measure-for-measure manner consistent with their crimes.
10. *Hilchot Chametz uMatzah* 7:1.
11. *Masorah* 3 (Nisan 5750), pg. 27-28.
12. Shemot 10:2.

Yachatz: Superfluous or Significant?

Yachatz has long troubled me. While it seems simple at face value and it seems to get lost in the gallimaufry of Seder activities, behind Chad Gadya, it's perhaps the strangest thing we do at the Seder. Why do we break the matzah? On Shabbos and Yom Tov, we are so careful about using only whole challoos or matzahs for *lechem mishneh*, why not tonight? And more troubling — why do we need a ceremony to break the matzah? We don't have a ceremony of putting the wine or the silverware on the table? Or for that matter placing the three whole matzahs initially on the table! Clearly, there are certain things that are preparatory stages that need to be done before we can even begin the Seder, putting a tablecloth on the table for example, so why don't we simply use one of the broken matzos in the box instead of breaking a perfectly good whole one?

Furthermore, on all other nights of Shabbos and Yom Tov, we have two loaves — why do we have three matzahs to begin with? Additionally, why do we break the middle matzah? What's wrong with the top or the bottom? And why is this matzah used for the *afikoman*? Do we just need to do something with it or is there a more intimate, closer connection? And why the bigger piece for the *afikoman*? Finally, why do we then hide the *afikoman*?

It seems that *yachatz* is more than just



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a preparatory stage for the Hagada and the mitzvos that follow, but it is in fact the great divide that informs, influences and inspires the very nature of the Seder night.

The concept and significance of using a broken matzah on Pesach emerges from the Gemara, *Pesachim* 115b, where the Gemara expounds upon the term the Torah used to describe matzah — *lechem oni* — a poor man's bread- the Gemara says *ma darko shel ani biprusa* etc., just as a poor man normally eats only a piece not a whole matzah, so too, on Pesach, because it's called *lechem oni* — we use a piece instead of a whole.

It's now clear why we use only a piece instead of a whole on Pesach as we do on other holidays, but a new difficulty emerges. If the definition of bread on Pesach is a piece instead of a whole, why don't we use pieces exclusively and no whole matzahs on Pesach?

Taking a step backwards, what is the source that we use any whole matzahs? The Gemara states:

הכל מודים בפסח שמיניה פרוסה בתוך שלמה
ובוצע מאי טעמא לחם עני כתיב.
ברכות לט:

All opinions concur that on Pesach you put the broken piece of matzah inside a whole one and make hamotzi. What is the reason? Because the verse states "bread of affliction."

Brachos 39b

Clearly, both a whole matzah and a broken piece are used. Why this change in practice on Pesach?

The Rishonim explain that we make a compromise on Pesach. On the one hand, we need to use a whole matzah in order to satisfy the requirement for *lechem mishneh* as we do on every other Shabbos or Yom Tov. On the other hand it says *lechem oni*, teaching us that we need to use a piece as a poor man does. Therefore, we place the whole matzah and the piece together.

The details of this compromise however, are the subject of a dispute among the rishonim, and directly relate to understanding the issue of *yachatz*. The fundamental dispute is whether on Pesach you use one and a half matzahs or two and a half matzahs. According to most Rishonim, Rashi, Rashbam and Tosfos to *Pesachim* 116a, as well as

Rosh, *Pesachim* 10:30, you need two and a half matzahs. You use the broken piece for the bracha of *Achilas Matzah*, the aspect of the eating of the matzah that is unique to Pesach and you use the two whole matzahs for the bracha of Hamotzi. The aforementioned Gemara in *Brachos* seems to indicate that Hamotzi on Seder night can't be inferior to other holidays when we make the bracha on *lechem mishneh*, two whole loaves. In practice, this means we hold all of the matzahs during the first bracha of Hamotzi so that we have a full *lechem mishneh* with the top and the bottom and we drop the bottom one to focus on the broken piece during the second bracha of *achilas Matzah*.

However, the Rambam disagrees. In *Hilchos Chametz UMatzah* (8:6) the Rambam writes that you take two whole matzahs and break one of them (obviously not the middle one) and put the piece together with the whole and make the bracha of Hamotzi. The Rambam proceeds, in uncharacteristic style, to ask a question on himself: why don't you need two whole loaves, as is normally required on Shabbos and Yom Tov? The Rambam explains that since the Torah uses the term *lechem oni*, on Pesach we act like the poor man. Just like a poor man uses a piece, so too, we use a piece for Hamotzi on Pesach.

A fascinating *machlokes* thus emerges. According to Rashi, the halachic requirement of *lechem oni* is an added requirement to the standard *lechem mishneh* requirement and therefore, in order to satisfy both, we need to add a matzah. According to the Rambam, however, the two requirements are in fact conflicting and the requirement of using a broken piece on Pesach reveals to us that in fact there is no obligation to have *lechem mishneh* on Pesach.

Therefore, we have only one and a half matzahs.

The Vilna Gaon in his *Biur HaGra* to *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim* 473:4, points out that the Rambam is appealing in the sense that it is difficult to explain that *lechem oni*, the requirement to have poor man's bread actually requires us to use more matzah than usual. It certainly seems more logical to assume that it would decrease the number of matzahs we use from two to one. However, one must still understand according to the Rambam, if there is no requirement of *lechem mishneh* then why do we even need to have one whole matzah, just use two broken pieces and mimic the life of the poor man even more accurately?!

There is an additional *machlokes* between Rashi and the Rambam related to *yachatz* that may come as a bit of a surprise and we need to understand if it in fact relates to the previous *machlokes*. They in fact argue when to do *yachatz* (interesting that everyone seems to agree that it's irrefragable that we don't simply start out the night with a broken piece, and there must be a formal breaking of the matzah). The *Beis Yosef, Orach Chaim*, no. 473, explains that according to Rashi, the matzah is broken immediately prior to Maggid following *karpas*. The Rambam, however, disagrees. He writes that after you wash *netilas yadayim*, you break the matzah (*yachatz*) and only then do you make Hamotzi. You do *yachatz* after Maggid not before!

In truth, the Rambam's opinion is quite compelling. Once it is a given that we don't start off the night with a pre-broken matzah—wouldn't the most logical time to prepare it for use for *achilas matzah* be immediately prior to

eating it—why would we do it before Maggid? Maggid has nothing to do with the matzah. Why not wait until you need it and then break it and prepare it for the bracha on eating the matzah?

It appears that a fundamental *machlokes* exists between Rashi and the Rambam as to the function of *yachatz* vis-a-vis the obligation to have a broken matzah at the Seder. The Rambam understands that the obligation to have *lechem oni* is part of the mitzvah of eating the matzah. Therefore, we demonstrate the aspect of it being a poor man's piece after Rabban Gamliel's statement explaining why we have matzah, and immediately before we are going to eat the matzah.

Rashi, however, disagrees and understands that *lechem oni* is not a halacha that informs the nature of eating the matzah on the Seder night. Rather, it relates to the overall experience of the night, of reliving the experience of slavery and redemption. We relive the experience throughout Maggid. As such, when do we break the matzah? Not just right before Maggid, but before *Ha Lachma Anya* — the paragraph in which we announce that this is the bread that was eaten by our forefathers **in Egypt**. This is a very different reason than the one given in the Rabban Gamliel paragraph where we proclaim that this is the matzah that was eaten as our forefathers **left Egypt**, because they were hurried and unable to let the dough rise and could only eat matzah.

Both reasons for eating matzah are true and each has a different role in the Seder. The *machlokes* about when to perform *yachatz* is about which aspect of *lechem oni* we want to stress when we break the matzah.

The issue about the nature of *lechem*

oni seems to hinge on the second interpretation that Chazal derive from *lechem oni*. In the very same *sugya* (topic of discussion) where the Gemara states that *lechem oni* refers to a broken piece, the Gemara states that *lechem oni* refers to *lechem sheonim alav devarim harbeh*, the bread upon which many things are said. Rambam understands that both derivations relate solely to the mitzvah of eating matzah on the Seder night. In order to fulfill the mitzvah of matzah, we need to describe why we eat the matzah — as we do in the Rabban Gamliel paragraph — because we left Mitzrayim in a hurried manner. When eating the matzah, we also must fulfill the second *drasha* of taking a broken piece, like poor man's bread. Therefore, the Rambam says that we break the matzah at the point immediately following Rabban Gamliel's declaration before we make the bracha on the matzah because that's when it becomes relevant. There would be no additional benefit to breaking the matzah before Maggid than if we did so before the seder!

Rashi also understands that the

two derivations work together but that *lechem sheonim alav devarim harbeh* refers to the Hagada — to the mitzvah of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim* (recounting the Exodus). We must recite the Hagada over matzah and the type of matzah upon which we need to recite the Hagada is the broken piece of matzah — the poor man's bread. The broken piece of matzah relates to the experience of leaving Mitzrayim that is so essential to the Seder night. Therefore, the logical place to break the matzah is right before the Hagada and even more precisely, immediately before we say *Ha Lachma Anya*, where we actually describe how the matzah relates to the experience of being enslaved in Egypt and in the end being redeemed.

Why don't we begin the night with the broken matzah? Why do we need a ceremony to break the matzah? According to both opinions, the breaking of the matzah is an essential part of the mitzvah because the Seder night is about experience. It is about reliving and appreciating the past. A ceremony highlights that it is not accidental that we have a broken

piece of matzah at the seder. It's not because someone leaned too hard on the matzah while passing the karpas around the table, but because we need to demonstrate that there is an aspect of matzah as it relates to the night of the Seder that reminds us of our poor status in Egypt and to where we have risen.

This also explains why we use one or more whole matzahs together with the broken piece. It is not only because of the *lechem mishneh* aspect but because there is more to matzah than just the broken piece. We juxtapose the broken to the whole reflecting the dual nature of matzah — our poor status and our redemption.

We have now answered several of our questions, but we still have some questions remaining:

- Why do we break the middle matzah? What's wrong with the top or the bottom?
- Why is this matzah used for the *afikoman*? Do we just need to do something with it or is there a more intimate, closer connection?
- Why the "bigger half"- or more

- Why do we break the middle matzah? What's wrong with the top or the bottom?
- Why is this matzah used for the *afikoman*? Why the "bigger half"- or more precisely "bigger piece" for the *afikoman*?
- Why do we hide the *afikoman*?



precisely “bigger piece” for the *afikoman*?

- Why do we then hide the *afikoman*?

I would like to offer what I hope is not only a comprehensive answer for all of these questions, but a deeper level of understanding of all the questions we’ve asked and to understand how *yachatz* as a whole is in fact the great divide, an essential part of our Seder experience.

Certainly, there is a relationship between the two halves of the matzah. The smaller part we will use for the mitzvah of matzah and the larger part, we put away and hide for the *afikoman*, the climax of the seder, which stands instead of the korban Pesach and represents that *geulah* we hope and pray and yearn for. But the depth of the relationship and the journey from slavery to redemption needs to be better understood.

In his book entitled *The Pursuit of Perfect*, Dr. Tal Ben-Shahar explains that the path to happiness in life is not always the one we plan or wish for. We all hopefully have goals and aspirations — personally, communally and nationally. We have a picture in our mind’s eye of where we want to get to and what we want to achieve in life. We also all, presumably, want to live happy lives.

The crux of the book relevant to our topic is the role of failure in life. Nobody likes to fail or make mistakes in life, but different people react

We must learn to fail and pass that lesson on to the next generation as well.

differently when things don’t go quite right. There are those perfectionists for whom failure has no role in reaching the pinnacle they are striving for. The ideal path to reach the goal is the shortest, most direct path — a straight line. Anything that comes up along the way and impedes progress towards the goal is unwelcome — it is an obstacle to reaching a goal.

But there can be someone else who has the exact same goal — no less ambition in life, but he or she understands that realistically, failure is an inevitable part of the journey — the “optimalist” (not optimist, but optimalist). He realizes that the optimal realistic journey is not a straight line, but rather some sort of imperfect irregular spiral that moves upward. While ultimately, this person will reach his or her goal, the knowledge that there will inevitably be deviations along the road is ever present. Success gives us satisfaction, but it is failures that make us flourish.

For the perfectionist, achieving the goal is the only thing that is of import. The process of getting there is meaningless. It is simply a necessary component of reaching the goal. The journey involves avoiding obstacles, mistakes and pitfalls that could slow down and get in the way of reaching the peak. There is no enjoyment in the process, nor can there be, because the only perceived source of happiness is reaching the milestone. The optimalist, who may very well be reaching and striving to the exact same goal differs in that he can value the journey as well. The path that leads to the destination can be filled with detours, some desirable, others not. But much of life is the journey, not the destination, and it is that which is learned, appreciated and taken in along the path that may have a larger

long-term effect on one’s outlook, one’s new goals or aspirations, than actually arriving at the destination.

Failure is not just inevitable on the road to success — it is essential to achieving success. We have two options in life: “learn to fail, or fail to learn.” But we don’t have a choice. We must learn to fail and pass that lesson on to the next generation as well.

The hand of G-d in this world is often hidden. We picture for ourselves as individuals or for our children a beautiful scene of serenity and happiness. We picture for Am Yisrael, on a national level, a beautiful serene peaceful destiny. Yet all too often, the reality does not match the picture. Things don’t go so perfectly or smoothly, there are speed bumps or even giant boulders thrown in our path that we could never have or would have wanted to imagine, but now the reality of life is that we must deal with what we are dealt. Why G-d does it we can never know, but that He wants to see how we learn from our failures or from obstacles we face is our responsibility and mission.

As a nation, just look at our Pesach story, the story of the Exodus from Egypt. Talk about an irregular spiraling pattern to eventually reach a destination! Forty years in the desert. Let’s put this in perspective. From Cairo, Egypt to Yerushalayim is 264 miles. Buffalo, NY is farther from Washington Heights than that, and neither Cairo nor Yerushalayim are border cities. How long should it have taken? A week, and if moving slowly a little longer. Yet it took 40 years! And whenever we are in exile, it’s the same thing. There’s a long journey, a painful one. Certainly our current exile from after the destruction of the Second Beis Hamikdash until today has seen

so many obstacles along the way: the Crusades, pogroms, the Holocaust, and terrorism. We are required to learn along the way as we journey confident that there is a destination, but the path Hashem has taken us on, somehow for our own good is not the short direct line, but a very circuitous one. If we choose to be the perfectionist and are unable to rise when stumbling along the way, our chance to have growth and *simchas hachayim*, a joy in life, is severely threatened. We need to be optimalist people who see the goal and yearn for it, but will adjust and learn at every step along the way.

Yachatz — We break the matzah to show that the path to geulah is not a perfect circle like a beautiful round matzah (or even a perfect square matzah). It has many breaks in it, it involves hardship, it involves difficulty and we are challenged at many different junctures along the path.

However, simultaneously, we need to show and express our reaction to those breaks. We take the broken part and we save it for the *afikoman*. The *afikoman* is the matzah that represents the korban Pesach. It represents our hopes for the future, *leshana haba'ah beyirushalayim*. But we still hide the *afikoman* because as much as we believe *be'emunah shleimah*, with full faith, that Hashem is orchestrating events in this world, that there is a plan and these obstacles are part of the journey that will bring about the ultimate redemption, how the plan comes together and how we'll merit reaching our destination is hidden.

Therefore, the piece of matzah reminds us that although our path in life may have breaks, Hashem is there guiding us in a hidden way and so we put that away for the future.

But we hide the bigger part. Why?

Because we express our realization that more in this life-long journey is hidden than revealed. The world at times seems so cruel. We seem to get closer and then we move farther. There is so much we don't understand so we save the piece and hide it to show that we realize it's all part of one journey, one story, one matzah, but the bigger piece is the one hidden from view.

Perhaps that is also why we break the middle matzah. It is that one that is hidden in the middle of the whole matzahs showing that even the revealed part of life, that which we see, has an element of unclarity and indecision. It's not hidden away like the *afikoman*, yet is covered by the other matzahs.

Yachatz is not an afterthought or merely a preparation for having a broken piece and an *afikoman* for the later stages of the Hagada. It, in fact, sets the tone for the entire night and carries within it the secret of Jewish success as individuals and our entire nation. It is the demonstration for all to see that the same pattern always repeats itself: that Hashem has a plan for us, one that we are not privy to the details, but our *emunah* and resolve in the knowledge that He is doing what is best for us keeps us going. It is the two elements of matzah, of *avdus*, the broken piece the bread our fathers ate in slavery in Egypt, and the *lechem sheonim alav devarim harbeh*, the bread that we ate in our redemption, that contains the secret to our current exile. The broken matzah symbolizes all the breaks in the path, but the bigger part, the clarity of redemption, is part of the very same mission but hidden away in that piece of *afikoman*, hopefully to be revealed *b'meheirah v'yameinu*.



Reflections on **Yom Haatzmaut**



From L'Shana Haba'ah to Hatikva: An Expression of Hope and Prayer on Exalted Nights

I clearly remember the last Pesach Seder before we made aliyah six years ago. We reached the culminating point where everyone joyously sings together *L'Shana haba'ah B'Yerushalayim*, which obviously had deeper meaning for us that year. But then I began to wonder, what do people who are already living in Israel, specifically Yerushalayim, say if they are already there? What about tourists and visitors who are spending Pesach in Yerushalayim?

The same can be said for the end of Yom Kippur, which in of itself is a question – what makes Yom Kippur and Pesach night unique as the only two times throughout the year we include this as a set part of our liturgy?

The Gemara describes when the future redemption will take place:

רבי אליעזר אומר ... בניסן נגאלו בתשרי
עתידין ליגאל. רבי יהושע אומר ... בניסן
נגאלו בניסן עתידין ליגאל.
ראש השנה י-יא.

R. Eliezer says ... In Nissan we were redeemed and in Tishrei, we will be redeemed. R. Yehoshua says ... In Nissan we were redeemed and in Nissan,



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we will be redeemed.

Rosh Hashana 10b- 11a

Based on this, Rabbi Yitzchak Arieli (Mashgiach of Yeshivas Mercav HaRav in Jerusalem who lived from 1896-1974), in his *Haggadah Shiras Hageula* (p.94) offers an explanation to our question. According to R' Elazar and R' Yehoshua, either Tishrei or Nissan will be the month that the redemption will take place and that is why we specifically say *L'Shana haba'ah B'Yerushalayim* on these two holidays, Yom Kippur in Tishrei and Pesach in Nissan.

However, there are several chagim in Tishrei. Why specifically choose Yom Kippur?

Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon in his *Haggadah Shiras Miriam* (p.372) also references this Gemara, but adds:

במדרש (מכילתא יד) אף הזוכר במפורש
כי ליל הסדר הוא זמן הראוי לגאולה: 'ליל
שימורים הוא לה' – בו נגאלו ובו עתידין
להיגאל.' בשני הזמנים הללו אנו זוכים להיות
זכים וטהורים. במוצאי יו"כ – לאחר תהליך
הכפרה והסליחה. בליל הסדר – לאחר
שיצאנו לחירות פנימית, השתחררנו מכל
השעבודים החיצוניים, וזכינו להתקרב אל ה'
כעת מרגישים אנו מוכנים, ומבקשים בצורה
ישירה, 'לשנה הבא בירושלים הבנויה.'

The Midrash states explicitly that Seder night is a time worthy of redemption. "It is the night where Hashem guards us," In it, we were redeemed and we will once again be redeemed. At both of these times, we have merited being clean and pure. At the conclusion of Yom Kippur, after the process of atonement and forgiveness, and on Seder night, after we have experienced an inner redemption and were freed from our external influences, we merit coming close to Hashem. At that moment we feel

This article is dedicated to my dear friend Rav Gavriel Pinchas ben Devora Zlata. May he merit a refuah shleimah.

ready and are able to request in a direct fashion: next year in a rebuilt Jerusalem.

Nonetheless, there is now one other time during the year when many proclaim *L'Shana'ah haba'ah* as part of the tefilla, on Leil Yom Ha'Atzmaut. How does Yom Ha'Atzmaut fit the paradigm we saw previously?

Let's rewind to the beginning of the Haggadah, where we can learn from a similarly worded statement to *L'Shana haba'ah B'Yerushalayim*:

השתא הכא לשנה הבא בארעא דישראל.
Now we are here. Next year, we shall be in the Land of Israel.

Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook writes:

הדברים שאינם מוכנים צריכים זמן רב להתפתחותם אבל מה שכבר מוכן בעצמותו וסיבות צדדיות מנעו מהיות ההכנה יוצאת אל הפועל תיכף כשתסור המניעה יוצא מה שמוכן כבר אל הפועל. יחוסנו לארץ ישראל איננו יחש מקרי אבל הוא יחש אלהי טבעי לנו כל הוייתנו ועצמותנו קשורות הנה בארץ חמדה וכל ריחוקנו מאדמתנו מפני חטאינו לא גרם שינוי בעצמות ערכנו והננו תמיד קשורים לאדמת קדשנו בכל טבע לבבנו ועצמותנו בארעא דישראל.
סידור עולת ראה חלק ב' עמ' רסה

Things which are not prepared require a long time to develop, but things which are inherently prepared and external factors prevent them from coming to fruition will sprout once that external factor is removed. Our relationship with the Land of Israel is not an arbitrary feeling, but rather a Divine feeling for us. Our entire essence and being is connected to the Land and our distance from it because of our sins does not change our inherent state. We are constantly connected to our holy land with all of our hearts.

Siddur Olat Raayah, vol. 2, p.265

Rav Kook understands this statement not merely as noting the facts (which may not be factual for one who lives in Israel), but rather as a prayer

and a promise. "We are praying for redemption, but we also are confident that it will surely come."¹

This same concept can be applied to our song of *L'Shana haba'ah B'Yerushalayim* — not just a declaration that we physically be present in Yerushalayim next year, but a confident prayer we will be there in the framework of the geula.

But what about those already living in Yerushalayim?

A story is told about Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook when he once went to fundraise in America. A wealthy man offered a significant donation on the condition that Rav Kook would explain to him why Yerushalaimi Jews say *L'Shana haba'ah B'Yerushalayim* at the end of the Seder and also the end of Neilah if they are already there! Rav Kook answered that we add the word "*habnuya*", for there is still time until this will be fulfilled completely. And then, he added wryly, when we say *L'Shana haba'ah B'Yerushalayim*, our intention is that our whole being should merit to be in Yerushalayim, both physically, spiritually and mentally, unlike nowadays when some can live in Yerushalayim but their mind is elsewhere, thinking about trips to America to collect money.²

Similar to Rav Kook, many commentators from the last century also add the word *habnuya* either parenthetically or with a notation specifying it as *minhag Eretz Yisrael* or *Minhag Yerushalayim*.³

The addition of *habnuya* transforms *L'Shana haba'ah* from a factual proclamation to a confident and hopeful prayer that we not only return to Eretz Yisrael, but will see the full geula with the rebuilding of the Beis Hamikdash by this time next year.

The Yom Kippur They Sang Hatikva

Interestingly, there are some communities who have the custom to sing Hatikva at the conclusion of Neila on Yom Kippur, including some Northern Tel Aviv Synagogues⁴ and the Jerusalem Great Synagogue.⁵

Rabbi Yitzchak Avigdor Ornstein (1894-1948), former Rabbi of the Western Wall, also writes⁶ about an episode that occurred at the Kotel at the end of Yom Kippur in 1945 after the blowing of the shofar and singing of *L'Shana haba'ah*, "The young men and women began singing Hatikva and other songs... they davened Maariv, and the young men and women left the Kotel area in song..."⁷

While this custom may have originated from those (secular) young men and women at the kotel,⁸ it is nonetheless an expression of yearning, prayer and tikva, hope, for a national redemption to not only return to Israel (as they currently lived there) but to receive independence in the Jewish homeland, which *L'Shana haba'ah* also represents.

Hatikva Pesach Night

In 1919, the sefer *Midrash Haggadah* was printed in Djerba, Tunisia. This Haggadah was the work of Rabbi Tzemach Cohen the 2nd (1744-1830), a Dayan, Torah scholar and Kabbalist from Djerba, and included 55 different commentaries he had collected into one work. When it was published in 1919, the printer added the song "Hatikva" to the very last page under the heading "Shir Hatikva". It was a logical inclusion, as the end of the Seder dealt with aspects of geula (i.e. *Chasal sidur Pesach* and *L'Shana*

haba'ah B'Yerushalayim), and the Jews of Northern Africa had great affinity for Naftali Herz Imber's Hatikva song.⁹ Additionally, some communities have the custom to sing *Chasal sidur Pesach* to the tune of Hatikva, although Hatikva itself they do not recite.¹⁰

While the custom may have been started erroneously and was not widespread, the fact that Hatikva was even presumed to be naturally juxtaposed with *L'Shana haba'ah B'Yerushalayim* at the end of the Seder, demonstrates *L'Shana haba'ah's* role as a communication of tikva, hopeful prayer for the redemption, on the Night of Redemption, Leil HaSeder.

L'Shana Haba'ah on Yom Ha'atzmaut

We can now understand why *L'Shana haba'ah B'Yerushalayim* is included on Yom Ha'atzmaut night. In a similar vein to Pesach and Yom Kippur, we are offering a confident prayer as we celebrate a time when we saw God shine on us "rays" of geula through the establishment of a Jewish state; Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik famously asserted that the establishment of a Jewish state was considered a great gift that God gave us.¹¹ Yom Ha'atzmaut has come to be a day that signifies our confidence in Hashem fulfilling His promise to return us to our Land, where we can freely worship Him and observe Jewish law; where

"Happy New Year" is symbolized with an apple and honey rather than the ball dropping at Times Square, and where, come December, Maoz Tzur and Haneiros Halalu are playing throughout the stores rather than songs about Santa. It is exactly at this time, on the 5th of Iyar, that we raise our voice in praise, prayer and hope – *L'Shana haba'ah B'Yerushalayim habnuya!*

The miracle of Medinas Yisrael, and all of the miracles we've seen over the last almost 67 years in the Land of Israel may only be the *aschalta d'geula* (or *aschalta d'aschalta d'geula*), the beginning of redemption, but we hope and pray this Pesach that our prayer will be answered, so that the 5th of Iyar and Yom Haatzmaut will truly be *moadim l'simcha l'geula shleimah*.

Notes

1. *The Night that Unites Haggadah*; Rabbi Aaron Goldscheider, Urim Publications 2014.
2. *Malachim Kivnei Adam*, p. 221, as noted in R. Shlomo Aviner's *Shu"t SMS "L'Shana Haba'ah B'Yerushalayim Habnuya."*
3. See Rabbi Menachem Kasher's *Haggadah Shleimah* and *Haggadat Pesach Artziyisraelit*; Rav Aviner, op. cit., notes that Rabbi Yaakov Moshe Charlop also listed *habnuya* parenthetically and Rabbi Shlomo Goren wrote it was Nusach Eretz Yisrael, as the minhag to say *L'Shana haba'ah B'Yerushalayim* began in *Chutz La'Aretz*, as those who are in Eretz Yisrael, or more accurately Yerushalayim, are already there and therefore add *habnuya*. It should also be noted that in *Haggadah Shel Pesach M'Beis Levi* p. 233, the GRI"Z was against adding *habnuya* and changing the *nusach*, claiming

it was a creation by those who feel we've already reached partial *geula* and all that remains is building the Beis Hamikdash.

4. Dov Sedan, *Ant Hu Malka Melech Malchaya* (1985) pg. 550 as cited in Arend (see note 8).
5. As told to me by Sandy Cohen.
6. Rabbi Ornstein's son, Shmuel Even-Or, compiled into book form, a diary Rabbi Ornstein had written about daily occurrences at the Kotel. Its title is *Yoman Hakotel HaMaaravi* (Jerusalem, 1968).
7. *Yoman HaKotel HaMaaravi* p. 344 as quoted in Arend (note 8). On p.388, he tells a similar episode from the following year as well.
8. See Dr. Aharon Arend, "*Minhag Shirat Hatikva Acharei Tekiat Shofar B'Motzai Yom HaKippurim*," *Daf Shvui, Universitat Bar Ilan* no. 255. Also see there for a more in depth analysis and hypothesis of the relationship between Hatikva and the shofar blowing.
9. See Dr. Aharon Arend, "*Hatikva B'Leil HaSeder*," *Daf Shvui, Universitat Bar Ilan* no. 387. Dr. Arend notes that the North African Jews' affinity to Hatikva was most likely the full original 9 stanza verse which is more religious in nature and verse than the shorter Israeli national anthem Hatikva that we know today. Also, many religious Jews were against the revised version of Hatikva, specifically for the secular tone and anti-Jewish ideology of being an *Am Chofshi*. Imber's original verse instead read "*lashuv l'erez avoteinu l'ir ba David chana*, to return to the land of our forefather, to the city where David camped." In fact, once the newer version of Hatikva became popular, the custom of Djerba to recite Hatikva Pesch night stopped. Tangentially, this is why the Yom Haatzmaut special Tefillah at night does not include the singing of Hatikva, but rather *Shir Hamaalos* (which almost was voted the Jewish national anthem at the World Zionist Congress in 1933) to the tune of Hatikva.
10. Arend, *ibid*.
11. *Nefesh HaRav* pg. 85.



Parents' Perspective on Their Children's Aliyah:

The Good, the Bad and the Ugly (It's All Good)

What motivated some of our children to make aliyah? Nothing comes from nothing.

Many of my mother's relatives emigrated from Germany to Israel prior to World War II. Due to Hitler, *yimach shemo*, my mother, as a teenager, lived in Palestine from 1936-39, where her brother was stoned in the Jaffa riots. Her father could not make a living there so he brought his family to the United States, always retaining his love and connection to Eretz Yisrael and its people. My parents were both active members of *Hapoel Hamizrachi*. My mom regularly went to Israeli dancing classes and to ulpan classes to improve her Hebrew. I am named for her Uncle Meir, and rather than give me an Anglicized version of Meir, she preferred the Hebrew name Meira — not a common name for an American Jewish girl when I was a child.

At Maimonides School in Boston, founded by Rav Soloveitchik, Hebrew language was emphasized. I had an amazing Israeli Hebrew teacher, Mar Lamdan (that was really his name!), and as a result learned to be fairly fluent in Hebrew. In those days, college students spent their junior year in Israel. My year came out right after the Six-Day War in 1967. It was not an easy decision for my parents to decide to allow me to go to Israel



Rebbetzin Meira Davis

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for a year — not only were there no cell phones then, there was barely any phone service. I spoke to them twice the whole year by going to the central post office and making an appointment to call them at a later time.

My husband and I were brought up with Bnei Akiva youth groups in our formative years. After getting married, we visited Israel for three weeks. We spoke Hebrew with our children until they were about three years old — when it became too difficult for us to convey concepts. When my husband began getting partial Sabbaticals (Pesach to Rosh Hashanah), we spent them in Yerushalayim, learning Torah and experiencing as much of Israel as we could. This certainly impacted profoundly on our children. We even showed them the graves we bought for ourselves for after 120, in Eretz HaChaim in Bet Shemesh. It came with a lesson from my husband that we are now able to keep *shemita* by owning *karka* (land) in Israel and not working it during the *shemita* year. Eight of our nine children attended Yeshiva University, Stern College or the Yeshiva University S. Daniel

Abraham Israel Program. All spent at least one year learning in Israel after high school. Batsheva, our seventh child, was the first to make aliyah during her *shana bet* year.

Here are our children's responses when asked what motivated them to make aliyah:

- I grew up in a very Zionist home and once I realized I was presented with an opportunity to make living in Israel my reality, I took it! Israel is our homeland and I love being home.
- Israel is the home of the Jewish people. For nearly 2,000 years, we were denied access to our home, but that changed in 1948.
- My husband wanted to.
- I was raised in a Modern Orthodox, Zionist home, but my schooling was predominantly Yeshivish. Because most of my friends were Yeshivish and I had opted to go to a Zionist yeshiva high school, I needed to figure out where I stood. As a high-schooler, Modern Orthodox and Yeshivish seemed like opposite sides of the spectrum. I felt neither here nor there. My parents let me

I would like to thank my husband, Rabbi Edward Davis for his collaboration on this article.

visit Israel during winter break of eleventh grade. Something clicked while I was in Israel and I just knew that it is where I belong. A huge motivating factor for me was that two of my siblings already resided in Israel.

- *Tzionut*. My husband and I, each, separately and together, wanted to make aliyah from a young age. We both believe that Jews belong in Israel and wanted to raise our family there - we wanted to “come home.”

Distance Makes the Heart...

None of our children live closer than 1,100 miles to us. Four of them have made aliyah. Akiva and Sara and family and Elana and Oren Wener and family live in Hashmonaim. Batsheva and Gilad Adamit and family live in Neve Tzuf and Ariella is in Givat Shmuel. Our other five children and their families are in the northeastern United States — Dani and Chaya in Edison, NJ, Tamar and Allan Galper in Brookline, MA, Shoshana and Marc Lerman in Riverdale, NY, Shira and Jesse Mandell in New York City and Rena and Gabi Wittlin in Kew Gardens Hills, NY.

One of our *mechutanim* jokes with us about our children making aliyah: “We taught them so many things, why is *this* what they had to listen to?”

There is a midrash in the beginning of *Lech L'chah* (Breishit Rabbah 39:7) which states that Hashem

purposefully recorded Terach's death before Avraham “made *Aliyah*.” In actuality, Avraham's father was still alive when Avraham left Charan to move to Canaan. Hashem told Avraham that He exempted Avraham from the mitzvah of *kibbud av va'em*, honoring one's parents, in order to make aliyah. In the Midrash, Hashem says “I exempt no one else from this duty.” This is a powerful midrash because of its application to the modern situation. In our family situation, we as parents are very pleased with our children's decision to make aliyah, yet we are aware of the possible Halachic issue when these two *mitzvot* conflict.

A big challenge of having family divided between two continents is the pain of physical separation for long periods of time, difficulty in sharing in each other's simchas, and for children and grandchildren to spend time with each other. Phone communication can be hampered by the big difference in time zones. My husband and I feel *bishvili nivra* WhatsApp (WhatsApp was created for me), which enables our entire family, wherever they are, to share texts, news, pictures and videos at any given moment — a treasured gift. With other audio-visual technology options, i.e. Skype, Facetime, Google Hangouts, we can “visit” and “see” each other in real time. A true bracha. For me, this reinforces the much greater sacrifice of people who made aliyah years ago and the difficulty

for their out-of-Israel family to be in contact with each other.

Recently, my dear father, Mr. Erwin Katz, a”h passed away. The funeral service was in Brookline, MA. Our children and older grandchildren in Israel — who had each contributed some thoughts to be included in the *hespedim* (eulogies) — gathered together. Via the funeral home's high quality webcast, they viewed it together and felt as if they were at the funeral.

Traveling to Israel is expensive, time-consuming and draining. It makes it much harder to visit a child to help out for a birth or a crisis or while a husband is in army reserve duty. It is difficult for us not to be able to be there when needed, but our children have grown stronger as a result and are there for each other in every way.

Two of our daughters were married around Chanukah 2013. The weddings were planned to be ten days apart in New York and Massachusetts, so everyone from Israel could be present at both simchas. Only Hashem knows when that will happen again.

The Challenges

The Talmud, *Brachot* 5a, quotes Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai:

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

R. Shimon b. Yochai says: Hashem gave three precious gifts to Israel – Torah, Eretz Yisrael and the World to Come. All three were given with struggles and challenges.

Our family is experiencing the struggles and challenges of Eretz Yisrael.

One of our *mechutanim* jokes with us about our children making aliyah: “We taught them so many things, why is *this* what they had to listen to?”

Our children's perspectives on their biggest challenges of living in Israel:

- As a family, a challenge is finding affordable housing (to purchase a home). We currently live in a place a little more affordable due to our surrounding "cousins." Many of the people in the neighboring Arab villages do not like us (putting that *very* mildly) and make life a bit more complicated. Making smart decisions (taking security measures, being careful where you drive...) and having real faith are a must.
- Getting used to a 6-day work week. Really miss those Sundays!
- Missing family members who are not with us.
- Lower salaries.
- Being far away from our family in America is the biggest challenge I believe we face on an emotional level. There are hardships we encounter now and then with the language or not having an "in" or the *protektzia* that Israelis have. We're learning things along with our kids as they experience new things we've never done — *bagruyot, tzav rishon* from the army, and so forth — so we can't provide the support Israeli parents might be able to provide to their kids. But overall, I believe the biggest challenge proves to be the emotional one of being apart from our families who live far away.
- Adapting to the new culture, education system and healthcare system. Language is also a big challenge for some of us. But the real killer here is Sunday, or the lack thereof. Saturday night is a school night, which is something we may never come to terms with.
- Being conspicuous as an American or "*olah chadashah*"

— someone who is clearly not a native Israeli. Whatever the giveaway might be, my subtle yet present accent, my Western/religious fashion sense, my ethnic look, my gentle and patient mannerisms, most Israelis eventually pick up that I was not born and bred in Israel. It might sound like a petty challenge, but here are some less-than-desired reactions I have gotten when people realize I am American:

1. The price for whatever I wanted to buy went up because American equals wealthy in their eyes.
2. Marriage proposals, because American means rich.
3. An Israeli will speak to me in broken English. Annoying, because I learned Hebrew and now the conversation will be much longer, because I can't understand the broken English. My frustration translates into: I work hard on integrating into your society – so why can't you let me blend in instead of pointing me out as a foreigner.
4. And finally the most common reaction: "You're from America? Why on earth did you move here? Are you crazy?" I don't respond to this anymore, because if someone is asking this, they don't respect your decisions in life and will not respect your response. **The bright side:** 1. Being American has the advantage of knowing English which is a necessity to get into most lucrative fields in Israel. 2. American mannerisms may be perceived as "soft" and "very un-Israeli", yet are beneficial to Israeli society. I am often complimented on my patience and gentle manner in dealing with people. 3. Native Israelis are conspicuous at times.

If my "American-ness" makes me conspicuous, so be it – there are worse things I could be.

- A teenage grandchild's perspective: Personally, my biggest challenge here in Israel is the language. Even after eight years in Israel, I still struggle so much in school and it's mostly because I have a barrier that I cannot break down when it comes to Hebrew.

No Sundays (or *Shabbat Shenit Shel Galuyot*, as we now refer to Sunday)

We are blessed that our children look for every opportunity to get together. In Israel this is particularly daunting since there are no Sundays off and the children go to school six days a week. They really appreciate Chol Hamoed and summer vacations when they have a block of days with no school.

Financial Struggles

Many *olim* take a big cut in salary to live in Israel. Living on an Israeli salary is not so easy. Real estate prices in prime areas are exorbitant. Although some of our children in Israel work for less pay than they received in the U.S., they enjoy and appreciate their quality of life.

Healthcare System

Our children have, for the most part, done well with their various health-care providers in the Israeli socialized medicine system, Baruch Hashem. Occasionally, one needs to wait a long time for a referral to a doctor or specialist. Our mentality for medical treatment is: if you need it, get it. Sometimes we have encouraged the children to go to a private doctor at our expense so that they can be attended to in a timely manner. We have occasionally called on the kind physicians in our shul, who know our children, to consult about certain

situations. Baruch Hashem, everyone is well.

Do you Know Where your Children Are?

Safety and security are on every parent's mind, and especially for those with children living in Israel. Our children have shared many emotional and frightening incidents of proximity to terrorist activity — from the rockets in the past few years, crashes at the Jerusalem light rail stations, to being stoned on the road. There is no dearth of things to “worry” about. Here is an email we received in the fall of 2011, during Gaza rocket barrages, from our newly-married daughter when they moved to Beersheva.

Eema and Abba,

Here is an update on what's going on here.

Gilad came back to Beersheva last night because classes resumed at the university today. I told him I wasn't returning until there were at least 2 days of quiet. This afternoon I got on a bus to come to Beersheva. I walked into our apt at about 6:20. At 6:43, just 20 minutes later, a loud siren starts blaring (I had to open the window to make sure for a second cuz I have major paranoia and think a car revving its engine is a siren). I panicked cuz I realized Gilad was biking home and I didn't know where he was. That second I heard the stairwell door close. Gilad had just made it back to our building, threw his bike to the side and ran upstairs to get me to run into the stairwell (since the bomb shelter is too far). We stood there with a bunch of our neighbors and listened to a lot of noise which we found out afterwards was the Iron Dome- which had successfully intercepted one of the rockets, but had missed the other. The noise was the sound of the interception of one rocket and the landing and exploding of the

other. Very scary.

We finished our conversations with the neighbors, keeping their little kids occupied and happy and returned to our apt. So much for a ceasefire ... I can't go to the grocery store because I don't wanna be outside so I'm gonna order online and have them deliver straight to my door ... At times like this a lot of emuna (faith) and tefilla (prayer) are in order.

*Love you both very much,
Batsheva*

Here is an emotionally-draining WhatsApp message we received from Ariella this past summer:

Just had my first siren that I had to pull the car over, get out and lie on the burning hot ground with my hands on my head praying that the debris from the extremely close and very loud rocket explosion weren't gonna kill me. I may have cried and said a perek of tehillim. That was officially the worst siren I've ever experienced seemingly because I knew my hands weren't gonna protect me from anything!

I remember how alarmed I was when our two sons were at YU in the 1990s and reported on the dangers of the neighborhood at that time. Incidents happen in other places occasionally, but in Israel, there is an all-too-steady diet of it.

Bottom line: trust in Hashem.

Only in Eretz Yisrael

Chesed

In Israel, *chesed* can be found in abundance everywhere. The country itself is a shining example to the world as a first responder to world calamities such as Haiti and the Tsunami — as well as within Israel during time of crises. Our children are a part of what



Israelis do for one another — opening their homes to those living in war or rocket zones, bringing goodies to the soldiers manning the Iron Dome installations near them and sending supplies to the soldiers on the front. This past summer, our 15-year-old granddaughter ran a one-day program in Hashmonaim for residents and merchants from the South, bussing them in to provide respite from rockets and an opportunity to sell their wares.

Army Service

Then there's the army: children in *miluim* (reserve duty) leaving their families for several weeks and grandchildren going into the IDF. This has certainly spurred me to increase my *emunah* and *bitachon* in Hashem — and especially my davening. I try not to worry, and to put all my trust in Hashem.

Here We Go Again

Our connection to Eretz Yisrael grows stronger as we visit more frequently

than we used to — so we can spend time with our family and participate in the life-cycle events of our Israeli children and grandchildren. We schlep the maximum amount of allowed weight in our luggage, trying to fill all the requests for the American products and other items they request. One of my friends has all her children living in Israel. She goes loaded with stuff and often asks people to take something small for her. When her children pressure her to move to Israel, she responds, “And who is going to send you all the stuff you want/need from America?”

Anglo Connections

The informal Anglo support groups are helpful for our children. Our daughter, Ariella, lives in Givat Shmuel where the singles invite each other over for meals, fix each other up and run some activities for themselves. Our married children have mostly English-speaking couples as friends. The cultural divide is palpable but not always insurmountable.

Torat Eretz Yisrael

We see our children being very connected to the Land of Israel and the *mitzvot* related to living in Eretz Yisrael - *teruma, maaser, shemita, orla* and more, learning the Torah and historical connections to where they live and to places all over the country. Our grandchildren are active members of Bnei Akiva with the motto – *Torah Ve'Avodah*.

Hashmonaim

Almost all of our grandchildren in Israel live in Hashmonaim. Our special connection to there is two-fold. First, our daughter-in-law Sara's grandparents were pioneers of that *yishuv* (settlement). Second, before our

children made aliyah, my husband was consulted about appropriating assets of the defunct Glenwood Jewish Center in Brooklyn to some yishuv in Israel. He encouraged this and was pleasantly surprised to find the shul where our children daven in Hashmonaim bearing that name. We enjoy the community very much when we are there. It's socially comfortable as there are a large percentage of Anglos there — and we know many of them from various parts of our lives.

In Retrospect

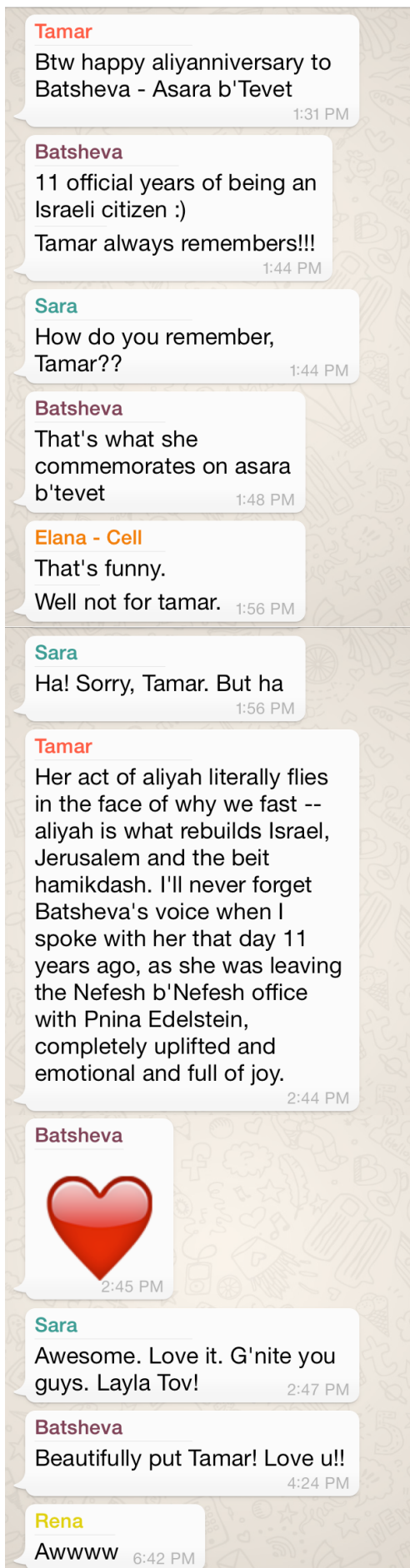
Comments from our children about any regrets related to their aliyah:

- The only regret I have is not doing any National Service. I would have loved to do *sheirut le'umi*, but I came with the American mentality of going straight to university after high school which is what I did.
- Regrets: that we didn't come sooner when real estate prices were more reasonable.
- No regrets – I don't see how doing things differently could have or would have changed anything. Maybe coming sooner, but we did okay.
- No regrets.
- A minor regret that I did not do a second year of National Service... it would have been an excellent opportunity to continue improving my Hebrew before beginning university. I think many American *olim* feel pressured to start university as soon as possible because of their American mentality, when it is not the reality or mentality of Israelis.

Final question to our children: What do you like best about living in Israel and what are the biggest benefits you

or your family have accrued as a result of living in Israel?

- We live in Israel — that alone is the greatest thing. We made it. We've returned to our homeland where we believe we belong. Of course, finding good friends and support systems are important, too, and thank God we've found those as well. The biggest benefits are that our children are growing up here, living and loving the land, knowing our history, being proud to be Jewish.
- A grandchild's response: One good thing about living in Israel is the freedom. Teenagers in Israel have a lot more freedom than teenagers in America have. Here in Israel, my friends and I can go out almost at any time we want without an adult accompanying us. We can take a bus from city to city without any kind of safety threat.
- Cheaper tuition. Living on a *dati yishuv* where the kids run around free on Shabbat with no worries.
- Israel is still in the Pre-Amber Alert Age. Children are able to be much more independent in this environment which benefits both their development and their quality of life. Religiously, there are obvious benefits to living in a Jewish country.
- I love that Hebrew, the *loshon hakodesh*, is the “mother tongue” here. It makes Torah and all our rabbinic commentary and literature so accessible and that much easier to learn. I love that my kids will grow up with a leg up in terms of Torah learning.
- I met my wonderful husband here in Israel where we live in a completely religious *yishuv* without having to worry about cars on Shabbat, etc. An amazing



life with incredible people.

- Israel is our home – the home of the Jewish People. Our roots are buried deep here and our blood is splattered all over this Land — the Land where our Forefathers are buried and the home of our Holy Sites. This Land has infused me with a passion and love for the Jewish People that I never felt before.

Concluding Thoughts

Bikitzur, as they say in Israel, we are very proud of how all our children have adapted to half the family being across the world, as painful as that separation has been for some. Baruch Hashem for Nefesh B’Nefesh under the leadership of Rabbi Josh Fass to whom we are deeply grateful. They have effectively eliminated the massive governmental bureaucratic barrier to making aliyah and transformed it into a user-friendly (formerly an unknown concept in Israel) experience. They are a real support group for *olim*, long after the actual aliyah.

We are very thankful that Hashem has created technology to keep us very connected. With humor, patience and great *emunah* and *bitachon Bahashem* we are navigating the challenges together.

The sidebar features a WhatsApp family conversation on Asara B’Tevet, which marks the date of the first child in our family to make aliya and live far away. I think this give and take aptly describes the sad emotions of separation and the humor, joy, pride, love and idealism of our family in Israel and America.

We are very proud of our children’s decision to live in Eretz Yisrael, even with the challenges that result from their aliyah.

ותקרבנה בנות צלפחד וגו' גדולה להן וגדולה לאביהן גדולה למכיר וגדולה ליוסף שכך יצאו ממנו נשים, חכמות וצדקניות.
במדבר רבה, פרשת פנחס פרשה כא

The daughters of Tzelafchad approached ... it brought greatness to them and greatness to their ancestors, Machir and Yosef because these wise righteous women came from them.

Bamidbar Rabbah, Pinchas no. 21

In the Torah narrative in *Parashat Shelach*, the daughters of Tzelafchad demonstrated tremendous love for Eretz Yisrael by requesting to inherit their father’s land. The laws of how women inherit land were included in the Torah based on their merit. The Midrash states that their request to possess their father’s portion of land in Israel, brought greatness to their ancestors, Machir and Yosef. Similarly, our children have brought great pride to us through demonstrating their love for Eretz Yisrael.

כֹּה אָמַר ה' קוֹל בְּרָמָה נִשְׁמָע נְהִי בְכִי תִמְרוּרִים רָחֵל מְבַכָּה עַל בְּנֵיהָ מֵאֲנָה לְהִנָּחֵם עַל בְּנֵיהָ כִּי אֵינָנּוּ: כֹּה אָמַר ה' מִנְעִי קוֹלְךָ מִבְּכִי וְעֵינַיִךָ מִדְּמָעָה כִּי יֵשׁ שָׂכָר לְפַעֲלֹתֶיךָ נְאֻם ה' וְשָׁבוּ מֵאֶרֶץ אוֹיְבֵי: וְיֵשׁ תִּקְוָה לְאַחֲרֵיתֶיךָ נְאֻם ה' וְשָׁבוּ בְּנִים לְגְבוּלָם: יִרְמִיָּהוּ לֵא: יד-טז

Thus said the Lord: A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation, and bitter weeping, Rachel weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are not. Thus said the Lord: Refrain thy voice from weeping, and thine eyes from tears; for thy work shall be rewarded, said the Lord; and they shall come back from the land of the enemy. And there is hope for thy future, said the LORD; and thy children shall return to their own border.

Jeremiah 31:14-16

Aspiring With the Ramban

The centrality of the Land of Israel in the thought of the Ramban is self-evident. Most notably are the facts that he counts the mitzvah to live in Israel in his *Book of Mitzvot*, as well as the fact that he personally moved from Spain to Israel towards the end of his life, where he founded the “Ramban Shul” in the 13th Century. Maimonides does not consider “*yishuv Eretz Yisrael*,” settling Israel to be one of the 613 mitzvot in his *Book of Mitzvot*, while the Ramban argues that this is a mistaken omission. There has been much speculation as to the rationale of the Ramban, but the Ramban’s inclusion clearly demonstrates the centrality of the Land of Israel in his halachic thought. In this essay, I would like to explore more precisely how the Ramban defines this aspect of Jewish religious life. What exactly is the religious meaning of the Land of Israel and the experience of living in that land? I believe that a consistent approach can be developed by looking at a series of passages in his writings on the Torah.

The Meraglim

In the episode of the *Meraglim*, the sin of the spies, the Ramban demonstrates that everything about the report of the spies was honest and accurate, and conformed to Moshe’s instructions for them. Their sole sin was the use of the word “*efes*” (13:28), which indicated that the possibility of the Jewish conquer of the Land of Israel was out of reach



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and impossible for them. This lack of faith, and self-doubt in their abilities even with the help of God was the heart of their failure.

Rav Soloveitchik (as cited in the introduction to *Shiurei HaRav* on *Masechet Challah*) noted that the mitzvah of *hafrashat challah*, tithing dough, is introduced at the end of the parsha of Shlach, subsequent to the account of the *Meraglim*, while the other agricultural laws of *terumah* and *maaser* tithes are taught at the end of Korach, immediately preceding the story of the *Meraglim*. Rav Soloveitchik suggested that this division can be explained based on the comments of the Ramban. *Terumah* and *maaser* reflect the sanctity that is inherent in the land. This sanctity is manifest in the fact that immediately after the produce is grown it has a halachic status that triggers special mitzvot. *Challah*, however, is a mitzvah that is initiated only after a human being takes the raw materials produced by the earth and actively processes them into something much greater. Only after the wheat is ground, sifted and kneaded into dough does this mitzvah take effect. Thus *Challah* represents

the incredible capacity and potential that Man possesses to improve God’s world. In direct response to the fear of the spies, God counters with the mitzvah of *challah* to emphasize the abilities that they indeed had, though they did not realize it.

If we will consider this thought in light of other comments of the Ramban about the sanctity of the Land of Israel, we can achieve an even deeper insight into the mistake of the *Meraglim* and the response of the Torah.

Torat HaAretz and Torat Chutz LaAretz

The Ramban (Bereishit 26:5 and Devarim 11:18) asserts that the entire Torah was given to be fulfilled specifically in the Land of Israel. While it is true that only agricultural mitzvot are specific to the Land of Israel and “*chovot haguf*,” mitzvot that depend on the person (not the land) apply even outside of Israel, in truth all mitzvot were designed specifically for the Land of Israel. The Ramban dramatically suggests that the ultimate purpose of the mitzvot that we do outside of Israel is merely to remember as practice, so

that the Jewish People will remember these *mitzvot* when we ultimately return to Israel. Since the Jewish People were destined to be sent into exile, the Torah sought to ensure the continuation of our traditions through the generations. If *mitzvot* would be limited to the Land of Israel, then they would be long forgotten by the time of our return from our long exiles. The prophet Yirmiyahu (31:20) instructed the Jewish People to make signs on the roads as we leave Israel that will point towards our return to Israel. The Ramban quotes the Midrash that says the same of *mitzvot* in exile: we must perform them in exile so that we will remember them upon our return. We must pave the road to our redemption even in the midst of our exile, from both a spiritual and physical perspective.

In the same vein, the Ramban (Vayikra 18:25) accepts the midrashic view that the Avot fulfilled the *mitzvot* of the Torah even though it was not yet given. Avraham was taught the *mitzvot* of the Torah by God and fulfilled them along with his children and grandchildren. They voluntarily performed the *mitzvot* because they understood the incredible spiritual opportunity that the *mitzvot* offered. However, the Ramban believes that this was limited to the time that they were in the Land of Israel, where the *mitzvot* were ultimately designed to be kept. It was unnecessary for them to volunteer to practice their *mitzvot* while in exile. That was only needed for the nation while in actual exile. [This

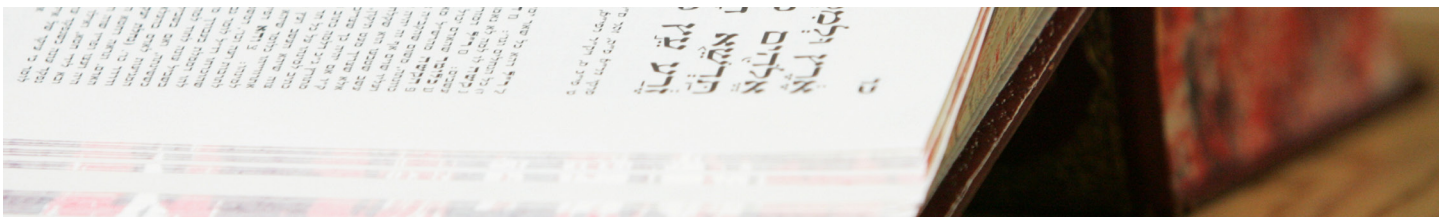
reconciles their commitment to the *mitzvot* with seemingly serious violations, such as Yaakov who was married to two sisters until he returned to Israel.]

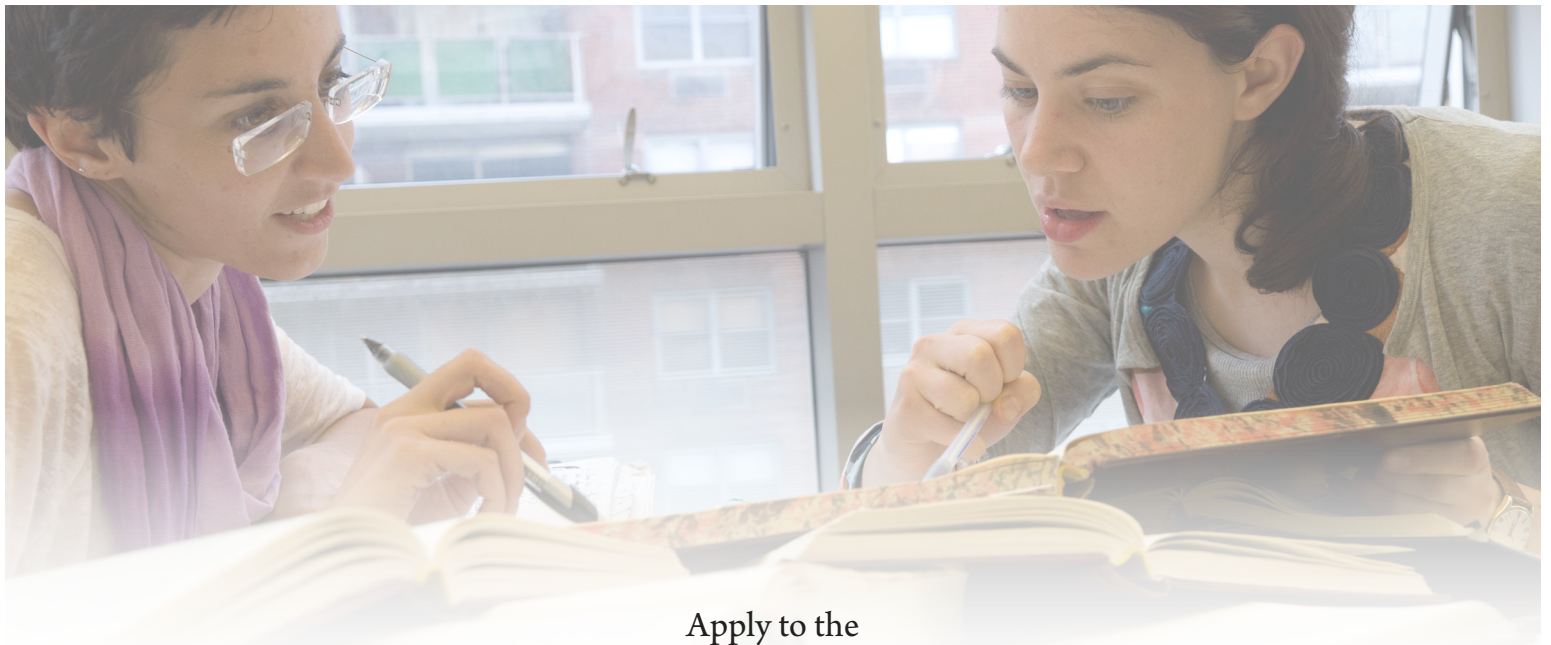
This concept sheds light on a problematic verse that the Ramban himself analyzes. In Sefer Vayikra (18:25) the Torah reminds us to comply with all of the commandments and threatens that if we fail to comply with the *mitzvot* then the Land will “spit us out into exile.” The Ramban notes that in context, the threat in this verse is linked to non-agricultural laws that are seemingly unrelated to the Land of Israel. In particular, the Torah is referring to the *arayot*, forbidden sexual relationships. Why then will the Land of Israel spit out the violators of these *mitzvot*? This sin is equally wrong in all lands.

The Ramban responds that the Land of Israel is particularly sensitive to Godliness and sanctity. God is intimately connected to the Land of Israel and directly guides its destiny. In respect to the other lands of the world, God leaves a distance between Himself and Man and, therefore, tolerates sin. The elevated sanctity of the Land of Israel makes sin intolerable and the Land literally spits out those who defile it through sin. This is especially logical in light of the previous thesis of the Ramban that all of the *mitzvot* were designed uniquely for the Land of Israel. The Torah and the Land of Israel were designed for one another and the Land cannot tolerate the defilement of the *mitzvot* of the Torah.

Meraglim Revisited

Based on this understanding, we can add a new layer of understanding of the sin of the *Meraglim*. The spies testified to the greatness of the Land, but claimed that the Jewish People would be unable to conquer it. It is possible that they did not merely underestimate their military ability; perhaps they underestimated their spiritual worthiness. Possibly they understood these lessons of the Torah (Vayikra 18:25, according to the Ramban) and realized that if they would not properly comply with the *mitzvot* they would be spat out. They feared that they would not be worthy of inheriting the land and thus would lose their battles. According to the interpretation of Rav Soloveitchik, God responded with the mitzva of *challah*. This mitzva, that revolves around human innovation, does not merely symbolize the physical and military potential of the new fledgling Jewish army; the mitzva of *challah* also represents the spiritual potential that this new nation possessed. Man will not only follow the *mitzvot* that exist, but will create opportunities for more *mitzvot* and new challenges that will continue to elevate us through our spiritual journey. We must certainly engage in the challenge and not seek to avoid the spiritual challenges out of our fear. We will take the “risk” of a spiritual life in the Land of Israel even though it can threaten to spit us out, because if we succeed, it will elevate us to unimaginable heights.





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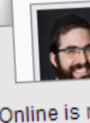
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