

# קול הנערים

## The True Meaning of Freedom

by Elazar Krausz (DAT '16)

The story of Pesach is one of slavery and of freedom. We say in the Haggadah, *hotzianu ma'avdut l'cheirut*, "He took us out of slavery into freedom." We, as a nation, were enslaved for 400 years in Egypt, forced into grueling labor, treated with gross indignity, and even murdered for fear of us revolting. Then, miraculously, through the mighty hand of God, we were rescued. We left Egypt once and for all, and finally we were free. Yet, we must wonder, to what extent are we actually free? Before, we were slaves to the Egyptians, but, now we are servants to Hashem.

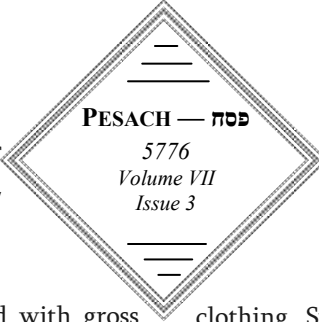
In Egypt, a Jew had to work all day forming bricks out of straw, and if he failed in his mission, he had to worry about his Egyptian master beating him. Today, we have to work to keep the *mitzvot* all day, and if we fail, we have to worry about the spiritual consequences. Shouldn't freedom mean we are able to do whatever we want without fear of retribution? If we were truly free, we would be allowed to eat whatever type of food we wanted or flip a light switch on whichever day we please. It seems as though we were not freed, we merely switched our master from the Egyptians to God.

To answer this question, we have to define freedom. Does freedom mean one can do whatever he wants, whenever he wants, with no consequences whatsoever? The answer is obviously no. America is a free country, but you are still not allowed to drive 100 miles per hour down a side street. Freedom is not anarchy. Freedom, I think, means the ability to be the best person you possibly can be. And, crashing your car into a house does not move you towards that goal.

In Egypt, we were not able to reach our full potential. Someone who could have been a great poet was too busy futilely shoveling straw to ever write a poem. A baby boy who could have grown up to be a great scholar was instead thrown into the Nile River to drown. And that is why we were not free. The Egyptians were inhibiting our potential by brutally enslaving us.

The shift from slavery to freedom was a very real one. Aside from the fact that we were no longer being beaten or killed, it meant that we did not have to worry about the mundane parts of life. In the time following our Exodus, we were provided with food in the form of *mann*, direction in the form of the pillars of clouds and fire, as well as shelter and clothing. Suddenly, we went from having to worry constantly about our physical needs, to being able to focus solely on growing spiritually. That is true freedom.

Today, as servants to God, we are free. In fact, God's direction in our life is what leads us to become the best possible people. We are free to grow infinitely, and no God-fearing person will ever be able to stop us. Chances are if you need any sort of assistance, there is going to be a fellow Jew eager to help you. So the fact that we cannot eat shrimp or use our phones on Shabbat is not a sign that somehow we are not truly free, rather it is an indication of the presence of God in our lives, and the freedom we have to follow His direction.



## In This Issue

### One in All

by Leah Herschmann (Maayanot '16)

Page 5

### Matzah, Chametz, and the Mystery of Moshe

by Eitan Jeselsohn (Maimonides '17)

Page 7

### Redemption: Fate or Destiny?

By Noah Rothman (Shalhevet '17)

Page 9

### Number Crunching

By Etan Ohevshalom (JEC '17)

Page 11

## The Fast of Torah

by Yehuda Goldberg (MTA '17)

Erev Pesach, amidst the hustle and bustle, nearly all firstborns will be attending a *siyum*. The purpose of attending this *siyum* is to absolve themselves of fasting the fast of Taanis Bechoros, the Fast of the Firstborn. The source for this practice can be found as early as Maseches Soferim (21:3) where it states that there was a *minhag* adopted by the firstborns to fast as a result of being saved from the 10th plague, the death of the firstborn. An additional possible source for the fast is the Yerushalmi (68a), which, according to some *mefarshim*, indicates that one should fast on Erev Pesach in accordance with the practice of Rebbe. This *halachah* is quoted by the Shulchan Aruch and the Rama, and although there is some disagreement about who is required to fast, nearly everyone agrees that fasting is necessary for firstborns. In this way, Taanis Bechoros is a unique fast; while it is universally accepted as a *halachah*, few if any *bechoros* ultimately end up fasting. In every other fast throughout the year, one is not advised to search out a *siyum* or *seudas mitzvah* to absolve oneself of the fast, yet for Taanis Bechoros, it is commonplace.

An additional *halachah* that applies only by Taanis Bechoros is that once one has eaten on Taanis Bechoros, they have permission to eat for the rest of the day. This peculiar phenomenon is explained by the Eretz Tzvi who differentiates between a *chiyuv* (obligation) of fasting versus an *issur* (prohibition) to eat. On a normal fast, one has both a *chiyuv* to fast and an *issur* to eat, thus, even if you break your fast, you still cannot eat. However, this is not true on Taanis Bechoros, where there is a *chiyuv* to fast, but not an *issur* to eat. Thus, once you break your fast, there is no longer a reason not to eat. While the Eretz Tzvi clearly explains the logic behind why you no longer have to eat, his answer does not explain why Taanis Bechoros only has a *chiyuv* to fast and not an *issur* to eat. Similarly, the fact that this practice of breaking one's fast through a *siyum* is not only allowed, but encouraged, remains a question.

In order to understand the answer to these questions, it is necessary to delve deeper into the sources and reason for Taanis Behoros. The Tur cites the most famous reason for this fast, as quoted in Maseches Sofrim, by stating that we fast as a commemoration of the firstborns being saved. The Chatam Sofer notes this answer, but questions why we specifically fast on the day before Pesach when we were not actually saved on that day; rather we were saved on the night of Pesach. He answers that just like Taanis Esther, every Jewish *bechor* in Egypt actually fasted the day before

the 10th plague, to ask Hashem for forgiveness and pray that they would be spared from the plague. In commemoration of the firstborns' fasting, says the Chatam Sofer, we fast on Erev Pesach.

An additional answer is given by Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach which answers the question of why we fast Erev Pesach and also explains why we allow people to eat after the Siyum. The Gemara in Pesachim (58a) states that the busiest day of the year in the Beis Hamikdash was Erev Pesach. This is understandable, as it was on that day that people had to bring the *korban pesach*. Additionally, Rashi (Bamidbar 3:12) reminds us that firstborns were originally supposed to do the *avodah*, before they lost their right to do so as a punishment for *chet ha'egel*. Putting these two sources together, Rav Shlomo Zalman says that the firstborns felt their loss of the ability to do the *avodah* most acutely on the day that the Beis Hamikdash was busiest, Erev Pesach. Thus, firstborns began to fast on Erev Pesach, in mourning for their lost status. Not only does this explain why we fast on Erev Pesach, but also why we allow ourselves to break our fast for the rest of the day, after listening to a *siyum*. After seeing the *avodah* in the Mishkan, the only solace for the firstborns was the knowledge that, as the Gemara says, Talmud Torah is greater than sacrificing the *korbanos*. By making a *siyum*, a clear celebration of Talmud Torah, the firstborns come to realize that although they cannot give the *korbanos*, they can learn Torah, which has an even greater reward. This realization allows a firstborn to break his fast and continue on with his Yom Tov preparations.

While this explanation is specifically talking about the firstborns fasting, it is also an important message for all of us to internalize in our own lives. Although we cannot give the *korbanos* ourselves, our learning and completion of a Masechta is our *korban* to Hashem. Taanis Bechoros reminds us that above all, Erev Pesach is a time to recognize, respect and celebrate the extraordinary gift of Talmud Torah that Hashem has given us for all generations.

## The Ultimate Sacrifice

by Zachary Orenshein (TABC '16)

In the moments before leaving Egypt, after many years of oppression, Hashem told Bnei Yisrael that there was one commandment they had to fulfill before they could be redeemed: the *korban pesach*. Why was this *mitzvah* so essential for the Jews to perform before their Exodus? Rav Amnon Bazak explains that the answer can be found in the intricate details of this *mitzvah*.

One obvious answer is that the animal used for the

*korban pesach* needed to be a lamb (Shemot 12:3). Asking Bnei Yisrael to sacrifice lambs was a tremendous test of their faith in God because lambs were worshipped by the Egyptians. This *mitzvah* was both an ultimatum for Bnei Yisrael to reject the Egyptian deities, as well as a symbol of their trust in Hashem's ability to protect them from the Egyptians' wrath. Interestingly, while the requirement that the *korban pesach* be a lamb seems relevant to answering our question, Rav Bazak does not mention it. Rather, the reasons he gives are based on details which are often overlooked, but provide profound insight into the *korban pesach's* deeper purpose.

Rav Bazak explains that the *korban pesach* transformed each house in Bnei Yisrael in which it was offered. The *korban pesach* was a unique *korban* in that it was roasted in Bnei Yisrael's houses and not on an altar. Additionally, Bnei Yisrael put the lamb's blood on their doorposts and lintels – again, not on an altar – and there were no Kohanim involved in this *avodah*. Rather, Bnei Yisrael slaughtered the animals themselves without giving away a portion. What emerges from these anomalous qualities of the *korban* is that it required Bnei Yisrael to turn their homes into altars and themselves into Kohanim.

From this perspective another unique aspect of the *korban* emerges. By comparing the *korban pesach* to other *korbanot*, it becomes apparent that the *korban pesach* is a combination of the *korban olah* and the *korban shelamim*. The *korban pesach* is strikingly similar to the *korban olah* in that the sacrificed animal must be a male, under a year old, unblemished, either a sheep or goat, and burnt whole. However, there is a key difference between the two. The *korban pesach* is eaten, while the *olah* is totally burnt on the altar. This aspect of the *korban pesach*, in addition to the prohibition against leaving over any meat, makes the *korban pesach* seem more similar to the *korban shelamim*. Rav Bazak infers from this that the *korban pesach* is a combination of the *olah* and *shelamim* offerings.

Throughout Biblical Jewish history, the only *korban* that was brought was the *olah*. Kayin, Hevel, Noach, Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov all brought offerings that were completely consumed by fire. Interestingly, among all the evidence that has been found of sacrifices in ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia, there are no records of people eating from the sacrifices to their deities. Rav Bazak explains the reason for this is that until the Jews left Egypt, people related to God primarily through fear. However, as the Jews were about to leave Egypt, Hashem introduced the concept of relating to Him through love as well.

As Thomas Foster, author of *How to Read Literature Like a Professor* explains, eating is an act of communion. Whenever two people sit down to eat together, they are either bonding or are meant to bond. Therefore, the *korban shelamim* model of burning some of the *korban*, and eating from it as well, represents this change in the relationship between Hashem and Bnei Yisrael. It is not just one of distance and fear, but one of communion and love as well. With this in mind, it is of no surprise that when the *olah* and *shelamim* are brought together in the Torah, it is when Bnei Yisrael are preparing for the revelation of the presence of the Shechinah. In order to achieve the highest level of sanctity, Bnei Yisrael must have both the fear and the love that the two *korbanot* represent.

In light of Rav Bazak's analysis, it is clear why bringing the *korban pesach* before Bnei Yisrael left Egypt was essential. First, it allowed them to transform their houses into altars, solely dedicated to serving Hashem. They were thus able to take the extraordinary religious phenomenon that occurred at a national level and use it to strengthen themselves at a familial level. Once they accomplished that, the *korban pesach* allowed Bnei Yisrael to combine the *olah* aspect of fearing Hashem and the *shelamim* aspect of loving Hashem so they could be prepared for Divine revelation at Sinai and an elevated relationship with Hashem.

## The Significance of the Miracles Throughout Our Enslavement

by Zehava Seidman (Frisch '16)

Why does God perform open miracles which disrupt the flow of nature? Hashem creates miracles so that we can recognize the wonders in our everyday lives and see that they too are miracles. Hidden miracles occur to everyone, every day, no matter if they are noticed or not. Some even as great as the miracles that occurred to us in Egypt. It is said that the only way nature is able to go through its natural process is through divine intervention. In fact, the Rambam says that we experience so many hidden miracles a day that there is really nothing natural about our everyday lives.

An open miracle is one that overpowers and displaces the natural norms, creating a reality that is completely contrary to nature's laws. In contrast, a natural miracle, while it may be an equal display of the hand of God, will seem to occur by natural means, employing natural phenomena and processes to achieve its end.

During the Exodus from Egypt, Hashem made many miracles, each with its own meaning and significance, in order

to show Bnei Yisrael and the world his power and majesty.

One such miracle was the miracle of the staff, when Hashem told Moshe to drop his staff and it turned into a snake. Was the purpose of this miracle really just to compete with the Pharaoh's magicians?

The Midrash says that Hashem's name was on the staff. Hence, this miracle was symbolic, telling us that when one lets go of Hashem, evil (represented by the snake) comes into the world. However, as long as we hold onto Hashem, the staff remains a staff and there is no room for evil. The snake that Moshe saw was not simply a snake, it was all the evil in the world. This is why it says that Moshe "*fled from before it*," he thought there was no way to fight so much evil. However, Hashem told him to pick the staff up and it became a staff again. This represents the concept of *teshuva*, where one can return the snake (the evil created in the world by his actions) into the staff (Godliness). The reason for this miracle was not to beat the magicians, rather it was to show that evil cannot take over if we do *teshuva* and follow Hashem.

The ten plagues are perhaps the most famous miracles to occur to the Jewish people. They are clearly open miracles, but what was the purpose of the plagues and why were they significant? The Maharal gives a classic answer, saying that these ten plagues mirror the ten sayings of creation, in reverse. The first of the sayings is "*in the beginning*," and the last of the plagues is the killing of the firstborn (first). The second saying of creation is "*let there be light*," and the ninth plague is darkness. The reason for the plagues was to reinstate the ten sayings of creation that the Egyptians had prevented from shining through during the time of the Jewish people's enslavement.

One of the last major miracles to occur to the Jewish people during the Exodus was the splitting of the sea. It is important to point out that the sea did not split until Nachshon ben Aminadav of the tribe of Yehuda walked into the sea and it wasn't until the water reached his neck that the sea split. This teaches us a very important lesson: as long as we do what we have to do, have faith and put in effort, then we don't need to worry about the outcome. We can always know that Hashem is there for us in every situation.

Each one of these miracles is significant in its own way. Miracles exist so that Hashem can show us that he is always present, even if we do not see it. No matter if it a open miracle, like the Exodus, or a natural miracle, like waking up, Hashem is always involved.

## The Meaning of Baruch HaMakom

by Akiva Finkelstein (Cooper '19)

During the *maggid* section of the *seder*, we recite "*Baruch HaMakom Baruch Hu, Baruch Shenasan Torah Li'amo Yisroel*." This is said right before we go through the famous questions of the four sons. The commentators discuss what this passage is all about, and why we say it before the questions of the four sons. After all, what's the connection between the two passages?

The Ritva answers that the intent of Yitzias Mitzrayim was not simply that we were freed from slavery, but rather that we could accept the Torah and fulfill the *mitzvos*. We know this from the *passuk* in Shemos, "*Taavdoon Es Haelokim Al Hahar Haze*"- "you shall serve Hashem on this mountain." That was the true purpose of Hashem taking us out of Egypt. This is what we are blessing Hashem for in the *bracha* of Baruch Hamakom, that Hashem made us free to serve him through the amazing Torah that He gave us.

Rabbeinu Binyamin explains that because of this, "*Baruch Hamakom*" serves as a *birchas hamitzva* for the Mitzvah of telling the story of *Yitzias Mitzrayim*. The location of this *birchas hamitzva* is appropriate because after all, the primary aspect of telling the story of Yitzias Mitzrayim is telling it over to your children, as the *passuk* in Parshas Bo says, "And you shall tell your son on this day saying, 'because of this Hashem did to me when I left Egypt.'" So we say the *bracha* on the story of Yitzias Mitzrayim right before the part of the *seder* that discusses the telling of the story to your sons, and what their questions on the story might be.

Based on this, Rav Yonason Sacks, in his commentary on the Haggada, notes the connection between the *seder* and Talmud Torah. This is why we focus specifically on Torah when we say, "*Baruch Shenasan Torah Li'amo Yisroel*," to show that what we are celebrating at the *seder* not just the freedom from slavery in Egypt, but on a deeper level, the wonderful gift of Torah.

A hint to this connection is the fact that the night of the *seder* is referred to as the *Leil Shimurim*, a night that is guarded. Many take this to mean that on the night of the *seder* we are protected from any dangers. This idea of the night of Pesach being a night of protection is similar to what the sages say about learning Torah at night. Chazal say that one who learns Torah at night is guarded from all the desires that come at night. Perhaps this shows us the connection between Torah and the night of the *seder*.

We see from all of this what we're really celebrating

on the night of the Seder. It's not the American ideal of freedom, but rather it's the idea that we are free to be able to learn and explore the depths of the Torah. As the Mishna in Avos says, "*ein l'cha ben chorin ela mi sh'osek baTorah*" - "a person is only truly free when he is engaged in Torah." This is what we are thanking God for in the *bracha* of *Baruch HaMakom*. Perhaps the reason why it comes before the four sons, is that much like the *mitzva* of telling the story of Yitzias Mitzrayim, the *mitzva* of learning Torah includes giving it over to our kids, "*v'limadtem osam*." With this idea in mind, hopefully, the lines of *Baruch HaMakom* will find new meaning and purpose in our minds and in our *seder*.

## One in All

by Leah Herschmann (Maayanot '16)

There are many relationships that the Jews are supposed to have with Hashem: husband and wife, king and citizen, parent and child, and so on. To me, it seems that the most difficult relationship for us to have with God is the parent-child relationship. It is easy to imagine ourselves to be Hashem's citizens, or even His servants. It is harder for us to imagine being like a spouse to Hashem, but it is especially difficult for us to imagine God as our father. Why is it so difficult for us? Part of the reason that it is especially challenging for us to see Hashem as our father is because we have grown accustomed to viewing the concept of Hashem as something distant from us, something that we cannot relate to anymore. It all lies in our problem of understanding Hashem and how He plays a role in our lives. In our society we do not talk about Hashem very often. We do not focus on how we can see Him in our everyday lives or about how each of us have *tzelem Elokim* within us.

It so happens that we are not the only generation that struggled with defining our relationship with Hashem. The Jews leaving Egypt, who experienced the *eser makot*, the splitting of the sea, and other firsthand encounters with Hashem, would often fall into despair whenever times of hardship would arise in their lives. Why? Why was it that the people who experienced all of these amazing miracles were having trouble defining their relationship with Hashem?

The world was a very different place when the Jews left Egypt. Today, philosophical and intellectual debates revolve mostly around whether there is a God. People are atheists, agnostic, or other believing members of society. Back then, however, it was not a question as to whether one believed in a god, but in how many "gods" one believed. It

was an epic battle of monotheism versus polytheism.

The Jews, parasites of the Egyptian culture in almost every way, struggled to visualize God as a God that could do many things. Until the *mara* incident in the desert, where God made the bitter water pleasurable for Bnei Yisrael to drink, and proclaimed himself our *rofeh* (doctor), we only imagined Hashem as the God of destruction. He single-handedly destroyed Egypt, the world power at the time, and crushed whatever forces the Egyptians managed to raise in protest at the splitting of the Red Sea. Bnei Yisrael witnessed all the plagues to the Egyptians, from frogs contaminating their houses, to hail pouring, to the deaths of the entire nation's firstborn sons. Destruction was all they knew Hashem to be capable of doing. Only after *mara*, however, did the Jews really experience God as more than just the God of destruction. They were finally able to understand that Hashem is omniscient, and that He is not restricted to one job. He can be our King, our Father, our Judge, our Protector, as well.

Thus, part of our purpose in reliving Yetziat Mitzrayim every year is to correct the attitude that the Jews mistakenly had at the time. We must recognize that Hashem is all powerful, but also that He does, in fact, love us as children and does much more than simply harm our enemies. He will heal us, love us, and invest in us, just as a parent does for a child. However, as part of this relationship, the child must learn to recognize all that his or her parent does. If not, the parent's effort will go unnoticed and will never be appreciated. We do not ever want to make that mistake of allowing Hashem's work to go unnoticed, and so our job at the *seder* is to fix that unappreciative attitude, and realize all Hashem does for us. If we can do that, if we can be more grateful, we will be able to connect to Him and truly understand what it means to have Hashem be a part of our everyday lives.

## The Hidden Face of G-d

by Yehuda Shetrit (DRS '17)

The Gemara teaches us in Masechet Sanhedrin (91a) about an incident that occurred with the Bnei Yisrael and Alexander the Great. At that time Alexander the Great was ruling over many lands including Eretz Yisrael and Mitzrayim. After he took control over Eretz Yisrael, the Egyptians came to him with a complaint. They said that it says in the Torah that the Jews took gold and silver from Mitzrayim during the plague of darkness. The Egyptians claimed that the Jews owed them money! Alexander the Great then decided to hold a court case claiming money from the Jews. A Chacham from the Bnei Yisrael named Gaviha ben Pessisa decided to be the one to

fight for the Jews. In the court case, Gaviha ben Pessisa claimed that the Mitzrim owed them money for the 600,000 Jews that worked as slaves for 430 years in Mitzrayim. So, he said, if you pay us what we are owed then we will return the money that the our ancestors in Mitzrayim borrowed. Since the amount of money that the Jews claimed was much more than that claimed by the Egyptians, Alexander the Great and the Egyptians had nothing to say back, so they ran away and gave their fields to the Jews. That is the end of the story in the Gemara. However, the Maharsha wonders, how could Gaviha ben Pessisa say that the Jews are owed money for the work of 600,000 Jews in Mitzrayim for 430 years, if it was only 210 years that the Jews were stuck in Mitzrayim and if they were only slaves for 86 years?

Rabbi Dr. Marcus Lehman gives a beautiful answer to the Maharsha's question. The Torah tells us the Bnei Yisrael went up *chamushim*, armed, out of the land of Mitzrayim. Rashi suggests that the word *chamushim* can be interpreted as meaning a fifth, which explains that only a fifth of the Jews left Mitzrayim. The rest were killed during the plague of darkness for certain sins. We also know that 600,000 Jews left Mitzrayim implying that were five times the amount of Jews that worked in Mitzrayim, 3,000,000. Gaviha ben Pessisa said that the Jews were owed money for the work of 600,000 Jews in Mitzrayim for 430 years, which is the same amount as the work of 3,000,000 Jews for 86 years, the actual amount of years the Jews were slaves for and the amount of slaves that were in fact enslaved in Egypt. Therefore, Gaviha ben Pessisa was in fact correct in making his claim.

Rabbi Lehman also uses this idea to explain why we have the four cups of wine on Pesach. He says that the reason we have them is to thank and praise Hashem for the four fifths of the 430 year period in Egypt that we were not slaves. A proof to this idea is that the *gematria* of the word *kos* is 86, the amount of years the Jews were enslaved in Egypt. This year, as we go into our Pesach *seder*, we should do our best to acknowledge the amazing miracles that Hashem did for us in Egypt, in darkness and in light.

## Spring: The Season of Change

by Rachel Eckstein (Bruriah '16)

One of the many themes woven into the holiday of Passover is the season of spring. The basic reason for this theme is the parallel between the rebirth of nature and the birth of our nation. Yet, the emphasis we place on spring

requires further explanation. The Torah mentions, on a number of occasions, that the Exodus took place during the spring. To name a few, the Torah says, "*Today you are going out, in the month of spring*" (Shemot 13:4), "*Keep the month of spring, and make the Passover offering to the Lord*" (Devarim 16:1) and "*You shall observe the festival of unleavened bread... at the appointed time of the month of springtime, for then you left Egypt*" (Shemot 23:15). Why does the Torah repeatedly draw our attention to this particular detail?

Perhaps we can better understand the focus on spring in light of a well known Midrash quoted by Targum Yonatan. Chazal state that only one fifth of the Jewish people left Egypt during the Exodus. What happened to the other four fifths? The Midrash (Shemot Rabbah 14:3) explains that there were people among the nation of Israel who were so deeply integrated into Egyptian society, that they had no desire to leave the comfort of their host country. In fact, even those that left Egypt were unsure about their decision and were averse to change. We learn in Shemot Rabbah that when taking Bnei Yisrael out of Egypt, God specifically leads them in a circuitous manner, so that they would not be afraid of the Canaanites and wish to return to Egypt. Thus, we see that even those who had chosen to leave were still vulnerable. Even though the Jewish people witnessed the *makot* they were wary of what lay ahead and were susceptible to the strong pull of the security and comfort of Egypt. When the Jews left Egypt, they embarked on a journey to change their lives through Torah and a relationship with God. This change and growth was not easy and was fraught with challenge. Yet, with God's help, they persevered.

With spring, life comes budding forth, often in the form of pollen. We, like the Jews who left Egypt, are quite literally allergic to new life. We just celebrated Purim, a holiday recognized by the Zohar as being potentially holier day than Yom Kippur (Tikkunei Zohar 57b). Just like Yom Kippur, Purim is a day of *tefillah* and *teshuvah*. On Yom Kippur we reevaluate our lives and make resolutions to change. Sukkot is the time following Yom Kippur when we are placed back into regular life to test the strength of our resolutions. Similarly, Pesach is the holiday in which we strive to actualize the goals we set for ourselves in the previous month. In fact, this actualization is actually a command on Pesach; each of us is obligated to see ourselves as having actually gone through the Exodus (Pesachim 116b).

Pesach is not merely a transition from slavery to freedom, it is a complete transformation of one's life. The Jews

who left Egypt revolutionized their lives with Torah and *mitzvot*, not just boundless freedom. We are obligated not to just feel as if we too were redeemed by God, but to actively redeem ourselves through the process of growth and *teshuvah*. We do not want to be like the eighty percent of Jews who got left behind because they could not choose life and God. We should strive to be the Jews who got out in the spring and choose life.

## Matzah, Chametz, and Moshe

by Eitan Jeselsohn (Maimonides '17)

The *korban todah* was half *chametz* and half *matzah*. On Erev Pesach, during the time of the Beit Hamikdash, people could not be sure that they would have enough time to eat all the *chametz* in the *korban todah* before the time came when they were not allowed to eat *chametz* anymore. Therefore, the Rabbis decided never to offer the *korban todah* on Erev Pesach.

Today, we cannot offer the *korban todah*, so we say the prayer "*Mizmor LeTodah*" every day during Shacharit instead. Since during the time of the Beit Hamikdash they did not offer the Korban Todah on Erev Pesach or Pesach itself, we do not say "*Mizmor LeTodah*" during those times.

There is also a special meaning in the physical and spiritual symbolism of *chametz* and *matzah*. The difference between *matzah* and *chametz* is the time that they bake. Dough made of flour and water that sits for more than eighteen minutes before being fully cooked becomes *chametz*. *matzah*, unlike *chametz*, represents man's ability to control his passions, by controlling the time that his bread will bake, uninfluenced by external forces. In other words, *chametz* represents the physical and the *matzah* represents the spiritual. With this in mind, one might wonder why we do not have the combination of *chametz* and *matzah*. After all, Jewish tradition seems to indicate that both spiritual and earthly matters are significant.

To answer this question, we must ask another question. Why is Moshe's name is not in the Haggadah, except for the one time we mention it in Shirat Hayam ("*vayaaminu baHashem uveMoshe avdo*")? Why is it that Moshe, the leader of the Jewish people during the Exodus from Egypt and the man who saw the suffering of Bnei Yisrael, is only mentioned in the Haggadah once? Do we not owe Moshe at least a few mentions in the Haggadah after all he did for the Jewish people?

The answer is that if we were to mention Moshe, the

significance of the Haggadah would disappear. Had his name been all over the Haggadah, people would say that the Exodus from Egypt did not happen because of Hashem, but because of a slave uprising that Moshe led. Therefore, in order to emphasize that everything came from Hashem, not from a political revolution against the Egyptians, Moshe is not mentioned.

The idea that we do not want to detract from the spiritual and miraculous nature of the Exodus can also help solve our problem. Yetziat Mitzaim was a totally spiritual event, as its goal was for the Jews to receive the Torah. Therefore, we do not mention anything mundane and instead, we eat *matzah*, which represents spirituality. Throughout the *seder*, we should also be sure to recognize the overtly spiritual and miraculous nature of the Exodus, and thank Hashem for saving us from the grips of slavery.

## Hidden in the Miracle

by Sarah Sabo (Shulamith '18)

When most people think about the miracles that took place in the Pesach story, the first thing that comes to mind is usually the ten plagues that Hashem brought upon the Egyptians. The reason why everyone automatically thinks about the plagues is that it's very clear to everyone that each one of the plagues defied nature, thus making them all miracles. But if you take a step back and look at the story from the beginning, you will see how, in fact, the whole story is one huge miracle that took place for a very specific reason.

Beginning with Yosef, when he was sold to an Egyptian against his will; one might think that nothing good can come out of something this bad. The story gets worse when Yosef gets put in jail for a crime he didn't even commit. But, despite all these horrible things that happened to him, Yosef never doubted Hashem's plan. One could say that Yosef not losing faith in Hashem is a miracle in itself. Clearly, Hashem had a plan for Yosef and everything that happened to him needed to happen in order for the future miracles to take place. Because Yosef was sold and was brought to Egypt, he was able to become second to the king and ended up saving the entire Egyptian nation as a result. Fast forward a few years: things were good for the Jews in Egypt, they had their own cities and lived content lives. But in a matter of years, everything changed. The Jews got enslaved by the Pharaoh and were forced into a life of poverty and anguish. As the years went on, the situation got progressively worse for the Jews, putting their faith in Hashem to the test.

Eventually, Hashem sends Moshe to save the Jews, and they are freed. So how was all of this a miracle? Why did Yosef and the rest of the Jews need to go through all these terrible experiences? If one looks at the narrative as a whole, it is clear that everything that happened laid the foundation for us receiving the Torah and entering Eretz Yisrael. Yosef needed to get sold in order for him to save Egypt because the Jews needed to be enslaved there, and then only after that can they could get Eretz Yisrael.

Yom Hashoah is soon approaching. There are many parallels that can be drawn between the Holocaust and the Pesach story. In both stories, the Jews were tortured and treated inhumanely by the leaders of the land they lived in. In both times, the Jews ended up surviving and gaining a homeland. Even though at times, especially now in exile, the Jews might feel like there is no hope for the future, we need to look back at these two situations and see the hidden miracles and hope that we will be deserving to see many more in the future.

## The Importance of Yetziat Mitzrayim

by Avishai Zarifpour (YULA '16)

When looking over the Jewish calendar and our *mitzvot*, one will notice a particular focus on the story of *Yetziat Mitzrayim*. Every Shabbat and every holiday. During *kiddush* we mention *Yetziat Mitzrayim*. Every day, when we recite *shema*, we recall *Yetziat Mitzrayim*. There are so many different episodes of history that we can emphasize, *akedat Yitzchak*, receiving the Torah, entering Eretz Yisrael. Why do we make such a big deal about leaving Egypt?

In order to understand the answer to this question, we must understand the Jewish understanding of Hashem and how he relates to the world. The Jewish understanding is based on two ideas: Hashem created the world and he intervenes in world affairs. Shabbat is testimony to the first foundation and *Yetziat Mitzrayim* is testimony to the second. Although most of the world accepted the concept of G-d as a Creator (until the days of the Enlightenment), men always have doubted G-d's active role in the world. If G-d is really involved in everything, why is there so much human suffering? This question caused many people to come up with different theories to try and solve the issue. Many said that G-d had done his job of creating the world, then stepped away and let the world run on its own. This means that G-d does not intervene in anything that is going on in the world and

that he neither knows nor cares about the lives of individuals. This concept is completely the opposite of the Jewish outlook. Judaism proclaims that nothing works without Hashem's will and constant involvement. As we say, "*Shehakol Nihiyeh Bidvaro*" – "that everything exists by your word."

Judaism emphasizes that Hashem is involved in every aspect of running the world; there are no forces except for that of the Creator. That is where *Yetziat Mitzrayim* comes in. Bnei Yisrael were slaves to the most powerful and tyrannical empire in the world. According to the Midrash, no slave was ever able to escape Egypt – since fortifications and deserts surrounded it. Therefore, by the laws of nature, it was impossible to escape. The whole point of *Yetziat Mitzrayim* is to show that Hashem runs the show from the smallest to the largest things. All the different components of *Yetziat Mitzrayim* were to demonstrate that Hashem is both the Creator and is also constantly involved in the world. The plague of lice showed that Hashem's supervision penetrated to the smallest creatures in the world. The plague of frogs, which caused the frogs to jump everywhere around Mitzrayim proved that Hashem's will, and not animal instinct, ruled the animal kingdom.

This is why *Yetziat Mitzrayim* is constantly mentioned and remembered. *Yetziat Mitzrayim* demonstrates Hashem's love for the Jewish people and how he intervenes in their individual and collective redemption. However, this still leaves us with a problem concerning the idea of suffering, an issue we have been grappling with for millennia. The Jewish answer to this is laid out on the *seder* table.

During the *seder*, there are many symbols that remind us of our suffering, such as the bitter herbs, the salt water that is reminiscent of our tears, and the *charoset*, which reminds us of the results of our labor. Yet these symbols are mixed with our *geula*. For example, the *charoset* resembling the mortar and slavery is sweet. The *karpas* representing new life is dipped in salt water. The bitter herbs are coated in the sweet *charoset*.

This is the lesson of the Haggadah's account of the five sages having the *Seder* in Bnei Brak. Rabbi Elazar said that he never understood why the *seder* is at night until another rabbi told him that it is only the totality of day and night, joy and suffering, that can produce the redemption. *Yetziat Mitzrayim* introduces to us how Hashem works for our ultimate welfare. Those who partake in the *seder* see the truth that suffering is simply part of redemption and that Hashem is in control of every aspect of existence.



## The Message of Shir HaShirim:

by Sarah Araten (Ramaz '16)

Shir HaShirim is the Megillah that we read on the Shabbat of Chol HaMoed Pesach. One interesting thing about Shir HaShirim is that the Chachamim were reluctant to canonize it. The Chachamim were within reason to question its place in our canon, as on the surface, it seems to be just the text of a love story between a man and a woman. Despite the fact that it seems out of place in our Tanach, in reality it fits into an important theme of Judaism, as it speaks to the human desire to have a relationship with Hashem.

If we view it in this way, then Shir HaShirim is an important book to canonize because, as Rabbi Lamm says, it speaks about our relationship with Hashem as a result of our humanity. As people, we can't always feel a strong connection with Hashem whenever we want to, because unlike angels, we live human lives and sometimes attain to our other, non-spiritual needs. Some might say that our mundane lives get in the way of our relationship with Hashem, but Rabbi Lamm says that, in fact, our human qualities are what make our relationship with Hashem unique. The fact that the Megillah is written using human ideas which we can understand, such as love, is what makes the Megillah such an important book to retain for generations to come.

One other way that the Megillah speaks to our human relationship with Hashem is by using textual references to other circumstances where we connected with Hashem. One such reference is in the first perek, when it says "*tzror hamor dodi li*" (1:13). The Da'at Mikrah says that this phrase is a hint to our relationship with Hashem after Chet HaEigel, a point in time when we were communally trying to rebuild our relationship with Hashem. *Tzror hamor* is a spice that gets stronger when burned, which would represent our connection with Hashem after Chet HaEgel, as our previously strong relationship at Har Sinai was made even stronger despite our sin at Chet HaEgel. After recovering from the sin, we got the Mishkan and all of the Korbanot, which were meant to enhance our relationship with Hashem. Since the text uses terms that humans are familiar with, such as spices, our connection to the text and to Hashem becomes even stronger. In addition, the fact that this text relates to an event that all of Bnei Yisrael were present for shows that the story in Shir HaShirim is not only about a man and a woman who seem to be separated from their community, rather, there is a more communal aspect to the book, as the text references other events in the history of the Jewish people. So, through a

personal story, the *megillah* shows the communal and human aspects of finding and creating a relationship with Hashem.

## Redemption: Fate or Destiny?

by Noah Rothman (Shalhevet '17)

One of the central mitzvot of Pesach is to remember that Hashem took Bnei Yisrael out of bondage and brought us to redemption, *geulah*. The Haggadah frequently references how Hashem, with an almighty hand and an outstretched arm, removed Bnei Yisrael from Egypt and brought us to freedom. Here, redemption is being done unto Bnei Yisrael. On first glance, it appears that the move from *galut* to *geulah* is a passive act for the Jewish people in the story of Pesach. However, upon further investigation, it becomes less clear if the Jewish people were indeed passive in being redeemed or if they took a more active part in causing their redemption.

The Gemara in Ketubot (111a) introduces an interesting take on this issue. The Gemara introduces a *passuk* from Yermiahu (27:22). The *passuk* states that Hashem declared, "They will remain in Babylon until the day I take them out." According to Ketubot, *geulah* is clearly an act of God to which the Jewish people are passive recipients. The Gemara then goes on to introduce the "three oaths." The "three oaths" declare three things that are prerequisites for us to achieve the final redemption. First, the Jewish people may not break through any walls and forcibly enter Eretz Yisrael; second, the Jewish people may not try and rebel against other nations; and third, the non-Jews must swear that they won't excessively enslave or subjugate the Jewish people. While there is some controversy over whether the oaths are *halakhic* or *aggadic*, nonetheless they paint the picture that redemption is in fact a passive process.

In Sanhedrin (97b), Rebbe Eliezer says that we will only be redeemed if we do *teshuvah*. Rebbe Yehoshua agrees and goes on to say that if we don't do *teshuvah*, Hashem will impose harsh decrees upon the Jewish people, such as those decreed through Haman. Only when the Jewish people do *teshuvah* will good things result. Rebbe Eliezer furthers his statement by bringing in a *passuk* from Yermiahu. The *passuk* alludes to the fact that Bnei Yisrael were not brought out of slavery by doing nothing, i.e. they were actively involved in their redemption. As a result, Rashi comments, Bnei Yisrael won't be redeemed with something monetary, but rather by their sincere *teshuvah*. According to this discussion in Sanhedrin, redemption is, in fact, a matter of the Jewish people actively pursuing it and taking measures to be redeemed.

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik wrote a piece in which he

talks about the active vs. the passive redemption. The Rav defines the conflict, not as an issue of passive vs. active, but rather as an issue of fate vs. destiny. In *Kol Dodi Dofek* the Rav explores the issue of why people suffer. He writes that the issue can be boiled down to fate vs. destiny. The Rav quotes Pirkei Avot (4:29) as the source for the explanation of the man who lives his life through fate, “Against your will do you live out your life.” The Rav writes that living live through fate is one that is devoid of meaning and of purpose. He writes, “The man of fate has the image on an object... he appears as made, and not as maker. He is fashioned by his passive encounter with an objective, external environment.” The Rav is saying that someone who is a person of fate is not living life with meaning. He does not act for himself, but rather lets things be done for him. He describes the man of fate like a man trying to explain evil--foolish. The Rav then goes on to explain the man of destiny, “Man is born like an object, dies like an object, but possesses the ability to live like a subject, like a creator, an innovator, who can impress his own individual seal upon his life.” The Rav says that the goal of life is to transform fate into destiny.

The Rav understands redemption as being an act of transforming our fate into destiny. The Rav writes about two covenants given to the Jewish people. The first, an act of fate, is in Egypt where God asserts himself as the God to the Jewish people. Later, at Har Sinai, Bnei Yisrael enter into a covenant with God to receive the Torah and follow it. This is an act of Bnei Yisrael transforming fate into destiny.

While redemption might appear to be an act in which we wait for God to redeem us, redemption is in fact something that we, as the Jewish people, must partake in. Redemption won't just happen -- we can't just expect our fate to play out in our favor. Rather, in order to ensure that redemption is achieved, we must make it our destiny.

## Dayeinu: Would it Really Have Been Enough?

by Yonatan Olshin (NSHAHS '17)

Every Pesach, at the *sedarim*, we sing *Dayeinu*. *Dayeinu* is a song containing fifteen stanzas: five stanzas about our redemption from slavery in Egypt, five stanzas about the miracles that Hashem had performed for us, and five stanzas about our closeness to Hashem. However, *Dayeinu* is a rather ironic song; some of the stanzas are very strange. For example, take the verse: “If He had given us their wealth and had not split the sea for us, it would have been enough!” – but

if we had their wealth and no escape route, how could we escape the wrath of the Egyptians? They were probably really furious that we had their wealth, and if they had recaptured us, they would have slaughtered us, or they would have re-enslaved us and treated us even harsher. Another verse reads, “If He had split the sea for us and had not taken us through it on dry land, it would have been enough!” – But if we were not taken on dry land, we would have been stuck in the mud. From there, the Egyptians surely would have caught up to us.

With all this in mind, we must wonder, what is *Dayeinu* supposed to mean? Rabbi Hillel Goldberg gives a fascinating answer. The Gemara (Pesachim 116b) says that each Jew has an obligation to see himself as if he personally left Egypt. That means that we need to put ourselves in the shoes of our ancestors. The Jews went to the sea and were stuck at a dead end. They thought that they would not survive because there was no other way out to escape the Egyptians. But, lo and behold, the sea splits! This was probably one of the most awesome events in the lives of the Jews. The experience was overwhelming; the Jews did not expect the sea to split and, once it did, they were certainly not thinking about the next stage lying in the future.

Rabbi Menachem Leibtag also gives a fascinating answer. Rabbi Leibtag explains that, really, each stage was not enough. For instance, Hashem could not just have left us at the sea with all the Egyptian's wealth without making the sea split. Yet, we still need to praise Hashem for each stage. Even if we have not experienced complete redemption, we are still obligated to express praise and gratitude towards Hashem at each stage of salvation.

Using both of these answers, I believe that we can learn an important lesson from the song *Dayeinu*. Even in the most difficult of times, we must have faith and trust in Hashem, firm in the belief that everything will turn out for the best. We can learn this from the story of Rabbi Akiva in the Gemara (Berachos 60b): Once, Rabbi Akiva was travelling. He came to a village, but nobody would let him lodge in their home for the night, so he was forced to camp out in the fields. He had a lamp with him for light, a donkey with him for travel, and a rooster with him to wake him up in time to *daven*. However, the wind blew out the lamp, a cat ate his rooster, and a lion ate his donkey. Nevertheless, Rabbi Akiva said, “Everything that Hashem does is for the best.” Indeed, the next day, Rabbi Akiva realized that bandits had come to the village, and robbed and killed the villagers. If the bandits had seen the light of the lamp, or heard the noise of the rooster or

donkey, Rabbi Akiva would have been in danger of losing his life. Hashem saved Rabbi Akiva by taking away the lamp, the donkey, and the rooster.

What this story teaches us is that we must always have faith in Hashem. Even in the darkest of situations, even if we cannot see the end goal, we must always recognize that Hashem is watching out for us and sees the bigger picture. That is why we sing *Dayeinu*: to praise Hashem at every moment of our lives, even the challenging ones, and to appreciate the role that He plays in every step along the journey of our lives.

## Barech Decoded

by Jacob Mitrani (RASG '16)

One of the most mundane aspects of the *seder* is *barech*, Grace After Meals. Barech does not make us reach the spiritual heights of *maggid* or *nirtzah* because we recite the Grace After Meals so often--after every single time we eat bread--that it no longer feels special. This idea is perhaps best summarized in the statement, "when something becomes routine to you, you become numb to it." That is exactly how we tend to feel when it comes to Birkat Ha'Mazon.

In order to combat this natural tendency, we should take a step back and try to understand Barech's true significance. The concept of a Birkat Ha'Mazon was first introduced about 4,000 years ago by our patriarch Avraham. Avraham Avinu was known for his benevolence, particularly for opening up the doors of his tent to visitors from everywhere. He would provide home-cooked meals and a place to stay for his guests, all at the price of simply thanking God for the meal and hospitality. Because of his great belief in Hashem, Avraham was an outsider to the rest of the population. He was known as "Avraham Ha'Ivri," or "Avraham the Hebrew," meaning "the one who stands on the other side (*me'ever*)." Avraham was alone in his view of God, but never feared that God was not on his side. Avraham's willingness to dissent and speak out against the nations of the world should serve as a model for us, in our own lives.

In connection to the Pesach story, Pesach commemorates the Jewish nation's freedom from their enslavement in Egypt. The Hebrew word for Egypt is "Mitzrayim," which is derived from the word "*me'tzar*," which means narrow and constricted. When God took the Jewish nation out of Mitzrayim, he took them out of a restricted land and into a free one. We were freed from the Egyptian way of life, which solely focused on outer appearance, and were introduced to a life that emphasizes

spirituality and growth.

We can learn from the Jews leaving Mitzrayim, as well as from Avraham, that the truest form of freedom is being able to do something solely because one believes it is true. Freedom is doing what is right, despite social pressures. Just like Avraham encouraged everyone to say *Birkat Hamazon*, we should encourage ourselves, and the people around us, to always do the correct thing, even if it is unpopular.

## Number Crunching

by Etan Ohevshalom (JEC '17)

On Friday night, Jews everywhere will sit down with their families and have their *seder*. We recount the story of our ancestors from thousands of years ago; the torture they endured while being enslaved for 400 years. Some may have read the previous sentence thinking that my numbers are off when I say that the Jewish people were enslaved for 400 years. Bnei Yisrael were enslaved in Egypt for 210 years, not 400! Many people know that there is an opinion that says the 400 years was really referring to the Jewish people being "strangers in a strange land," which began with the birth of Yitzchak. However, in this Dvar Torah I would like to expound upon one of the lesser known opinions regarding why we say 400 years, even though we know it was only 210.

Let's start by looking at the very *sefer* that talks about our being slaves: Sefer Shemot. In the very first *perek* of Shemot, the *pasuk* says, "And they made their lives bitter with hard service, in mortar and in brick, and in all manner of service in the field; in all their service, wherein they made them serve with rigour" (Shemot 1:14). On the words, "And they made their lives bitter." The Vilna Gaon explains that because of the Egyptians' treatment, not only were we slaves, but our lives were also embittered. This made the 210 years we were in Mitzrayim feel like 400 years. Originally, we were supposed to be in Egypt for 400 years, but because the Egyptians embittered our lives, Hashem shortened our physical enslavement by 190 years.

But from where do we get the number 210? The Vilna Gaon uses *gematria* to prove his idea and show the source of the number 210. He takes the *gematria* of Kadma V'azla, the names of the notes that the words "*and they made their lives bitter*" are read with from the Torah. The *gematria* of those terms turns out to be exactly 190. The *pasuk* is hinting that the extra suffering inflicted upon us by the Egyptians embittered our lives by the equivalent of another 190 years. Next year may we all be reading Kol Hanearim in Eretz Yisrael when Moshiach has come.



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