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THE BENJAMIN AND ROSE BERGER TORAH TO-GO®

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Dedicated in memory of Cantor Jerome L. Simons

Pesach as a Model for Educating Our Children

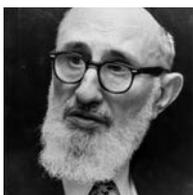


ישיבת רבנו יצחק אלחנן

Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary

An Affiliate of Yeshiva University

CENTER FOR THE JEWISH FUTURE



Commemorating the 25th
Yahrtzeit of Rabbi Joseph B.
Soloveitchik zt"l
**The Rav on Religious
Zionism**



Seven Decades of Israel
**Top Seven Torah Issues
from the 70 Years of the
State of Israel**

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Teaching Children With Different Learning Profiles



The Methodology of Teaching the Pesach Story



The Rav on Religious Zionism



Seven Decades of Torah Life in the State of Israel



Introduction

There is a mitzvah on the Seder night to recount the story of the Exodus from Egypt. Having recently completed observing the holiday of Purim, we are struck by the extraordinary contrast between Purim and Pesach, specifically in how they relate to the time honored tradition of “storytelling.” Megillas Esther is a dramatic account of the unfolding events that threatened the Persian Jewish community. Its sophisticated literary style builds characters, creates suspense, and introduces shocking twists and turns. Aside from being one of the revered Sifrei Tanach, it is a storytelling masterpiece. In sharp contrast, we encounter the Haggadah, our story guide on a night when we are commanded to relate our most formative national experience, and transmit that epic to the next generation. The Torah relates this incredible saga in all of its dramatic detail, and yet the construct of the Haggadah lacks even the most fundamental elements of a “great story.” It is a sophisticated collection of biblical interpretations, halachic symbols, imagery of praise, and ritual performance. With a night so devoted to transmitting this most sacred story, why isn’t it structured in a manner that relates the experience in a dramatic, clear, and profound way?

The answer can be found at the outset of the Haggadah, as we are introduced to the Arbah Banim. Tonight is not a ritual in storytelling — there is no megillah to read. Tonight is a night of Jewish education and inspiration. In that regard, to truly reach each and every child, Chazal provided not a text,

but a framework for the experience. Chazal understood that different types of children would require different approaches in absorbing the core elements of the *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim* experience. Therefore, the Haggadah is structured to provide the template for parents and educators to convey each and every aspect of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim*. Yet it does not constrict that effort in a particular approach so we can indeed reach every child. To reach every child, we must understand their unique differences and form an individualized approach.

Tonight is not a ritual in storytelling. Tonight is a night of Jewish education and inspiration.

In this edition of the Benjamin and Roser Berger *Torah To Go*, we turn to renowned educators to explore methodologies and approaches in relating to different types of children. It is our hope that these insights will provide us with perspectives and guidance for Seder night, and in how to reach these students throughout the year.

In the course of presenting the goals of this issue, we asked the authors of our section focusing on learning styles to have in mind the following questions (special thanks to Dr. Rona Novick, Dean of the Azrieli Graduate School of Jewish Education and Administration for her assistance in formulating these questions):

- What about the learner, the teacher, the material and/or the setting creates challenges and/or opportunities for each type of student?
- How do we respond *both* to those students at the marked extremes

(i.e. gifted, or struggling) without neglecting the student in the middle, the average learner?

- How much of students’ challenges do we believe are in their control, or are their responsibility to change?
- What are the best conditions under which each type of learner functions? What are their biggest challenges?
- What is our own personal learning profile, and how does that impact how we work with learners different from ourselves?
- Should/can our schools and educational programs meet the needs of all students, no matter how diverse?
- How can parents support their child — regardless of their learning profile?

Additionally, we are pleased to present a section that focuses on the methodology of teaching the Haggadah. The divrei Torah are geared toward specific age groups and the authors provide us with methodologies and techniques to convey these ideas.

This Pesach commemorates the 25th yahrtzeit of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, whom we know simply as “The Rav.” A few weeks later, we will be celebrating the 70th anniversary of the founding of the State of Israel. To commemorate both events, we are presenting two articles dealing with The Rav’s thoughts on Religious Zionism. Additionally, the fellows at the YU Israel Kollel in Jerusalem share their reflections on the last seventy years, each covering one of the seven decades.

Wishing you a chag kasher v’sameach,



Rabbi Yaakov Glasser
David Mitzner Dean,
Yeshiva University Center for
the Jewish Future

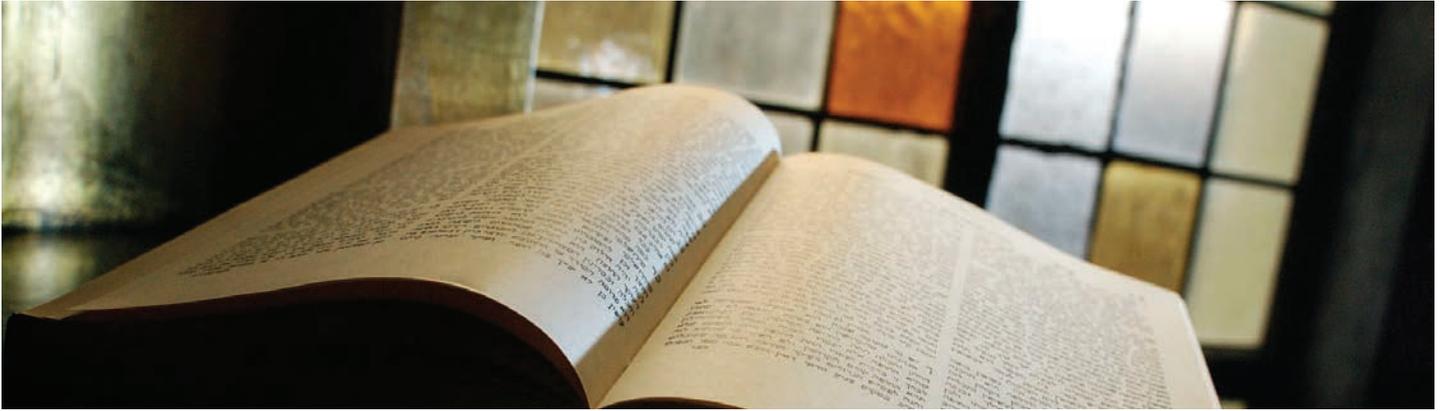
Teaching Children With Different Learning Profiles

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Rebbe, YU High School for Boys

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For the past twelve years, Rabbi Tanchum Cohen has conducted intensive beis midrash-based learning at the Wrubel Beis Midrash Katan, a self-selecting cadre of motivated seniors at Yeshiva University High School. He has also advised similar efforts at several other high schools around the country, and has taught for thirteen summers at NCSY Summer Kollel, a model of broad-based beis midrash engagement for North American high school students.



STRUCTURE, SPIRIT, SIPPUR

THE SEDER TABLE AS THE ORIGINAL BEIS MIDRASH, AND AS A MODEL FOR AMBITIOUS, ASPIRATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL EDUCATION

Nowadays, how can we best share the richness of Torah with the next generation? How can we share this with as many young people as possible? What strategies can we learn from studying the original mandate to teach and transmit Torah?

I. Questions of Effective Teaching and Transmission

As we continually strive to convey Torah to all our children with ever-increasing effectiveness, two of the areas for ongoing growth are questions of scope.

First, **breadth**: How can we ensure that we share the breadth of our rich Torah? Are our children and *talmidim* engaging and absorbing

both the sense and the sensitivities as well as the substance, the themes, values and *machshava*, as well as the content and skills of text and analysis? Second, **reach**: How can we provide instruction and instructional environments that cultivate ambition and foster learning for an array of learners? In this article, we will focus particularly on the following challenge: in a classroom that includes both gifted and more typical students, how do we engage our typical, “middle-of-the-road” learners with level-appropriate ambitious goals in both content and skills development, while simultaneously challenging our gifted students to excellence, ensuring that they neither stagnate nor lose interest?

In surveying the field of contemporary educational thinking about these and similar questions, the following is striking. The Big Bang Theory constitutes the scientific community’s embrace — after 3-and-a-half millennia — of the core lessons of the opening verse of Bereishis²; namely, that a Cause outside of and predating physics and causality brought the material universe into existence. Similarly, some key aspects of contemporary thinking in educational theory present a return to elements that have been integral to our beis midrash dynamic for tens of centuries and that continue to underpin this sacred dynamic.

Our appreciation of the beis midrash, at once age-old and contemporary,

begins by reaching even further back, with the original mandated structure for Jewish learning that preceded the centrality of the yeshiva. After all, Rav teaches us in *Masseches Bava Basra* that a yeshiva is a place in which the rebbi teaches Torah is an *in loco parentis* evolution from the original mandate of father-son transmission:

שבתחלה, מי שיש לו אב, מלמדו תורה. מי שאין לו אב, לא היה למד תורה. מאי דרוש? ולמדתם אותם [את בניכם] (דברים י"א) – ולמדתם אתם. התקינו שיהו מושיבין מלמדי תינוקות ...

Initially, whoever had a father would have his father teach him Torah, and whoever did not have a father would not learn Torah at all. What pasuk did they interpret that indicated this? "And you shall teach them [osam] to your sons" (Devarim 11:19), as "And you yourselves [atem] shall teach your sons." When the Sages saw that not everyone was capable of teaching their children and that Torah study was therefore declining, they instituted that teachers of children should be established.

Bava Basra 21a

However, if we seek to base our learning and teaching on the details of this model, the original *de-Oraysa* (Biblical) format of Torah transmission, we encounter a basic obstacle: difficulty in formulating or articulating the specific methodological model. While the general mitzva to teach Torah to one's son — *ve-limadtem osam es beneichem* — is a ubiquitous, year-round mandate, the halacha tells us little about required methods or modalities for this all-encompassing mitzva. In search of instruction and insight into the how-tos, let us therefore focus instead on a **second** mitzva *de-Oraysa* of Torah education, one that is specific to Pesach. The final *perek* of *Masseches*

Pesachim provides us with an array of instructions for fulfilling *ve-higadta le-vincha* (Shemos 13:8), the requirement to tell the story of *yetzias Mitzrayim* on the first night of Pesach, the mitzva typically known as *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim*.

In our context, we will discover that a nuanced halachic analysis of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim* is not only fundamentally enlightening but also practically instructive. In the upcoming section, we switch gears and analytically engage the *sugya* of mitzvas *sippur* on its own terms. As is so common in the world of *talmud Torah*, opening with seemingly small questions about halachic details will lead us to grand vistas and great vision. Solving the technical problems provides us with profound insight into Pesach; moreover, appreciating the details of this mitzva will enable us in the final section to recognize some of the unique value and dynamic of the *beis midrash*, and to begin to envision and plan for enhancing learning and teaching Torah throughout the year.

II. Sippur Yetzias Mitzrayim

Children are not the only ones to ask questions about the structure and substance of the Seder. We, too, might be moved to wonder — for instance — why we don't wash *netilas yadayim* and begin eating matza immediately following Kiddush, much as we do at any other Shabbas or Yom Tov meal, particularly since the requirement of *kiddush bi-mkom seuda* (*Pesachim* 101a) — eating a meal in the same place as Kiddush and immediately thereafter — ought to militate against an unnecessary lag between Kiddush and beginning the Yom Tov meal.

The Sequence of the Seder

This seemingly tangential question actually introduces us to the two main elements of the Seder: the mitzvos of eating matza and of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim*, telling the Pesach story. According to the accepted opinion,³ these are the two mitzvos *de-oraysa* at the Seder nowadays, since each of these is a mitzva *per se* rather than exclusively an adjunct to *korban Pesach* (unlike maror,⁴ which is *de-rabbanan* nowadays).

This pair's connection, however, goes far beyond merely sharing this common status of *mitzvos de-Oraysa* that apply nowadays. Each of these mitzvos actually requires the other, and so *achilas matza* and *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim* are doubly connected in a bond of mutual causality. First, we say "*Yachol me-rosh chodesh ...*," near the opening of Maggid. We can only fulfill the mitzva of *sippur* "*bi-zman she-yesh matza u-maror munachin le-fanecha*" at a time when the matzah and maror are in front of us — in conjunction with the palpable, tangible *cheftzei mitzva*. Similarly, Rabban Gamliel famously taught⁵ that one of the genres that comprise *sippur* is an explication of the matza and maror on the table, relating the narrative to the tangible "audiovisual aids." Second, the converse is true as well: *achilas matza* needs to follow the verbal mitzvos. The Torah's central description of *matzas mitzva* is the enigmatic and multivalent phrase "*lechem oni*."⁶ One meaning of this term is "bread of conversation" ("*lechem she-onin alav devarim harbei*").⁷ Rashi understands that the matza meets this criterion only after Maggid has been recited (*sippur* and some Hallel) over the uncovered matza.⁸

This interdependence begins to explain the mysterious sequence of the Seder. Maggid must precede *motzi matza* for both reasons: *achilas matza* can be properly fulfilled only after the matza has “absorbed” the words of *sippur* and Hallel,⁹ and the *sippur* must be accomplished while the matza is as yet uneaten and available as prop and context for the verbal mitzva.

The Length of the Seder

While we may now understand the need to precede *achilas matza* with some sort of Maggid, the length of the Maggid might still seem curious. The need for such a lengthy “*hefseik*” or lag between Kiddush and seuda becomes clear in light of the following comment attributed to Rav Chaim Soloveichik.¹⁰

Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya’s statement “*harei ani ke-ven shiv'im shana,*” which is actually a Mishna in *Masseches Berachos* (12b), has been made famous among children — in the context of the Haggada — primarily in connection with “*ke-ven shiv'im shana,*” which Rashi (ad loc) explains as a reference to his miraculously premature aging. The **content** of Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya’s statement, however, is very striking. He taught that the daily mitzva of *zechiras yetzias Mitzrayim* (which we fulfill by reciting “*ani Hashem Elokeichem ...*” at the end of *kerias shema*) applies at night as well as by day. Why, then, should anyone who has already recited *Sh'ma* on *leil Pesach* bother to have a Seder at all? Haven’t we already mentioned *yetzias Mitzrayim* in this briefer format?

Rav Chaim responds with a small but significant difference in terms: the daily mitzva is *zechiras yetzias Mitzrayim*; the annual one is *sippur*.

Drawing upon a series of mishnayos in the closing chapter of *Masseches Pesachim*, the Rambam¹¹ lists six qualities that characterize the *sippur* process: 1) dialogue, 2) interactive question-and-answer format, 3) dramatic contrast — starting with the negative and ending with the positive, 4) the nexus of *Torah she-bi-chsav* and *Torah she-be'al pe* — the exposition of the *Arami oved avi* section, 5) relating the story to the palpable *mitzvos ha-layla* — Rabban Gamliel’s requirement to discuss these mitzvos, and 6) physical portrayal of the *geula* (kinesthetic *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim*). None of these apply to the twice-daily *zechira*, which is a simple mention, a recital to ourselves. *Sippur*, on the other hand, is an entirely different activity with fundamentally different goals. *Sippur* is a richly experiential educational opportunity, a **retelling** of the story of *geula*, which generates **relating** and **relationship**-building, in service of **relaying** a dynamic, vibrant *emuna* and *yiras shamayim* to the succeeding generation.

With this enriched perspective, the length of the printed Maggid is certainly no longer merely an application of *kol ha-marbe harei ze meshubbach*, the longer the better. Rather, it is a careful combination of each of the six minimal ingredients listed above: After Kiddush, we engage in several surprising, (hopefully) question-provoking activities that diverge from the program of a typical Yom Tov meal, such as following our *netilas yadayim* with *karpas* vegetables rather than with the typical bread, as well as clearing the table (which we fulfill nowadays¹² by removing the matzos and/or Seder plate), and refilling the cup as though we have already completed the meal and are preparing for *birkas ha-mazon*. Having

thus catalyzed the *sippur*, we proceed almost immediately to instructions and parameters for the *sippur* as explained above (“*afillu kullanu chachamim ... kol ha-marbe ... Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya [as a contrast to sippur] ... arba'a banim ... bi-sh'a she-yesh matza u-maror munachin le-fanecha ...*”), followed by each of the elements of *sippur* listed above. After completing the multifaceted *sippur* and thereby tasting our ancestors’ experience of *yetzias Mitzrayim* and *geula*, we naturally respond with a brief Hallel on a cup of wine. Having enriched our matza with words of *sippur* and Hallel, it is now *lechem oni* — *lechem she'onin alav devarim harbei* — and we now proceed directly to the mitzva of *achilas matza* and the balance of our seuda.

III. Back to the Beis Midrash

Consider the larger picture that *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim* now paints. Unlike the daily *zechira*, *sippur* is a robust retelling rather than mere referencing, and that retelling in turn leads to relating between generations and relaying *emuna*.

The elements of the **process**, the educational modalities, include **personal and direct engagement**, **dialogue** driven by **questions and answers**, **targeted differentiated instruction**, and the combination of **personal application** together with **song and joy**, which cap the *limud*. A parent who has had the pleasure and privilege of presiding over a Seder at home will know that it requires **work** — work that is both challenging and deeply rewarding. These educational elements — already mandated in the original *mitzva de-oraysa* of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim* — can and should be richly present in the beis midrash.

The **results** of *sippur* — in the building and enhancing of relationships, both with parents and grandparents who are teaching and with Hashem — also find their parallel in the results of successful engagement in the beis midrash dynamic. The beis midrash provides an unparalleled opportunity to build relationships, and it also opens the door within for personal growth.

Building Blocks for Beis Midrash-based Learning

Inspired by the model of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim* — the original beis midrash — here are some elements to consider in building a contemporary high school beis midrash with ambition. The model will of course require tailoring to each unique school context and culture (much as the above passage in *Bava Basra* 21a — on the history of Torah education — goes on to speak of refining the processes of Torah education to specific locations and ages), but the following elements will be among the critical ingredients in many successful recipes.

Some ingredients of a morning seder for *hachana* in advance of an *iyun shiur*

- carefully crafted *mareh mekomos* that are not merely a list of *mekoros*, but are energized by guiding questions;
- quantity of time allocated for seder will be carefully considered, graduated over the years by age, skill, and sense of developed self-confidence;
- deliberate training in the skills of effective *chavrusa* learning (e.g., the mechanics of reading together, *shakla ve-tarya* with one's *chavrusa*), beis midrash etiquette, sense of mature responsibility for our time and product (enabling our *talmidim*

to grow beyond common limiting adolescent mindsets);

- sense of *masora* and of membership in the *masora* community — ideally, engendered by sharing a beis midrash with older *talmidim*;
- cultivating a culture of *dibbuk chaveirim* (camaraderie) within the group of *talmidim*;
- actively rotating from *chavrusa* to *chavrusa* during seder can allow for differentiated instruction to augment the full-group learning and teaching in the *shiur* room, as well as for individual assessment of progress in skills, content mastery, and motivation.

This seder can be complemented by an active *shiur* that engages *talmidim* in building upon what was learned *be-chavrusa*. Subsequent *sidrei chazara* (review sessions, perhaps during daily or biweekly night *sedarim*, or daily afternoon *sedarim*) offer a further, dynamic opportunity to return to the original *mekoros* with newly-seasoned eyes, equipped with the added insight gained from *shiurim* to now — during *seder chazara* — notice the nuances in the *mekoros* that went unnoticed and unappreciated during a prior *seder hachana*.

This beis midrash-centered *limud be-iyun* pairs exceptionally well with ambitious goals in *bekius* (with an age- and level-appropriate *beis midrash* element) and in new vistas in Tanach, halacha and *machshava* to help our *talmidim* to draft visions of themselves as *talmidei chachamim* and to begin to realize those visions.¹³

The Beis Midrash as Smithy

The beis midrash is the smithy¹⁴ in which a talmid can forge more profound emotional relationships

with people and a deeper personal identification with Torah and its Giver. Consider the following two passages:

אמר רבי חייא בר אבא, אפיל האב ובנו הרב ותלמידו שעוסקין בתורה בשער אחד נעשים אויבים זה את זה. ואינם זוים משם עד שנעשים אוהבים זה את זה.

What is the meaning of the phrase “with enemies in the gate” (Tehillim 127:5) with regard to Torah study [as “gate” often refers to the ancient beis midrash]? Rabbi Chiyya bar Abba says: Even a father and his son, or a rabbi and his student, who are engaged in Torah together in one beis midrash [literally, one “gate”] become [temporarily] as adversaries with each other due to the intensity of their studies. Yet they do not leave there until they love each other.

Kiddushin 30b

א"ר מתנה אמר רב חסדא, האב שמחל על כבודו, כבודו מחול. הרב שמחל על כבודו, אין כבודו מחול. ורב יוסף אמר, אפיל הרב שמחל על כבודו, כבודו מחול, שנאמר "וה' הולך לפניו יומם". אמר רבא, הכי השתא?! התם, הקדוש ב"ה עלמא דיליה הוא ותורה דיליה היא, מחיל ליה ליקריה. הכא, תורה דיליה היא?! הדר אמר רבא, אין, תורה דיליה היא.

Rav Mattana says that Rav Chisda says: With regard to a father who forgoes his honor, his honor is forgiven [and his son does not transgress if he does not treat him in the proper manner]. By contrast, with regard to a rabbi who forgoes his honor, his honor is not forgiven. Rav Yosef disagrees: Even with regard to a rabbi who forgoes his honor, his honor is forgiven, as it is stated: “And Hashem went before them by day” (Shemos 13:21). Rava questioned [Rav Yosef’s position]: How can these cases be compared? There, with regard to the Holy One, Blessed be He, the world is His and the Torah is His, and therefore He can forgo His honor. By contrast, here, is it his Torah, that the teacher can forgo its honor? Rava subsequently said: Yes indeed. If he studies, it is his Torah ...

after he studies, it becomes “his Torah.”
Kiddushin 32a-32b

Shared intensive Torah study ultimately generates deeper bonds between those who engage in it together. Moreover, we become as partners to Hashem in His Torah as we make it our own through sustained effort and focus. The beis midrash can and should be a hub, a primary venue for this personal engagement and multifaceted relationship building. The beis midrash also thereby provides a platform to open the door to both minds and hearts; we ought to capitalize on this openness and thoughtfulness, this open-door opportunity, to develop increasingly profound identification with *emuna* and understanding of the ideas and ideals of *machsheves Yisrael*, of Torah thought.

Rav Menachem Mendel Morgenstern of Kotzk commented on a curious wrinkle in the language of *kerias sh'ma*. Immediately after the first two *pesukim*, which contain key notions of Hashem's existence, uniqueness and omnipotence and of the love for Him and dedication to Him that we ought to cultivate, the Torah commands us:

וְהָיוּ הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה אֲשֶׁר אֶנְכִי מְצַוֶּה הַיּוֹם עִלְיָ
לְבַבְךָ:

These words [instructions and ideas] — which I have commanded you today — shall be upon your heart.

Devarim 6:6

We might have expected the Torah to require that the words enter *within* our hearts, rather than merely sit *upon* our hearts. The Kotzker¹⁵ explained that if we encounter inspiring Torah ideas when we are presently unready for them, they can still remain *atop* our hearts, as it were; when our hearts open at a later date, the Torah ideas are there, ready to be absorbed and digested.

We seek to design our batei midrash around this pair of goals: to open the *levavos*, the hearts and the minds,¹⁶ and to fill those open and willing hearts and minds with ambitious Torah — with deep and broad understanding of many *sugyos ha-Shas*, with a sense of the vision and values that those *sugyos* convey in the context of Tanach and *sifrei machshava*, with deepened *emuna* and with personal identification with the glorious procession of *masora* whose heroes we study with¹⁷ and from, and with the yearning to grow ambitiously and dynamically as *talmidei chachamim* throughout the decades of our lives.

Tefilla

Tefilla plays a particularly crucial role in our success in *chinuch*, both for our own biological children as well as for our students, *banim heim heim ha-talmidim*.¹⁸ Closing these musings with a dual tefilla:

May we be inspired to vividly relate and portray the yetzias Mitzrayim narrative and thus meaningfully relay its messages and lessons of emuna and of hope, and may we soon merit to precede the Seder with the truly first Hallel of the Pesach season, the afternoon Hallel that accompanied the offering of the korban Pesach.

כֵּן ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֵלֵינוּ יִגְעַנּוּ לְמוֹעֲדֵינוּ
וְלִרְגֵלֵינוּ אַחֲרָיִם הַבָּאִים לְקִרְאָתֵנוּ לְשִׁלוֹם
שְׂמֵחִים בְּבִנְיַן עִירָךְ וְשָׂשׂוֹן בְּעִבּוּדֶךָ וְנֹאכַל
שֶׁמֶן מִן הַזֵּבַחִים וּמִן הַפֶּסַחִים אֲשֶׁר יִגְעַן דָּמָם
עַל קִיר מִזְבִּיחֶךָ לְרִצּוֹן וְנוֹדָה לְךָ שִׁיר חֲדָשׁ עַל
גְּאוּלְתֵנוּ וְעַל פְּדוּת נַפְשֵׁנוּ.

May we succeed — throughout the year and throughout our lives — in conveying Torah richly and fully, sharing both the substance and the sensibilities of devar Hashem, inspiring future generations of am Yisrael to ambitiously cultivate minds

bright and full of Torah knowledge and wisdom, lives a-sparkle with mitzvos and their values, and hearts brimming with awareness and love of Hashem.

וְהָאֵר עֵינֵינוּ בְּתוֹרַתְךָ וְדַבְּקוּ לָבוֹנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתֶיךָ
וְיַחַד לְבַבְנוּ לְאַהֲבָה וּלְיִרְאָה אֶת שְׁמֶךָ

Endnotes

1 Rabbeinu Yonah, *Iggeres ha-Teshuva* 81-82; *Zeri`a u-Binyan be-Chinuch* pp. 34-35.

2 Prof. Nathan Aviezer, *In the Beginning*, p.15; Dr. Gerald Schroder, *The Science of God*, p. 23.

3 Rava in *Pesachim* 120a; qtd. by Rambam, *Chametz u-Matza* 6:1.

4 *Pesachim* (*ibid.*); qtd. by Rambam, *Chametz u-Matza* 7:12.

5 Mishna *Pesachim* 116a.

6 *Devarim* 16:3.

7 *Pesachim* 36a.

8 See as well *Tur* and *Beis Yosef* 473.

9 This seems to explain as well the kabbalistic terms for matza: *nahama di-mheimanusa* or *michla di-mheimanusa*, bread or food of faith (referenced in *Sefas Emes*, *Pesach* 1878 and 1879; et al).

10 *Chiddushei ha-Grach mi-Pi ha-Shmu`a*, *Pesachim* 116a (*siman* 40).

11 *Chametz u-Matza* 7:3-6.

12 *Shulchan Aruch* 473:6. See as well *Rashi*, *Rashbam* and *Tosfos* to *Pesachim* 115b.

13 *Midrash Tanchuma*, Ki Sissa 16, qtd. by *Rashi* ad loc. 31:18.

14 The metaphor is inspired by the simile in *Yirmeyahu* 23:29, particularly as explicated in *Kiddushin* 30b.

15 Quoted by his grandson in *Shem mi-Shmuel* (5677).

16 Rav Yaacov Kaminetzky, *Emes le-Yaacov*, *Devarim* 6:5.

17 Rav J. B. Soloveitchik, 1974; qtd. in *Reflections of the Rav* 2 pp. 21-23; cf. *Nefesh ha-Rav* pp.48-51 and fn. 21. Audio available at <http://www.yutorah.org/lectures/lecture.cfm/753994>.

18 Rabbeinu Yonah, *Iggeres ha-Teshuva* 81-82; *Zeri`a u-Binyan be-Chinuch* pp. 34-35.

Teaching Children With Different Learning Profiles

Dr. Aviva Goldstein

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MINDFULNESS AS A REMEDY FOR INATTENTIVENESS

The Pesach Seder is an immersive experience that allows us to engage with each other and with our Creator using nearly all teaching modalities — the five senses, story-telling, singing, questions and answers, and lively debates. One of the most foundational and simultaneously profound moments of the Seder — eating the matzah — is also a sacred moment of recollection, focus and mindfulness. When we eat the designated *shiur* of matzah, we employ mind, body and spirit to fulfill the mitzvah. Leaning to

the left, we chew in silence, avoiding conversation to encourage our minds to concentrate on the purpose of the moment, reflecting on the mitzvah of remembering the suffering of our People and the remarkably glorious redemption from slavery to freedom.

This moment of purposefully eating the matzah with *kavannah* — concentration — while being fully present and engaged is actually an ancient prescription for a contemporary ailment. Our society is plagued by the affliction of inattentiveness. Teachers see it with

their students, children see it with their parents, colleagues and spouses see it in each other. While our lives are moving at light-speed and we are constantly achieving more in less time, we are also fooling ourselves into believing in the myth of multitasking. There are many consequences of this trend.

In recent years, the number of ADHD diagnoses has spiked among young children, adolescents and adults alike. In the United States alone, 6 million children (one in ten) have been diagnosed with ADHD, making it the

most common childhood behavioral condition in the country. This is both good news and bad news. The good news is that more attention is being paid to learning patterns, instructional methodologies and interventions for antisocial behavior. The bad news is that we know that ADHD is being over-diagnosed and misdiagnosed, since the actual identification process is quite challenging.

Add to the mix an unprecedented shift in childhood reality: screen-based technology and mobile devices. Multiple studies have found that the amount of time a child spends engaged with a screen (laptop, phone, tablet, etc.) has a significant impact on that child's behavior. A child who is strongly connected to his or her screen tends to demonstrate strikingly similar behavior to those children with ADHD; that child might be able to spend large quantities of time focused on the task at hand, like watching a show or playing a game, but struggles to focus in other areas, like conversations, class discussions and household chores. There is no shortage of evidence to show us how emotional connections are being formed (or not formed, or misformed) in ways that dramatically deviate from historical human trends, or that learning — inside and outside of the classroom — is becoming increasingly superficial, and, that as time spent online increases, attention spans decrease. Research also shows that parents who try to accomplish something on their phones while also being with their children lose their patience and temper with their children much more quickly than those parents who have put their phones away.

With all of this as a backdrop, mindfulness is having its cultural moment, but its trendiness should not

be cause to dismiss it. Mindfulness is the mental state achieved by focusing one's awareness on the present moment. Unlike meditation (its close cousin), which is about directing your thoughts elsewhere, mindfulness is about being completely present in the moment. The popularity of mindfulness is due to many factors, including the ease in which it can be practiced, and the direct positive feelings it creates as a result. Corporate giants are bringing mindfulness seminars to their employees, while hospitals, educational institutions, prisons and the U.S. military are all including mindfulness training in their programming as well.

The genius of its simplicity is also causing it to take root in the Jewish world. Jewish day schools are starting to talk about how to bring mindfulness into classrooms and school culture, rabbis are incorporating it into their *divrei Torah*, and I have the distinct pleasure of teaching it to many gap-year students in Israel. The beauty of mindfulness is that a knowledgeable Jew doesn't have to veer off the path of *Yiddishkeit* to tap into it — it is, in fact, the essence of *Yiddishkeit*. We just call it something else — we call it *kavannah*.

When we make a *bracha* with *kavannah* before eating, that's mindfulness.

When we say *Asher Yatzar* with *kavannah* after using the bathroom, that's mindfulness.

When we *bentch* our children on *Leil Shabbos* with *kavannah*, that's mindfulness.

And when we eat matzah in silence on *Pesach*, savoring the taste, reflecting on the moment, and listening to

the soundtrack of crunching, that's mindfulness.

Shutting out the distractions and focusing on the present moment can be extraordinarily challenging. Yet we know we are capable of it, because we practice it at different moments throughout the year. Perhaps it's only on *Yom Kippur*. Perhaps it's each Friday night at candle lighting. Perhaps it's more frequent, on a daily basis. Recognizing that it is challenging, but not impossible, is the key to searching for more opportunities to bring presence, mindfulness, and *kavannah* into our daily lives.

As with most behaviors, our children learn from us. If we model mindfulness, and even explicitly share with our children why it matters and why it's hard to achieve, our children may be inspired to follow our example. If it is known that this shift in focus and behavior is for the precise purpose of establishing deeper, more authentic connections with each other and with our Creator, there is even more reason to go outside our comfort zones and to be present in the moment.

There are many strategies that can help individuals and families incorporate mindfulness into their

When we eat matzah in silence on *Pesach*, savoring the taste, reflecting on the moment, and listening to the soundtrack of crunching, that's mindfulness.

daily lives. Here, however, are some tools that might help your family become less distracted and more mindful, specifically for Pesach:

1. Choose one part of the preparations for Pesach on which to be especially focused: reciting *Kol Chamirah*, slicing/shredding/chopping one food for the Seder plate, cleaning one specific part of the house.

2. Let halacha guide you: during the moments that are meant to be devoid of conversation (drinking from the four cups, between washing and Hamotzi, eating the matzah, various points throughout Maggid), make a point of being present in the moment, focusing on the task or thought at hand.

3. During clean-up: Use the moments during dishwashing or table-clearing to speak to the others who are joining the effort to discuss highlights of the Seder. What was particularly meaningful for you?

4. Don't forget Chol Hamo'ed: Designate specific moments during Chol HaMo'ed to have conversations with those you love, maintaining eye contact and keeping phones in pockets or bags.

5. Make the Omer count: Sfiras Ha'Omer is a great example of having the prescription already in our hands. Like in other instances, there is a short paragraph that starts with *hineni muchan umezuman*, which is a verbal preparation for creating the mindset in which we can fulfill the mitzvah of counting the Omer each day. By actually focusing on the words we say in that paragraph, we sharpen our *kavannah* and create mindfulness for ourselves, and potentially for those around us as well.

This Pesach, may we help our children and ourselves be freed from the bonds of distraction and inattention; may we find the clarity of purpose to reestablish the connections that

matter most to us; and may we find ways to have *kavannah* — to be mindful and to be present with ourselves, our loved ones and with our Creator.

Resources:

For more information about the research on the relationship between screen time and behavior, see the work of The Kaiser Family Foundation, Jean Twenge, Edward Swing, Elizabeth Lorch, and the American Academy of Pediatrics.

For information about Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder in children and adults, see the work of Amnon Gimpel, the Journal for Attention Disorders, or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

For more information on mindfulness, see the work of J. David Creswell, Jon Kabbat-Zinn, Charlotte Zenner, and Tal Ben Shahar.

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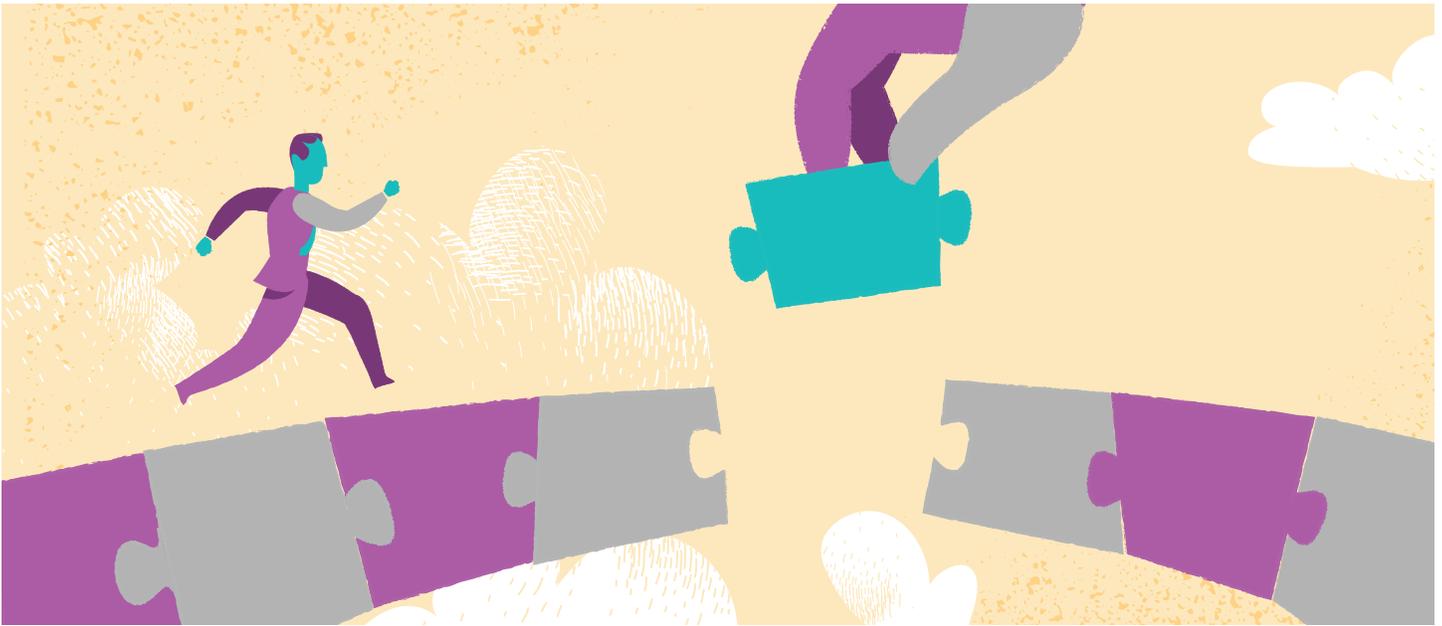
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Teaching Children With Different Learning Profiles

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THE SPECIAL NEED TO PROVIDE APPROPRIATE CHINUCH TO PEOPLE WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

In discussing some of the details relating to the education of Jewish children, the *Shaloh HaKadosh* (*Sha'ar Ha-Osiyos, Derech Eretz, s.v. ikar*) emphasizes the tantamount importance of raising children properly and asserts that the very purpose of procreating is to have children and descendants who will be involved in Torah and *mitzvos* (see also *Beis Shmuel* to *Even Ha-Ezer* 1:3). Because, he adds, people by nature have the potential, and in some cases even the tendency, to do that which is wrong, it is necessary to train and teach children to develop good habits and characteristics from a very young

age, steadily increasing the direction and the guidance in accordance with their developing abilities.

We know, of course, that different people develop differently and at varying paces. We also know that some people never “fully” develop — at least not in a way that society considers “normal.” What, then, are our educational responsibilities towards these children? In a most famous passage, the Haggadah speaks of four different types of youngsters, one of whom is described as “*she-eino yodeia lish'ol*” — someone who does not know how to ask. The simple

explanation of this description is that it characterizes someone with a limited intellectual capacity (see the Haggadah commentary attributed to Rashi, s.v. *Ve-She-Eino*, and that of the *Orchos Chaim, Hilchos Leil Ha-Pesach* No. 38, s.v. *Ve-She-Eino*). According to the text of the Haggadah, this student requires instruction that is markedly different from that given to others — instruction which perhaps demands more of those trying to teach him who must on their own find the way to engage him. But this child clearly is not shunned, excluded, or rejected — he or she too has to be brought in to the Seder experience. And the same

would seem to be true of the other experiences that define the life of a committed Jew. In this essay, we will address the introductory questions that are relevant to the education of children with special needs.

What about the learner, the teacher, the material and/or the setting creates challenges and/or opportunities for this type of student?

Perhaps the first issue to consider in the Jewish communal setting is whether any halachic obligation exists to educate Jewish children who have so-called “special needs.” If the answer is no, the case may be made that the parents of these children should be directed to the many excellent academic services and resources often available in their local public school districts, where their children may be educated. If the answer is yes, then it becomes the responsibility of the Jewish community, despite the already severely strained financial situation associated with Jewish education, to see to it that these youngsters are provided with a proper Torah education just like everybody else — a formidable challenge given the high cost of special needs education, but one which must be met.

The Mishnah in *Kiddushin* (29a) teaches that one of the obligations incumbent upon a father concerning his child is teaching him Torah; no distinctions are mentioned there relating to the ability of the child. Similarly, the Gemara in *Sukkah* (42a), speaking about the observance of mitzvos, indicates with a number of examples that once a child is old enough to be able to perform a particular mitzvah, his father must do whatever is necessary to

enable him to do so properly (see *Chidushei Ha-Ritva* to *Sukkah* 2b, s.v. *Amar Rabbi Yehudah*). No uniform age is presented there concerning any specific mitzvah, and it is clear from *Tosafos* in *Erchin* (2b, s.v. *She-Higiya*), followed by others, that the exact age in fact depends upon the individual child. But despite this acknowledgment of developmental differences among children, no outright exclusions or dispensations for a certain class of children are cited. It would thus seem clear that there exists at least on some level a requirement of *talmud Torah* as well as of *chinuch* for mitzvos regarding special needs children who have a significantly more limited intellectual capacity.

One of the difficulties, however, lies in determining just how “limited” the child’s capacity is. Will this student, in light of his or her disability, ever become fully obligated in mitzvos upon reaching adulthood, or will his or her disability be a cause for exemption upon reaching adulthood? Some Acharonim, such as R. Tzvi Hirsch Chayes (*Shu”t Maharatz* no. 58) and R. Avraham Shmuel Binyamin Sofer (*Shu”t Kesav Sofer, Yoreh De’ah* No. 172), assert that there is no requirement to train a child in the observance of mitzvos that will not be relevant to him as an adult. The *Minchas Chinuch* (Mitzvah 264 No.34) disagrees (see also *Pischei Teshuvah* to *Yoreh De’ah* 396:2), but even he imposes the obligation to educate such a person only if there is some chance that he may later become halachically bound to observe the mitzvah in question, affirming elsewhere (Mitzvah 5 No. 4) that one who will never become obligated in a mitzvah as an adult need not be educated as a child.

Further complicating the matter is the fact that it is often very difficult to accurately assess a mental or educational disability or to precisely determine what a person truly knows and understands. Moreover, there is a wide range of intellectual impairments, and hence predicting whether a particular child will indeed, upon growing older, fall into the category of people exempted from mitzvah observance (see Rambam, *Hilchos Chagigah* 2:4 and *Hilchos Eidus* 9:11) is almost impossible. Perhaps with this in mind, the *Pri Megadim* (*Eishel Avraham* to *Orach Chaim* 343:2) and the *Aruch La-Ner* (to *Yevamos* 113b, s.v. *gezeirah*) assert that we must educate even a child with a severe intellectual disability, since he most likely does have some understanding, the latter adding that it is possible that the disability will improve as the child matures.

Which brings us to a final point. For many years, presumptions were made about people with intellectual impairments — and indeed about people with other disabilities, such as blindness and deafness — which we know today are simply erroneous. It was widely assumed that certain people were incapable of any kind of understanding and just could not, under any circumstances, be educated; we know today that such is not at all the case. We have more understanding today than ever before about the functions and abilities of the human brain; we now know, due to our awareness about the plasticity of the brain, that people can and do learn with all kinds of disabilities at all stages of life. Not everyone can be taught and can learn the same way, at the same pace, or at the same level, but most everyone can learn something, even if in an unconventional manner.

The challenge is to create educational programs that will meet the needs of even the members of our community who need that unconventional style.

How much of students' challenges do we believe are in their control, or are their responsibility to change? On what do we base those assumptions?

In evaluating students with special needs, it is usually very difficult to accurately pinpoint which of their disabilities can be overcome, even if only partially. Precisely because of certain disabilities that tend to be prevalent among these individuals, such as poor auditory processing and poor receptive language skills — which means that they don't fully comprehend what they are being asked — and poor communication and poor expressive language skills — which means that they cannot effectively share what they know — we often cannot, with certainty, know exactly what they do and do not understand and hence, what challenges may and may not be at least somewhat in their control.

Clearly, most students on the autistic spectrum, such as my own youngest son, will be unable to converse on a subject that requires deep abstract thinking any more readily than an average student who has difficulty with simple algebraic equations will be able to solve problems in advanced calculus. These shortcomings are not the students' fault and in most cases it would be unfair to demand or even expect that they "change." At the same time though, there are certainly special needs students who, like so many other students, are lazy, do not want to push themselves too hard,

and seek the path of least resistance, sometimes even trying to take advantage, perhaps unwittingly, of their disability in order to avoid doing something.

Educators must acknowledge that there are people whose comprehension of even things taken for granted by most of us is limited. The difficulty, as noted above, is in determining just how limited and hence, what can truly be expected of a student who may be in this category. R. Moshe Sofer (*Shu"t Chasam Sofer, Even Ha-Ezer Part 2 No. 2, s.v. gam*) observes that Chazal themselves did not provide clear guidelines regarding people whose abilities are limited but yet are still capable in certain ways; perhaps that is because the range of disabilities is too broad and their nature too complex to allow for any general kind of rule, and each case must thus be examined individually. It is therefore the duty of the educator to get to know the students as well as possible and figure out how far they can be pushed. It is tempting at times to conclude that as teachers we have gone as far as we can go with a particular student, because that means that we can now relax, free from further obligation. But too often, to take that approach is to sell the student short, and it is an unfortunate reality that in the world of special education, despite the undeniable devotion of dedicated teachers, that is exactly what happens, and the students, while certainly accomplishing something, do not accomplish everything they are in fact capable of accomplishing.

It is noteworthy that already in the 19th century, R. Simchah Bunim Sofer reported (*Shu"t Shevet Sofer, Even Ha-Ezer No. 21*) that his father, the

mentioned R. Avraham Shmuel Binyamin Sofer, after visiting a school for the hearing and language impaired in Vienna and seeing the people's accomplishments as a result of their special education, remarked that the Jews there should now be considered obligated to observe mitzvos. The Rashash (*Gittin 71a, s.v. Gemara*) records his own, similar reaction to visiting that school. [See, however, *Shu"t Halachos Ketanos 2:38, Shu"t Maharam Schick, Even Ha-Ezer 79:4, and Shu"t Maharsham 2:140.*] In more modern times, R. Yitzchak Isaac Ha-Leivi Herzog (*Shu"t Heichal Yitzchak 2:47*) came to the same conclusion about mentally impaired people in light of modern educational methods. These individuals did not change on their own, but were changed by their teachers and mentors. While it may not be in the realm of possibility for special needs students to change on their own, in light of present day improvements both in our understanding of how people learn and in educational methodology, it is our job as teachers and as parents to change them by educating them appropriately.

What are the best conditions under which this type of learner functions? What are their biggest challenges?

As indicated earlier, the "special needs" population includes people with an extraordinarily wide range of educational and academic disabilities, and no single method of instruction can be said to address every student. Broadly speaking, though, the environment must be one that allows students to express their idiosyncratic behaviors, whether that means allowing them to move around

regularly because they cannot sit still for an extended period of time, or not being “thrown” or put off when students are talking to themselves — even out loud — or manifesting other sensory issues, or repeating a lesson multiple times because the students’ minds are wandering, they are daydreaming, or they are otherwise tuned out for a time. Conduct of this kind would obviously be discouraged in a “mainstream” classroom, but in the special needs classroom, it is part of the program. The Gemara in *Eiruvin* (54b) speaks of a student of R. Preida’s who was unable to grasp his teacher’s lesson until it was presented several hundred times; R. Preida was clearly a devoted teacher with the patience to give his student the attention he needed in order to succeed. It often takes a similarly gifted teacher to be able to reach special needs students and create the best learning environment.

The famous verse in Mishlei (22:6) directs us to educate each child in accordance with his own individual way; the Vilna Gaon there explains that in fact the only way to assure that the teaching will not only be successful in the short term but will also have a long-term impact is to provide the instruction to each student in a manner consistent with the student’s nature. To force someone to learn in a way that disregards his nature will not yield productive results. This lesson is all the more true for students with special needs. Many have to be given space and do not function well in the tight or “claustrophobic” environment that often characterizes a typical classroom. Some are overwhelmed when there are too many stimuli at once, because they lack the tools to filter out extraneous “noise” and react

poorly when overstimulated. Most are best taught in very small settings — if not one-on-one then close to it. It should also be stressed, though, that their education must sometimes include training in basic social skills, which they do not pick up on their own the way other youngsters do; this instruction is generally more effective in a larger setting. These students have many challenges, but with the right approach and the right personnel, they can be successfully met.

What is our personal learning profile, and how does that impact how we work with learners different from ourselves?

Because the minds, the brains, and the thought processes of special needs students are in so many ways so very different than those of more typically developing students (and adults), we cannot really draw on our own learning experience and background for insights into teaching them. Many of these students tend to be very literal, and hence completely miss nuances, sarcasm, and even humor — basic components of many conversations and discussions, both in the classroom and outside — and also lack self-awareness regarding behaviors of theirs that may be inappropriate or even, at times, offensive. It is only by continuing to work closely with and getting to know the student well over an extended period of time that we can begin to understand how to best educate him, how to most successfully communicate a lesson to him, and how to get the most out of him.

Based upon our own educational backgrounds, we might tend to focus only on the disability of the students

with special needs — what it is that makes them different and hampers their educational growth. This, however, can be a big mistake, because many of these students in fact have certain unique abilities as well. As the father of a special needs child, I vividly recall my son’s excitement at being in an upcoming high school play a few years ago — and my own conviction that surely this production would be underwhelming, and on the lowest of levels. When I saw what he and his classmates were able to do, I was literally brought to tears. Clearly, the staff focused on the students’ abilities and not their disabilities, enabling each participant to shine in his or her own way. The Gemara in *Shabbos* (156a) indicates that every human tendency can be channeled in a way that yields a positive result; it is wrong to expect that only those with certain more typical attributes can succeed and can contribute.

We now know that it is also wrong to assume that everybody learns the same way. At one time, the conventional wisdom was that writing with the left hand was “incorrect” and lefties were thus forced to learn to write with their right hands — my mother, *a’h*, who was a lefty, related that her left hand was tied behind her back in an attempt to rectify her “disability.” While this may sound barbaric (and it was!), it is just as inappropriate to assume, as was the case until relatively recently, that everyone is an auditory learner and can best be educated by listening to an exciting presentation of information, when such is not the case. Many, if not most, special needs students are better visual learners — as, in fact, are many in the more typical classroom — and it is thus necessary to adjust their academic instruction accordingly.

It is interesting to note that the Gemara in *Menachos* (29a; see also Maharsha there, *Chidushei Aggados* s.v. *Sheloshah*) reports that Moshe Rabbeinu himself had difficulty understanding certain concepts that Hashem was teaching him until Hashem actually showed him a vision of what they looked like. Perhaps this was necessary because Hashem wanted him, as the master teacher of all of *Klal Yisrael*, and hence, in a certain sense, the role model for all subsequent teachers, to understand that there are indeed people who are visual learners, in order for him to be able to relate to *all* of his students.

Should/can our schools and educational programs meet the needs of all students, no matter how diverse?

As delineated above, if there indeed exists a halachic obligation to teach Torah to and to train even severely intellectually impaired individuals in mitzvah observance, then there would seem to be little doubt that our communal educational structure must include institutions, schools, and programs that meet the needs of students with special needs. While there is some doubt about various particulars to this question (see *Shu"t Tzitz Eliezer* 15:1, Part 1 No. 3), the consensus among more modern-day authorities is that even people with pronounced disabilities are obligated in at least certain mitzvos. R. Moshe Feinstein (*Shu"t Igros Moshe, Even Ha-Ezer* 3:33), for example, rules that one has mitzvah obligations as long as he can speak, while R. Ovadyah Yosef (*Shu"t Yechaveh Da'as* 2:6) says that he may even be counted toward a *minyan*; R. Shlomo Zalman Auerbach (*Shu"t Minchas Shlomo* 2:4, No. 30)

indicates that such is the case even if he can simply answer *Amen*.

Elsewhere, R. Feinstein (*Shu"t Igros Moshe Yoreh De'ah* 4:29) asserts that those whose mental capacity is limited and thus do not comprehend things fully, but who have some intelligence, are required to observe at least certain mitzvos as adults and hence must be educated as children; significantly, he adds that there is a communal obligation to help fund the education of these children. R. Auerbach (*Shu"t Minchas Shlomo* 1:34; see also R. Yosef Shalom Elyashiv's *Kovetz Teshuvos* 1:10) rules that as long as an adult has even the level of understanding of a child, knowing that Hashem gave us the Torah and commanded us to do mitzvos, he is obligated to fulfill the mitzvos that he can. He then stresses that with the advanced methods of education that can be implemented today, even intellectually impaired people can be educated and reach scholastic levels that the earlier sages could not imagine, and he thus concludes that it is very difficult to say that this entire class of people are excluded from the mitzvos.

It should also be added that aside from whatever technical mitzvah obligations may exist, the fact is that all of these special needs individuals are part of our community — they will be found in our shuls and will share in many communal activities, especially on Shabbos and holidays. We therefore must do whatever we can to make them feel at home there, just as we try to do for other children. Indeed, R. Feinstein, in the aforementioned *teshuvah*, writes that is incumbent upon all of us to make those with special needs feel welcome in shul and to allow them to participate to the extent possible.

Simply put, we have to do our best to meet the educational needs of this segment of the population.

How can parents support their child — regardless of the learning profile?

In the final analysis, the parents of special needs children (of any age) must be the ones who constantly advocate on their behalf — and this for (at least) two reasons. First, they are unable to advocate for themselves. Members of the special needs population are generally without a voice, lacking the skills and ability to speak up on their own behalf, a fact that has significant social, psychological, and legal ramifications. With nobody standing up for them, these individuals can easily be ignored, not given benefits available to others, or even mistreated. Second, nobody knows the special needs person like the parent and family members. Only they fully realize what he really needs, what he is truly capable of, and how he can best be motivated, and it is thus their job to create the environment that helps the child maximize his or her unique potential. The parents should be patient — not only with the child, but with those teaching him or her, as they are engaged in a most difficult task and there is often much frustration and hardship involved along the way. But with much love, with the right attitude, with the right educational programs, and with a great deal of help from Hashem, parents will see *nachas* from these children as well.

Teaching Children With Different Learning Profiles

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STRATEGIES FOR DEALING WITH REBELLIOUSNESS

Every year, as we read the passage about the Four Sons, we often find it accompanied with a *dvar Torah* or a conversation about dealing with rebellious children. For many, this conversation is theoretical — but for some it is very real. In recent years, there has been an unfortunate increase in the number of adolescents from observant Jewish families who have become seriously disruptive, rebellious and defiant. This essay will help us appreciate the challenges involved and provide a summary of recommended interventions.

When dealing with a child who is already overtly rebellious, it is

important for parents and educators to keep in mind that since the key dynamic underlying such behavior is feeling alienated and set apart from the mainstream, parents and teachers can play a pivotal role in helping a child or adolescent feel connected. Perhaps the most potent antidote to feeling angry and alienated is feeling appreciated and understood. When parents and teachers make harsh or belittling remarks or treat a child in a manner that the child perceives as unfair, the child's downward spiral may accelerate. Conversely, a combination of time, support and understanding can go a long way toward bringing a rebellious adolescent back on the path of more

productive and meaningful behavior. The following recommendations can be considered:

Limit Setting

A rebellious child does best with a balance between love and limits. Research (Barkley, 1998) indicates that the following consequences work best with disruptive children and adolescents: First, punishments are consistent and not overly harsh, and are administered briefly, unemotionally and clearly. Second, they stem logically from the misbehavior and make sense to the child. Third, they are viewed as being delivered in the context of a child

feeling liked and appreciated, in spite of the punishment.

The verse in Mishlei states:

יִסֵּר בְּנֵךְ כִּי יֵשׁ תִּקְוָה וְאַל הִמִּיתוּ אֶל תְּשׂוּעָה
נִפְשָׁךְ.

Discipline your son while there is still hope, and do not set your heart on his destruction.

Mishlei 19:10

The midrash deduces from this verse:

כָּל הַמֵּיִסֵּר אֶת בְּנוֹ מוֹסִיף הַבֵּן אֶהְבֵּה עַל אָבִיו
וְהוּא מְכַבְּדוֹ.

If one disciplines his son, the son will have greater love and respect for his father.

Shemos Rabbah no. 1

When a parent or teacher shows that he or she doesn't take the child's misbehavior personally and disapproves of the behavior and not the child, consequences tend to be far more effective. A parent once told me that he always wondered why his child bristled at the slightest criticism from either parent, but was able to take even the toughest and most demanding direction from his basketball coach. I explained that when children know that everybody is "on the same team" they will accept even the most demanding set of rules willingly. They are most likely to rebel when they feel that their parent or teacher isn't with them on the same team.

However, even when following these discipline guidelines, children tend to engage in negative persistence. They won't accept the logic and keep nagging about the consequences. An effective way of dealing with negative persistence is illustrated in a d'var Torah by R. Henech Leibowitz, *Chiddushei Halev*, Bereishis pg. 103. He quotes the midrash that when Avraham Avinu was on his way to

the Akeidah, the Satan approached him and tried to convince Avraham that Hashem didn't really command Avraham to slaughter his son. First, the Satan said, "How could it be that you waited 100 years for this son and now you are going to slaughter him?" Then he said "How could it be that Hashem commanded you to commit murder?" Each time, Avraham responded "*al menas ken*" — I am doing so despite what you just said. Avraham's response is somewhat puzzling. Why didn't he just respond to the Satan, "You are lying. Hashem did command me to slaughter my son"? R. Leibowitz answers that there is no point in debating the Satan. Avraham didn't want to get sucked into an argument that would give credence to the other side. The same could be said about negative persistence. When a child is given a consequence, the logic should be explained at the outset. If the child then persists, he or she should be told "we are no longer discussing the reasons for the consequence," and after the third time the child nags, the conversation should be ended completely.

Methods of Discipline

Greene (2000) at Harvard Medical School has developed a set of strategies to guide parents and teachers in dealing with disruptive children in the classroom. These include:

- Try to see the child's behavior as coming more from the child's wiring rather than from willful misconduct. Most of these children's behavioral difficulties are either fueled by neurological factors (i.e. frontal deficits) or stressors at home that make it difficult for them to regulate

their affect. While this does not mean that limits and consequences are not necessary, it does mean that the parent or teacher can respond calmly as he or she would to any misbehavior that is coming more from a child who "can't" rather than "won't" behave properly.

- Respond to child before he or she is at their worst.
- Anticipate and modify situations that will likely trigger defiance by cueing in to specific factors that fuel explosiveness.
- Use of distraction, logic, empathy may work if employed before meltdown.
- Choose only worthy battlegrounds.
- Address recurring patterns by identifying specific situations that routinely cause significant frustration.

How do we choose worthy battlegrounds? How do we know which acts of rebellion require consequences and which can be ignored? The *Midrash Tanchuma, Vayechi* no. 6, provides numerous examples of how the Avos handled conflict. They didn't respond at the beginning of the conflict, but instead waited for the right moment to respond — *nasnu makom l'sha'ah* — they gave space for the moment and walked away from the conflict until there was a moment that they could respond in a way that would be effective. When dealing with rebelliousness, there are situations that are dangerous and we can't just ignore what is going on. However, there are situations where we can give space and make a strategic withdrawal. When the relationship is not only about dealing with negative behavior, we can form a positive relationship.

Addressing the Spiritual

Whenever possible, address the spiritual. Rebellious adolescents often describe feeling alienated from spirituality, yet at the same time, being thirsty for greater spiritual understanding and connection. An at-risk child who returned from a summer program that emphasized spirituality with growth through musar explained the reason for his dramatic improvement after the summer. “Until now,” he explained, “I never knew who God was. God was always about what I couldn’t do. Don’t watch TV on Shabbos, don’t go to inappropriate movies. Nobody ever told me who God was until this summer. Now that I understand what God is about, Judaism makes more sense to me, and for the first time, I’m interested in what Judaism has to offer.”

Parents and children alike should be aware that there are multiple pathways to spiritual connection. Some children are in a setting that favors one type of spiritual connection and they may thrive in a setting that favors another.

Rabbi Baer of Radoshitz once said to his teacher, the rabbi of Lublin: “Show me one general way to the service of God.” The zaddik replied: “It is impossible to tell people what way they should take. For one, the way to serve God is through learning, another through prayer, another through fasting and still another through eating. Everyone should carefully observe what way his heart draws him to, and then choose his way with all his strength.”

Tales of Hasidim (Buber, 1961) pg. 313

The Parent-School Partnership

Promoting effective parent-school partnerships are an essential part

of any program for addressing the needs of the at-risk child. Research has consistently shown that at-risk children do better when they perceive their parents as being actively involved in their education (Henggeler et al, 1998). Parents overtly supporting teachers, monitoring homework assignments and grades and supporting extracurricular school activities have all been found to help children develop the kind of prosocial behavior that is an antidote to the influence of acting-out peers. Educators can help promote this type of partnership by providing parents with regular feedback regarding their child’s academic and behavioral progress, and scheduling parent-teacher conferences in a manner that is flexible enough to accommodate parents’ work schedules.

Ongoing teacher and parent training on strategies for dealing with at-risk children, supported by school administrators, can be valuable both for addressing and preventing problem behavior. Some yeshivot have implemented mandatory teacher and parent training to help deal constructively with defiant and disruptive behavior and to maximize the chances of creating a strong parent-school partnership. Such programs tend to be most effective when schools create in-service days for teachers that do not require the teachers to attend sessions on their own time. Teacher-training content should include classroom management strategies for defiant students, strategies to identify high-risk situations, when to refer, and how to talk to parents. Scheduling programs as part of parent-teacher conference nights has proven effective for maximizing parent attendance.

Expelling a Rebellious Child

Expelling a child from a school should be considered only as an extreme step when all alternatives have been exhausted. Yeshivot that are quick to expel rebellious adolescents have unwittingly exacerbated the problem for the entire community by creating a growing group of such children on the streets. This fosters the kind of “deviancy training” that can contaminate more mainstream adolescents in the community (Dishion et al, 1999). Successful alternatives to expulsion include programs that allow adolescents to work part of the day and attend school part of the day. In this way, adolescents remain part of their peer group and find success in non-academic areas where they are more likely to achieve.

Some schools have experimented with “exchange” programs where they “trade” a disruptive child in one school for a disruptive child in another school. When children are given a totally fresh start in a new school, they often experience success that isn’t possible in an environment where they are perceived by teachers and peers as troubled.

Finally, although many high schools frown on early graduation, when

When children are given a totally fresh start in a new school, they often experience success that isn’t possible in an environment where they are perceived by teachers and peers as troubled.

rebellious adolescents are allowed to graduate after their junior year, they often thrive. Success can come as a result of many factors: kids get a fresh start in an environment where they aren't viewed in a preconceived way; they have the opportunity to make more appropriate friends; and they enjoy the greater academic flexibility present in post high school environments.

The Gemara makes the following comment about the ketores:

כל תענית שאין בה מפושעי ישראל אינה תענית שהרי חלבנה ריחה רע ומנאה הכתוב עם סממני קטרת.

Any fast that does not include the sinners of Israel [in its prayer services] is not a fast. Because the galbanum had a foul smell and was nevertheless included in the spices of the ketoret.

Kerisos 6b

Children actually benefit from having a little “galbanum” in their social circles. I once heard R. Moshe Meir Weiss express the following idea: When Hashem told Avraham to kick his son Yishmael out of the house, the Torah (Bereishis 21:11) records that Avraham was very distressed “*al odos b'no*” — about the welfare of his son. Which son? It would seem that he was distressed about what would happen to Yishmael. However, R. Weiss suggested that he was distressed about what would happen to Yitzchak. Yishmael was supposed to serve as an inoculating influence so that Yitzchak could better handle the dangers of the outside world. Now that he was gone,

how would Yitzchak learn to deal with those challenges?

The following story is told about R. Avraham Yeshaya Karelitz, the Chazon Ish. A student was once caught going to an inappropriate venue on Shabbos. The rosh yeshiva wanted to remove him from the yeshiva. The Chazon Ish heard about this and confronted the rosh yeshiva, saying “Now you are on the level to be a judge for *dinei nefashos* (capital punishment)?” The Chazon Ish suggested that the rosh yeshiva learn *b'chavrusa* (one-on-one) with this student. When the rosh yeshiva claimed that he couldn't learn with this student, the Chazon Ish offered to personally learn with this student. The student later became a Torah teacher. (*Ma'aseh Ish* Vol. VI pg. 52)

Concluding Remarks

The Gemara tells us that when dealing with children, we should use the following rule:

לעולם תהא שמאל דוחה וימין מקרבת.
One should always use the left hand to push away and the right hand to bring closer.

Sanhedrin 107b

The left hand represents the weaker hand. When we discipline or set limits, we should do so with the proverbial “weaker hand” while at the same time drawing them close to us with our greatest strengths — love and compassion. R. Simcha Wasserman added the following explanation: Imagine putting both of

your hands on your child's shoulders and pushing with your left hand while pulling with your right hand. What would happen? The child would actually turn around! Finding the right balance between limits and love can be a challenge, but with perseverance and patience, it can be very effective in helping the rebellious child turn around and head in a different direction.

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The Methodology of Teaching the Pesach Story

Introduction

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MAXIMING AND MINIMIZING: THOUGHTS ON CREATING A FAMILY-FRIENDLY SEDER

The Seder night has a certain magical quality. Perhaps that is because, as R' Mayer Twersky explains, specific times of the year are mystically imbued with a particular flavor or characteristic, and *Leil Haseder* is suffused with “*giluy Shechina*,” G-d’s close and intimate presence waiting to be uncovered and embraced.¹ Or perhaps it is the dazzling effect that is created when loved ones come together at the culmination of intense collective preparation, education, and anticipation. Whatever the underlying cause, there is a palpable sense of opportunity and wonder that underlies the evening.

Set against the backdrop of this subtle but powerful momentousness, the explicit content of the evening surrounds the theme of our nation’s past and future. Through both words and actions, celebration and perpetuation of our tradition weaves its way through the Seder experience. Unlike certain religious edicts that may be fulfilled equally as well or perhaps even more effectively through solitary and independent observance, the Seder night mimics the eve of the *korban Pesach* in that we achieve optimal observance when surrounded by family and guests.

The mandate that the Seder night serve as a vehicle to pass on our

tradition squarely places children at the heart of this endeavor, for they are the segue that connects the present moment to the future of our nation. It is no surprise, then, that children play a prominent role in the Seder experience — from the singing of the *Mah Nishtanah* to the protracted game of hiding and finding the *afikoman* to the numerous rituals that were created with the explicit purpose of spurring children to ask questions. While there may be certain *mitzvot* in which the presence of children may be a barrier to personal religious observance and fulfillment, in the case of the Seder, the children serve as a focal point, with the goal of creating a

meaningful and engaging experience specifically for them.

It is one thing to talk about the value of a shared family experience recounting our tradition and inspiring each other toward meaningful living. It is quite another to orchestrate and execute this tall order. When sitting in the company of a range of ages, knowledge levels, backgrounds, and attention spans; when some come to the table armed with mountains of divrei Torah and others are wondering just how they will survive until the meal is served, how can we effectively capitalize on the opportunities that *Leil Haseder* offers? In the coming sections, some important considerations, both developmental and pedagogical, will be explored, with the goal of further enriching the Seder experience for everyone, and in particular the children.

Engaging Young Children

Given that the Seder includes an important didactic element, in that its goals include teaching and sharing important concepts and information, a brief exploration of how children learn is in order.

From a very young age, children's interaction with their environment serves as a catalyst for thinking and organizing information and making sense of the world. As children's language develops, they discover an entirely new galaxy in which they can interact with their world, discover questions, and seek answers. Play is also a very central learning theater for preschool-aged children. Through imagining and engaging the world through their five senses, and adopting a host of different roles, children's minds build cognitive webs that organize and give meaning to information about the world that surrounds them, and about their place in it.

These learning concepts have important implications for *Leil Haseder*. The classic model of "divrei Torah" is hardly relevant to children in the preschool age bracket. Experiential learning, powerful for any age group, will be particularly appropriate for younger children. As they create Pesach-themed adornments for the Seder table, taste the different foods on the table and consider their flavors and accompanying associations (sweet, bitter, salty, etc.), act out the

Ten Plagues (on a personal note, my children were very excited to cut a marshmallow in half, lick the stickiest surface, and "glue" it to their arm for Shechin), and dramatically recount the story of Yetziyat Mitzrayim, interactive learning engages children's senses and their minds. Rather than adults driving and imposing the learning, the goal is to set the stage for these children to learn, experience, and ask questions, and for us to provide them with age-appropriate answers. As their curiosity is piqued, their cognitive wheels begin turning, and their inquisitiveness awakened. Under these circumstances, children are engaged and excited to learn the ideas we have to share with them.

Children in late preschool and early elementary school who have developed some basic literacy and numerical understanding can be more directly engaged through the Haggadah. Haggadah bingo, where children have a bingo card with different words, names, and concepts in Maggid, can be a fun way for kids to follow along even when they're not yet ready to engage analytically with the material. A similar concept is a number search, which assigns

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children a specific number, and they then look for mentions of that number throughout Maggid (for example, the number 4 — four questions in Mah Nishtanah, the Four Children, etc.). Children who may enjoy this but are not yet ready to participate independently can be paired up with an adult to help them follow along in the Haggadah and assist them in finding their bingo words or assigned number. Furthermore, though children of this age may not be ready for intensive analytics and high-level philosophy, most children are certainly capable of and interested in answering age-appropriate thought questions. For example, questions such as, “What do you think the Jews felt when they were woken up in the middle of the night and told they would leave Mitzrayim?” and “What do you think Hashem was trying to teach the Mitzrim (and the Jews) when He did the Eser Makot?” can engage the minds of children as they enter developmentally into a stage in which they are more capable of abstract thought. Last, encourage the children to ask questions. A token prize, such as a chocolate chip, for each question posed can get kids thinking, and their refreshing way of viewing the world may yield questions that bewilder even the wise adults at the table.

Older Children (and Beyond) and the “Classic” Dvar Torah

Common among older children and adults is the traditional model of dvar Torah, where one person shares a Torah thought and table participants listen. This model has both important advantages and notable drawbacks. On the most basic level, the sharing of meaningful Torah content is

inherently valuable and holy. Torah is meant to be studied and expounded upon, and therefore we cherish the opportunity to offer and exchange ideas and insights. Additionally, verbal expression often prompts the speaker to further clarify and organize the concept in his/her own mind, which leaves the speaker with an enhanced and sharper understanding of the idea. Last, particularly in the case of children sharing a dvar Torah, a child often experiences both a sense of ownership of the material and a feeling of pride at being the center of attention and receiving positive feedback.

At the same time, if the Seder is viewed, at least in part, as an opportunity for a meaningful learning experience, then the traditional dvar Torah model has certain limitations. High-quality learning involves active engagement with the material. The more we directly interact with and process new material, the deeper and better our comprehension and long-term retention. For many of us, the number of hours we have spent listening to lectures, sermons, and speeches, let’s even say over the last ten years, is embarrassingly disproportionate to the amount of knowledge we can show for it. This is because certain conditions are much more conducive to effective learning, and passively receiving information is not one of them. Additionally, as mentioned earlier, given the range of ages and backgrounds that often populate the same Seder table, the dvar Torah model is often inappropriate or unsuitable for a segment of the Seder participants.

Though there is no “one size fits all” solution to this challenge, there are a number of considerations and

suggestions that can help.

Some families choose to view Maggid as the beginning of a process that is by no means limited to this specific section of the Haggadah. While a meaningful exchange of ideas can start during Maggid, there is ample opportunity to continue this process, whether during Shulchan Orech or after the formal Seder is over, well into the night after the younger and/or more wearied have retired. Other families choose to spread out these discussions over the entire Yom Tov, sharing ideas at each of the Yom Tov meals. This both enhances the Yom Tov meals and serves as a great solution to the child who came home with a stack of divrei Torah. In this way, the child can have opportunities to share all of the content that he/she excitedly prepared, while minimizing the stress and challenge of fitting it all in on the night(s) of the Seder.

In addition to identifying opportunities beyond the confines of Maggid for sharing divrei Torah, we can employ certain strategies for engaging more of the listeners at the Seder table, thereby creating a more active learning experience for all present. The dvar Torah presenter can introduce the dvar Torah with a question that the listeners should seek to answer while the dvar Torah is being delivered. This helps listeners focus their attention and gives them a cognitive anchor to process the information. Because listeners are looking to answer a specific question, their minds are more actively engaged in processing the information than if they were just listening passively. Alternatively, after each dvar Torah, the head of the table can present participants with a question on the content of the dvar Torah, perhaps

even offering a token prize (small prize,² treat, etc.) for correct answers. Another way to expand divrei Torah engagement is to ask that Seder participants prepare some kind of visual aid associated with each dvar Torah they share, in order to give the dvar Torah both an auditory and a visual element.³ This item can be a concrete item, a hand drawn picture, or an image that was printed from the computer. If appropriate, in advance of the Seder, older siblings or guests can be paired up with younger children for this task, perhaps by inviting the younger child to draw a picture before Yom Tov, or to help find and present the associated item. This gives the younger children an important and prominent role in “sharing” divrei Torah, and directly involves them in an element of the Seder from which they may have previously felt alienated.

The Other Stars of the Show

Thus far, the emphasis has been on the children. I would like to shift to the other end of the spectrum, namely, the grandparents, great grandparents, and senior citizens sitting around the table, those who serve as the direct link to our tradition and heritage.

In some families, the older generation is heavily involved in participating in and even running the Seder. In other families, due to a host of reasons, the participation of senior citizens does not occur organically, but instead needs to be actively invited

and facilitated. This population has a unique and valuable asset that can greatly enhance a Pesach Seder: they have a more direct connection to previous generations and first-hand experience of Pesach Seders as they were celebrated in eras gone by. Each family has its own story, its own roots in its countries of origin, and each family can consider what might be meaningful to hear from the senior generation at the table. I have very cherished memories of hearing my grandparents share how Pesach was prepared for and celebrated in Poland and Lithuania. Even more powerful was when my father would turn to my grandfather, may they both live and be well, and say, “So, Daddy, tell us about slavery to freedom. Tell us about the day of your liberation at the end of the Holocaust.” Suddenly, concepts that felt so distant and remote, the notion of captivity and subjugation and denigration, become very real and very close to home, and my appreciation of freedom takes on new and vast proportions. What better way to emphasize our heritage than by looking to those whose life stories, each in their own way, tell a microcosmic tale of the story of our people.

Conclusion

Rabbi Norman Lamm, in a Passover sermon delivered in 1969, aptly described that which we are trying to convey at the Seder: “Tradition is not a symbol on the order of the American flag, or a celebration like July 4, or a

social or political sacrament. Tradition is my way of orienting to my G-d, it is that which sensitizes me spiritually, which opens me to eternity and to the timeless... Tradition, for the Jew, is not a sentimental recollection of the past, but the long process of preparing for a spiritually meaningful future by consecrating the present.”⁴ When families and friends unite around a common heritage and seek to strengthen their connection to their tradition, some creative thinking may be required in order to maximize and optimize the experience. At the same time, such opportunities have the potential to create lasting memories, shape identities, and nurture the spirit of the next generation.

Endnotes

- 1 Rabbi Mayer Twersky, “And It Happened at Midnight,” Retrieved from: http://Torahweb.org/Torah/1999/moadim/rtwe_pesach.html
- 2 Based on a conversation with R’ Hershel Schachter, it is permissible to give out prizes, provided that they are not muktzeh and could theoretically be used on Yom Tov.
- 3 Of course, this is more suitable for divrei Torah that are prepared in advance. This wouldn’t apply to, nor am I suggesting that it replace, the banter of Torah conversations that naturally occurs when individuals are engaged in meaningful, naturally-flowing exchanges of Torah ideas.
- 4 Rabbi Norman Lamm, April 3, 1969. “Questioning Tradition.” The Jewish Center, Manhattan, NY. Retrieved from: <http://brussels.mc.yu.edu/gsd/collect/lammserm/index/assoc/HASHf403.dir/doc.pdf>.



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**The Methodology
of Teaching the
Pesach Story**
Lower School

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TRANSFORMING YOUR SEDER INTO THE IDEAL EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE

Every year, as we prepare for the Pesach Seder, we think about what we could do to make *“this night different from all of the other nights.”* To some, the Haggadah seems like a dry and drawn-out document full of unrelated details. On a night when we should be talking about *yetzias Mitzrayim*, some feel like they are spending an inordinate amount of time talking about ancillary events in Jewish history.

Therefore, every year, as we come closer and closer to the month of Nissan, many of us make an internal commitment to transform the upcoming Seder into the best one the children have ever attended. The question is — how?

As we look back at Parashas Bo and the early stage of Bnei Yisrael’s

journey to freedom, Moshe Rabbeinu continuously addresses the Jewish nation, focusing on the children and their education.

וְהָיָה כִּי יֹאמְרוּ אֲלֵיכֶם בְּנֵיכֶם מָה הָעֵבֶדָה
הַזֹּאת לָכֶם. וְאָמַרְתֶּם זָבַח פֶּסַח הוּא לַה' אֲשֶׁר
פָּסַח עַל בְּתֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּמִצְרַיִם בְּנִגְפוֹ אֶת
מִצְרַיִם וְאֶת בְּתֵינֵנוּ הִצִּיל וַיִּקַּד הָעַם וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ.
When you enter the land that HaShem will give you as He promised, observe this ceremony. And when your children say to you, “What does this ceremony mean to you?” then tell them, “It is the Pesach sacrifice to HaShem, who passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt and spared our home when He struck down the Egyptians ...”

Shemos 12:26-27

וְהִגַּדְתָּ לְבִנְךָ בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא לֵאמֹר בַּעֲבוּר זֶה עָשָׂה
ה' לִי בְּצֵאתִי מִמִּצְרַיִם.

On that day tell your son, “I do this

because of what HaShem did for me when I came out of Egypt.”

Shemos 13:8

וְהָיָה כִּי יִשְׁאֶלְךָ בְּנֶךָ מָחָר לֵאמֹר מָה זֹאת
וְאָמַרְתָּ אֵלָיו בְּחֹזֶק יָד הוֹצִיאָנוּ ה' מִמִּצְרַיִם
מִבֵּית עַבְדִּים.

In days to come, when your son asks you, “What does this mean?” say to him, “With a mighty hand HaShem brought us out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.”

Shemos 13:14

Moshe’s messages seem quite clear. Education is the key to ensuring that the lessons and the ideals of *yetzias Mitzrayim* are not lost. To meet that goal, Seder night has to be converted into an educational environment.

Thus, it pays for us to look at some of the criteria used to measure a successfully run classroom.

A. An effective classroom lesson and environment begins with the culture of the room.

The teacher must establish the classroom as a pleasant and inviting environment.

The most inviting classrooms are decorated with posters and educational materials that correlate with what the children are learning. The decor helps students learn and gives teachers visual aids that enhance the learning. Like the classroom, for the sake of the children, the Seder table should not look like an ordinary Shabbos or Yom Tov table. While some have traditionally pursued the very elegant look, the Seder table, and the entire room, for that matter, could be transformed to reinforce all of the messages of the evening: the Ten Plagues, the splitting of the Sea, the Four Sons, the Four Cups, the Exodus. All of these concepts can be used to develop a decorative theme in the dining room.

B. It should be a place where the teacher recognizes and accepts individual differences.

In elementary schools we often find assigned roles and responsibilities in the classroom. There is the line leader, the door holder, the snack helper and the board eraser. The same should hold true for the Seder. Each child should have a role in the Seder. A child can pick who is going to say the next dvar Torah. A child can decide who will fill whose cups with wine. A child can be assigned to call on people to read. This is truly ideal for those children who can't participate in the textual part of the Seder in a meaningful way.

There should be different Haggadahs to choose from. The younger children need Haggadahs with pictures while the older children may value

the Haggadahs with questions and answers attached to text.

Younger children should be seated next to someone who can assist them, guide them, and keep them focused.

C. The lesson begins by giving the students clear instructions and stating the desired quality of work.

The Seder always begins by singing the stages of the "Seder." It is at that point where we state our expectations for the evening. However, to raise the bar a little more, we could begin the Seder with questions that will be answered over the course of the evening. The questions can be general, such as, "How many times is the number four presented in the Haggadah?" to more thought-provoking, like, "When and why is Rabbi Akiva brought into the Pesach Seder story?"

D. The teacher must do whatever possible to ensure that everyone is paying attention, and begin with a highly motivating activity.

Stories or midrashim that highlight the actual redemption are ideal. This is what the children came to the table to discuss! The "parsha questions" from Shemos, Va'era, Bo and Beshalach can be used, and themed treats handed out to those who know the answers. The key is to remember that children want to be active and involved. Costumes or role playing can bring the experience to life! The child can be responsible for arguing the positions of R. Akiva, R. Eliezer and R. Yosi HaGelili on the strength of the Plagues. Finally, depending on how the room is decorated, children can be invited to view the visual aids during the Seder, as in the classroom.

E. The children's attention is sustained by varying who is called on, using appropriate pacing,

reinforcing their efforts with praise and showing enthusiasm in their delivery.

The leader of the Seder must be wise in determining how to involve the children and how quickly the group reads the Haggadah. It is valuable to read some portions slowly with explanations, while other portions should be read and moved through at a quicker pace.

Here are some sample divrei Torah^(*) that will meet the needs of elementary school children. There is a halacha that we must start preparing for Pesach thirty days in advance. Our Pesach preparations should include every parent preparing what to share at the Seder table. It's important to spend time looking at the Haggadahs designed for children to gather ideas.

2nd & 3rd Grade The Makkos: Measure-for-Measure (Middah K'neged Middah)

HaShem punished the Mitzrim based on how they made the lives of the Jewish people miserable. How do each of the makkos relate to what the Mitzrim did?

- **Blood/Dam:** The Mitzrim killed many Jews and drowned the boys in the Nile.
- **Frogs/Tz'farde'a:** The Mitzrim hollered and screamed at Bnei Yisrael, never letting them rest.
- **Lice/Kinim:** Bnei Yisrael were forced to clean and sweep the dirty streets in Mitzrayim.
- **Wild Animals/Arov:** Bnei Yisrael had to hunt wild animals for the pleasure of the Mitzrim.
- **Death of Animals/Dever:** Bnei Yisrael were sent to the deserts and mountains to shepherd the Egyptians' animals.

- **Boils/Shechin:** The Mitzrim would beat Bnei Yisrael until their bodies were covered with blisters.
- **Hail/Barad:** Bnei Yisrael were forced to plant crops and orchards for the Mitzrim.
- **Locust/Arbeh:** Then these crops were battered by the hail and consumed by the locusts.
- **Darkness/Choshech:** The Mitzrim darkened the lives of the Jewish people.
- **Death of the First Born/Makkas Bechoros:** The Mitzrim enslaved Bnei Yisrael whom HaShem called “My first born.”

Dayenu and Gratitude

When we say “Dayenu,” “it would have been enough for us,” do we mean to say that leaving Mitzrayim would have been enough for us? How can we imagine not having received the Torah or Eretz Yisrael and all other acts of kindness HaShem did for us?!

What we are really saying here is that any of these gifts would have been enough to make us sing praise to HaShem. How much more grateful we must be that HaShem has given us all of these precious gifts.

Mah Nishtanah and the Four Cups

Question: Why aren't the Four Cups mentioned in the Mah Nishtanah?

Answer #1: Abarbanel and R. Lazer Ginzburg suggest that the four questions of Mah Nishtanah are really one question. The children see contradictions at the Seder table and they want to understand them. Two concepts (matzah and maror) symbolize *avdus* (slavery) and two concepts (reclining and dipping) symbolize *cheirus* (freedom). We answer the question with *Avadim*

Hayinu — “we were slaves” but “HaShem took us out...” The wine of the Four Cups doesn't represent either one exclusively. Both wealthy people and poor people, happy people and sad people drink wine. Therefore, the wine is not included in Mah Nishtanah.

Answer #2: Chasam Sofer suggests that the four questions of Mah Nishtanah all refer to items that have already been seen at the Seder table (either actually performed or set out on the table). The children see the matzah on the table and know we have rid our homes of chametz. They see the maror sitting in front of them, they have already dipped the karpas in water, and everyone has already leaned to the left while drinking the cup of wine at Kiddush. Thus, when Mah Nishtanah is recited, the children have only seen the first cup of wine at Kiddush. Having wine on the table is not unusual at a Yom Tov meal. That is why it isn't included in the four questions.

The Ten Plagues

Question: Why do we pour out a little wine when mentioning the Ten Plagues?

Answer #1: The Vilna Gaon suggests that the removal of the wine from the cup highlights the fact that after each plague the Egyptians lost a little bit more of their strength, power and ability to resist.

Answer #2: As we came out of the Yam Suf, we were dealing with two very different emotions. On the one hand, we desired to praise HaShem for saving us. On the other hand, we had compassion for those who perished. We spill some wine at the Seder to recall HaShem's instruction to the angels that they should not sing as the Egyptians were drowning in the sea.

Why do we begin and end the Haggadah in Aramaic (*Ha Lachma Anya* and *Chad Gadya*)?

Aramaic is not understood by the angels. Usually we want angels to help our prayers go to Heaven, but tonight we start the Haggadah with Aramaic to show that we speak directly to HaShem, not through angels. Hashem is here at our Seder listening to every word we say! (*Emes L'Yaakov*)

Mah Nishtanah Halayla Haze?

The term *layla*, night, is a sign of *tza'ar* (hardships) and exile. We ask: How is this night — this exile — different from all other nights — from all other exiles?

If we take a trip from New York to Eretz Yisrael, although the trip will take many hours, it is manageable since we know how long it should take. However, if we were to get on a plane not knowing the destination, the trip would seem very long and a lot less manageable since it appears that there is no end in sight!

Similarly, with all of the other exiles, we knew the length of the exile and it was therefore more manageable. However, we have been in this exile for over 2,000 years and we have no idea when Mashiach will finally come, bringing it to an end. And that is exactly what makes this exile different and much harder than any previous exile — it appears as though there is no end in sight! Still, the greatness of the Jewish people is that we await Mashiach each and every day as if we know exactly when he is coming.

Dayenu

Question: Why are HaShem's acts of kindness referred to as “*ma'alos*” (levels)?

Answer #1: Abarbanel suggests that these acts were “above and beyond” what was necessary to simply redeem the Jewish people from Egypt. They went beyond what was promised to Avraham Avinu.

Answer #2: Maharal suggests that of the 15 items, each one is greater than the one before it. That is why they are called “*ma'alos*,” which is the word used for stairs.

Baruch Shomer Havtachaso — Blessed is the One Who Keeps His Promise.

Why are we praising HaShem for keeping His promise? We just mentioned that He was the one who sent us down into slavery. What are we thanking Him for?

HaRav Mordechai Willig once answered this question with a *mashal*: Imagine two classmates fighting and as a result, one falls, hits his head and has to be sent to the hospital. We would think that he would be mad at his classmate for the injury. However, while in the hospital, doctors discover that he has a more significant illness that would not have been detected early enough to treat had he not been sent to the hospital by his friend.

This is what the Jewish People went through. We were suffering from an “illness,” a *tumah*, and didn't know it. If HaShem didn't put us through the *avdus* to purify ourselves, who knows what would have happened to us?

5th Grade The Rasha

Question: Why is the Rasha's question considered wicked?

Answer #1: Abarbanel suggests that the problem is his use of the word “*mah ha'vodah hazos lachem*,” which

could be translated as “what is this service by you.” The Rasha is implying that the mitzvos were established by **man** and not HaShem. This further implies that not only were they inspired by man and that there are no *eidos*, *chukim* or *mishpatim* — laws, ordinances and statutes — but they were created for our own self-interests. The korban Pesach is not a service, but rather an excuse to eat meat.

Answer #2: The Malbim suggests that the Rasha views mitzvos as “*avodah*” — hard work, a burden.

Chad Gadya

At the end of the Haggadah, we sing *echad Elokeino shebashamayim uva'aretz* — our Lord is One on Heaven and Earth — followed immediately by a seemingly violent and almost senseless tale. What possible message can the story of *Chad Gadya* provide and why is it in the Haggadah? Furthermore, what is the significance of praising the oneness of HaShem and then immediately transitioning to *Chad Gadya*?

On Shabbos, we sing a beautiful prayer that seems inherently contradictory.

אֵין בְּאֱלֹהֵינוּ, אֵין בְּאֲדוֹנֵינוּ, אֵין כְּמִלְכֵנוּ,
אֵין כְּמוֹשֵׁיֵנוּ. מִי בְּאֱלֹהֵינוּ, מִי בְּאֲדוֹנֵינוּ, מִי
כְּמִלְכֵנוּ, מִי כְּמוֹשֵׁיֵנוּ. נוֹדָה לְאֱלֹהֵינוּ, נוֹדָה
לְאֲדוֹנֵינוּ, נוֹדָה לְמִלְכֵנוּ, נוֹדָה לְמוֹשֵׁיֵנוּ.

There is no one like our Lord ... Who is like our Lord ...

What does it mean that we initially say there is no one like HaShem, yet the very next question is Who is like HaShem, as if there is a possible answer to that? Are we proclaiming his oneness or are we doubting it?

Rav Moshe Tuvia Lieff explains that this teaches us a very valuable life lesson. When we are sitting at our

Seder table rejoicing with our family and enjoying Yom Tov, it is easy for us to declare and praise the oneness of HaShem. We have just spent an entire evening reflecting on the many miracles displayed on our behalf and instructing our children to remember these miracles and the statutes that come from within our Torah.

However, after we get up from our Seder, and “regular” life settles back in, there are times in our daily routine that seem senseless and chaotic, times when it is harder for us to see and declare *echad Elokeino shebashamayim uva'aretz*. Jews as a whole have suffered throughout history. Individuals go through many challenges in their lives. We see instances of righteous people suffering within our communities.

The job of a Jew is to constantly declare and recall Ein K'Elokeinu or *echad Elokeino shebashamayim uva'aretz*. Even when questions arise and there are instances in life that lead us to ask why, we must never forget that there is no G-d like HaShem, and that He is One in the Heavens and Earth.

We end our Seder reminding our children that life is like an EKG. It is full of ups and downs, and that is fine. What is not good is when life is a straight line. That is tantamount to death. So even when things aren't going as we planned or hoped, *echad Elokeino shebashamayim uva'aretz*, HaShem is watching over us and doing what is best for us. May we merit to see the goodness in our lives and rejoice in the final redemption, *b'mheira b'yameinu*.

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**The Methodology
of Teaching the
Pesach Story**
Middle School

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COMPLEX QUESTIONS FOR A COMPLEX AGE

Interested in disengaging your teen at the Seder? Keep it simple. With greater access to the global world, our teens are actually quite broadminded in terms of their critical thinking. By and large, they are interested in shorter talking points but at the same time deep thought provoking questions. The divrei Torah I have selected here are culled from the “pre-Seder” preparations because they challenge the teenager right at

the outset. This is important so that engagement takes place early on.

Each idea I shared can be framed with a more direct question:

An Opening: Do you think Judaism rewards you for just showing up?

No Bread so we can eat Bread: Is there a negative character trait or quality that you possess that you would delete if you could?

They can Find Everything, Except for Chametz! Do you think restraints hinder us or help us develop? What are some examples where they make us stronger?

When the Night Comes Down: Calling people, nations, or things evil does that help or hinder us?

Tough Decisions: Are there any areas of our lives that you would say isn’t black and white? What’s an issue that

you can easily make the case one way or the other?

Remove the Candle: Should we maintain museums celebrating military victories?

The Little Three: Is there anything you would say you really are jealous of?

An Opening

Up until now, our lives may have been missing something. Limiting mindsets and past failures have discouraged us from taking charge of our destiny. Perhaps we could use a relationship with G-d. But where do we begin? How much work must we do? The Midrash (*Shir HaShirim Rabbah* 5:2) teaches us that G-d says “open for Me an entrance the size of an eye of a needle and I will open for you an entrance the size of a ballroom.” G-d expects us to start the relationship by making some minimal change. What change? Don’t worry. On Pesach, the work on our part may be even easier. In English this holiday is called Passover because G-d passed over the entrances of the Israelites’ tents when meting out retribution upon the Egyptians. The Gerrer Rebbe, the

Sefas Emes, explains that G-d skipping over the entrances is a reference to the entrance mentioned above in the Midrash. On Pesach, G-d passes over or forgoes the need for us to make the first opening. On Pesach we don’t even need to start by opening an entrance for G-d the size of an “eye of a needle.” Just show up, and the opening has begun. The fact that you are reading this d’var Torah, open to life’s possibilities, means that you are ready.

No Bread so we can Eat Bread

The Torah (Devarim 16:8) teaches us that we are supposed to eat matzah for seven days. The mystical sources call matzah the “bread of faith.” On the other hand, regular leavened bread, chametz, which we eat year round, alludes to the shadow side of the human being or the *yetzer harah*. By eating matzah on these seven days, we are somehow ensuring that we are protected from the possible negative spiritual influence of bread the rest of the year. If chametz is symbolically so bad, why do we continue to eat it the rest of the year?

Maimonides in his *Laws of Oaths* 5:20 says that if somebody takes an oath that they’re not going to eat anything for seven days, it is considered meaningless and they have violated the prohibition of swearing for no reason. The reason it is considered a meaningless oath is because in the eyes of Jewish law no one can live for seven days without food. The Chassidic scholar known as the Avnei Nezer says that we see from this statement of Maimonides that in the physical world, seven days can kill. The physical world parallels the spiritual world. Therefore, when we go seven days without chametz, we too can “kill” the negative energy that feeds off chametz. After Pesach is over, we are ready to go back to chametz because at that point we have obliterated the darker symbolism of bread.

They can Find Everything, Except for Chametz!

Legend has it that Reb Levi Yitzchok of Berditchever once asked one of his pupils at the Seder if he could locate some Andalusian tobacco. The student quickly went and came back with the exceptionally rare Andalusian tobacco. The next day the Rav asked another student to bring him some rare Devils Pup-fish. The loyal student came back within fifteen minutes with this precious fish. Then he turned to another trusted student and asked him to find some chametz, any chametz anywhere. The student searched and searched and couldn’t find a single bit of chametz. Reb Levi Yitzchak, who was always known as the great defender of the Jewish people, cried out to the Heavens, “G-d look at your people, they are always able to find anything anywhere like nobody

When we go seven days without chametz, we too can “kill” the negative energy that feeds off chametz. After Pesach is over, we are ready to go back to chametz because at that point we have obliterated the darker symbolism of bread.



else can, but if you ask them to find a morsel of chametz in their homes on Pesach — no way, no Jew can find it.”

The laws of proper Pesach observance are complicated and detailed. There seem to be so many limitations.

Judaism recognizes that constraints, when understood properly, enable creativity. Without constraints the options are unlimited and in that blinding way nothing gets done. But when we work within the framework of the Seder — with all of its measurements and restricted recipes — we learn to create a symphony of ideas and dialogues.

When the Night Comes Down

The formal search for chametz begins the night before Pesach. At night, we commence our search and the next morning we begin to burn the crumbs. Why do we wait until the morning to burn our chametz? Reb Yisroel of Rizhin says that it reflects the reality of the world as it is. We don't have the power to entirely eradicate evil. But we must try. And sometimes the best that we can do is recognize what is good and what is bad. That is the significance of the search at night. It is our attempt to call out the dark. But one day, once upon a not-to-distant future, when the night comes down and day breaks, then we will be able to banish the darkness forever.

Tough Decisions

Chametz happens when we wait too long and allow our bread to rise.

Isn't patience a virtue? The Stichiner Rebbe says that the notion of waiting too long when it comes to chametz alludes to our indecisiveness. Should we eat it as matzah or should we eat it as bread? We were wishy-washy. This deliberation finds its root in primordial man eating from the Tree of Knowledge. Before we ate from the tree we knew what was right and what was wrong. We intuited the correct behaviors. The moment we partook of the tree, all of our decisions going forward become a battle ground. Should I or shouldn't I? Burning chametz is our attempt to restore clarity.

Remove the Candle

After the search for chametz, the custom is to burn the bread and to burn the searching candle as well. Why do we burn the candle? Even if it may have touched a little bit of the bread, that wouldn't make a difference because chametz is not transferred this way. Rebbe Chaim Meir Hager of Vizhnitz refers back to a concept we mentioned previously, that chametz symbolizes our darker impulse. It follows that the search for chametz ritualizes our introspective search for the shadow side of ourselves in order to expel it. Within this schema, the candle's main function is to assist in looking for the darkness within. The Vizhnitzer Rebbe says that any device whose main function is to exploit or expose evil needs should be destroyed as soon as we are finished using it. In thinking of a proper analogy,

surveillance comes to mind. A limited curbing of our freedom is acceptable if it's going to promote greater safety. But once the primary threat has been dealt with, invasive surveillance quickly becomes the enemy. One more analogy. The surgeon may use a scalpel to fissure out diseased bacteria. Once the problem has been neutralized, the surgical equipment is discarded because it now may carry the infection.

The Little Three

We are obligated to check every hole, nook and cranny. In every corner of our homes we need to look for chametz. In Jewish numerology the value of chametz is 138. The numerical value of matzah is 135. The difference between them is 3. What does the 3 stand for? Reb Yankele Galinsky says that the 3 symbolizes the three ill character traits that remove a person from this world (*Pirkei Avos* 4:21) — jealousy, thirst for honor, and lust. That's the difference, that little 3. Those three struggles are exactly what we are trying to eliminate.

What is specific in our battle against jealousy, chasing honor, and lust? All three problems express a will to have something beyond what is ours. It reflects a lack of faith in the crucial notion that everything we need is right in front of us.



Find more shiurim and articles from Rabbi Shlomo Einhorn at <https://www.yutorah.org/Rabbi-Shlomo-Einhorn/>

The Methodology of Teaching the Pesach Story High School

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ONCE UPON... A KARPAS

Once upon a time has become an iconic opening phrase that launches its audience into a story. We know we are at the beginning of a story when we see such a phrase, and we know we are at the conclusion when we read “and they lived happily ever after.” Truth be told, throughout our lives we are all storytellers in some way. We tell the story of our people, we learn from our family’s story, and we even share our own personal story with those we truly trust

and love. On the night of Pesach, we are commanded to retell the story of our people to the next generation; but how do we start to tell this story? Where do we begin?

If we examine the Haggadah closely, we can clearly see that there is an order to our evening, but can we identify the beginning of where our story starts? Is it clear where we should begin?

If we look at the Maggid section we see an interesting opening line:

Discussion Questions:

1. If you were to tell your own personal story, at what point in your life would you start it? (i.e: Birth, first independent accomplishment, start of school, discovery of a talent, first job?) Explain.
2. What are ways or methods that get you most engaged when starting to learn something new?
3. If you were commissioned to put together the Seder, where would you have started the story? Explain.
4. Is it important to know where something began or is the ending really the only relevant part? Explain your answer.

הא לחמא עניא די אכלו אבהתנא בארעא
 דמצרים. כל דכפין ייתי ויכל, כל דצריך ייתי
 ויפסח. השתא הכא, לשנה הבאה בארעא
 דישראל. השתא עבדי, לשנה הבאה בני חורין.
*This is the bread of destitution that
 our ancestors ate in the land of Egypt.
 Anyone who is famished should come
 and eat, anyone who is in need should
 come and partake of the Pesach sacrifice.
 Now we are here, next year we will be in
 the land of Israel; this year we are slaves,
 next year we will be free people.*

Although there is much beautiful
 Torah written on this opening phrase,
 it doesn't really give our story any
 specific beginning. The opening
 phrase does not seem to open up to
 any story at all. Even if we consider
 this section to be an introduction
 to Maggid, and claim that the story
 really starts with *Avadim Hayinu*, after
 the children ask their *Mah Nishtanah*
 questions, we still haven't solved the
 problem. We go straight into being
 slaves to Pharaoh in Mitzrayim,
 then jump around to Rabbi Akiva
 and his contemporaries, back to

our forefathers, and then back to
 Mitzrayim. Why is there no clear
 starting point?

The answer might be found in a
 brilliant educational tool we call
karpas. *Karpas* is a difficult word to
 translate. Although we might want
 to translate it to something like
 “vegetable” or “something we dip in
 salt water,” the word *karpas* actually
 means cotton or fine linen. If we look
 in Tanakh, we see the word *karpas*
 only once: It is found in Megillat
 Esther to describe the elaborate
 decoration of Achashverosh's palace:

חור כרפס ותכלת אחוזו בחבלי בוץ וארגמן
 על גלילי כסף ועמודי שש מטות זהב וכסף על
 רצפת בהט ויש ודר וסוקרת.

*[There were hangings of] white cotton
 and blue wool, caught up by cords of
 fine linen and purple wool to silver rods
 and alabaster columns; and there were
 couches of gold and silver on a pavement
 of marble, alabaster, mother-of-pearl,
 and mosaics.*

Esther: 1:6

Why is *karpas* at our Seder? Why
 do we dip it into salt water? Is this
 practice done only so that “the
 children should ask”?

In education there is a teaching
 practice called “the hook” of the
 lesson. The hook is a creative and/
 or engaging tool that serves as a way
 of getting students interested and
 invested in new material. It would
 seem that Chazal, in their mastery
 of teaching, start off the Seder with
 a “hook” to get us involved and
 interested. Chazal knew that before
 you can teach, you must first engage
 your students and make them active
 participants in their own learning. The
 Gemara says of Rabbah that he used
 to open his class with a humorous
 comment:

דרבה מקמי דפתח להו לרבנן אמר מילתא
 דבדיחותא ובדחי רבנן.

*Rabbah, prior to beginning his lecture,
 would open with a humorous remark
 (mitla debidichuta).*

Shabbat 30b

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Rabbah understood that if he created an atmosphere that opened his students to learning, he could then proceed to teach them Torah that would leave a lasting impact. Perhaps Chazal are doing that as well on the Seder night by making a “hook” they called *karpas*. They are engaging each of us before we start Maggid, which will get us thinking. It will give us context about the start of our story and place us in the proper mindset to learn.

The opening of our story starts with an interactive activity of dipping something that is called cotton or linen, but what does this have to do with the story of Mitzrayim? A medieval commentator on the Rambam known as Rav Manoach discusses why we have Karpas at the Seder:

ואנו נוהגין בכרפס זכר לכתונת הפסים שעשה יעקב אבינו ליוסף אשר בסבתה נתגלגל הדבר וירדו אבותינו למצרים.

And we have the custom of karpas as a remembrance of the coat of wool that Jacob made for Joseph which caused the entire episode of “and our forefathers went down to Egypt.”

Hilchot Chametz U’Matzah 8:2

Furthermore, Rashi makes a comment on the *ketonet pasim* that was given to Yosef, and explains that this coat was made of *karpas*:

וישראל אהב את יוסף מכל בניו כי בן זקנים הוא לו ועשה לו כתנת פסים.

פסים: לשון כלי מלת, כמו כרפס והתכלת, וכמו כתונת הפסים דתמר ואמנון.

Now Israel loved Joseph best of all his sons, for he was the child of his old age; and he had made him an ornamented tunic.

Bereishit 37:3

Pasim is a term for raiment of fine wool (Shabbat 10b). Similar to pasim is karpas utechelet — fine linen and blue (Esther 1:6). The same garment, ketonet pasim, is mentioned (2 Samuel 13:18) in the story of Amnon and Tamar and we may therefore presume that it was made of very fine material].

Rashi, Bereishit 37:3

We begin the Seder with a reenactment of the story’s beginning. We take the *karpas* and dip it into salt water, reminding us of the dipping of Yosef’s coat by his brothers that began our descent to Egypt. It was the disloyalty and hatred among brothers that led us to us to Egypt, where we ultimately became slaves. The brothers had corrupted themselves with jealousy and hatred and ultimately made their brother suffer. Perhaps these were the actual seeds of slavery. When a human can disregard another human’s importance and individuality, or take advantage of him, that can bring about slavery. The *ketonet pasim* differentiated Yosef and made him special. It was this difference that the brothers could not live with, and so they tried to get rid of him. The same would repeat itself to us as a nation years later in Mitzrayim:

ויקם מלך חדש על מצרים אשר לא ידע את יוסף. ויאמר אל עמו הנה עם בני ישראל רב ועצום ממנו.

A new king arose over Egypt who did not know Joseph. And he said to his people, “Look, the Israelite people are much too numerous for us.”

Shemot 1:8-9

It would seem that this Pharaoh would also forget Yosef and the lesson of brotherhood. Pharaoh and the Egyptians would look at Bnei Yisrael as different and too numerous, and would feel threatened

by their numbers. These people were different from the Egyptians and so the fear and disrespect started against our people:

הבה נתחכמה לו פן ירבה והיה כי תקראנה מלחמה ונוסף גם הוא על שנאינו ונלחם בנו ועלה מן הארץ.

Let us deal shrewdly with them, so that they may not increase; otherwise in the event of war they may join our enemies in fighting against us and rise from the ground.

Shemot 1:10

It would take the great lesson of knowing how the story of our slavery began in order to correct it so that it never happens again. Chazal have us dip *karpas* each year so that we remember how our story started. We must try and rectify the past. In place of jealousy and hatred, we need to love and celebrate one another. If we fail to do so, we will be guilty of the same sin that caused our ancestors to be enslaved in Egypt. With an engaging activity at the start of the Seder, we dip the *karpas* into salt water, symbolizing the tears and hardships brought about from the original dipping of the *karpas*. We go through the story only once we have tasted what that dipping can lead to. It is imperative that we start our story this way and see how it develops throughout the Haggadah. We need to consider on a personal and national level how we will ultimately end our story. Will we learn from the lessons of the past and do better for a more promising future? Can we work toward an ending of respect, acceptance, and love for all that can hopefully lead to a “happily ever after”? Let us hope that we can internalize this message and choose an ending that brings about peace throughout the world, next year in Jerusalem!

believed in the Egyptian gods and followed Egyptian philosophy.⁴ “Taking them out” meant removing the Jews from ideological subjugation to Egyptian philosophy. Given the level of their involvement in the culture, for G-d to take the Jews out of the midst of Egypt would only be possible if the Jews maintained their national identity. The Jews did not intermarry with the Egyptians, as is implied by the Torah publicizing the one case in which this did occur.⁵ This expression of redemption parallels the first cup of wine, which is the Kiddush. Kiddush means separation or sanctification of the festival, and this can only be performed by people who are themselves sanctified and separate. Indeed, although the Jews were culturally assimilated, they did not intermarry with the Egyptians and therefore remained a separate nation. Thus the cup of Kiddush is a testimony to our ancestors maintaining a separation from the Egyptians.

The second expression, *I will save them*, refers to G-d saving the Jews from the threat of annihilation by the Egyptians. G-d intervened to save the Jews from death at the hands of the Egyptians, but did not, and would not, have intervened to save them from themselves. Self-destruction, enabled by the Jews’ free will, would not have been prevented by G-d.⁶ It was only possible, then, to save the Jews from the Egyptians if the Jews were not pursuing, hurting and killing each other. The fact that the Jews were saved from death at the hands of the Egyptians indicates that there was unity among the Jewish people, that they did not inform on each other to the Egyptian authorities, and did not pursue each other.⁷ Hence G-d saved them from the hands of the Egyptians because of the loyalty the Jews had to

each other, despite their oppression. Rav Meir Simchah sees this idea expressed in Birkat HaMazon, our prayer of thanks and declaration of reliance upon G-d. Only when we have trust and faith in G-d will we not become so desperate and panicked in the face of oppression that we turn on our fellow victims. In the merit of this trust in G-d, the Jews were saved.

The third expression in the verses in Shmot refers to redemption from slavery. We know from the Talmud that slaves often wanted to remain as slaves because they are comfortable with having no responsibility or moral strictures.⁸ Rav Meir Simcha attributes this to the low self-esteem of a slave, who has no pride in his ancestry, and does not see himself as important.⁹ The fact that G-d was able to redeem the Jews from slavery indicates that the Jewish people still retained an understanding of who they really were — children of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob — and that they still had pride in their identity. This is indicated by the fact that the Jewish people still used their ancestral names and named their children after their ancestors.¹⁰ The Jews looked at themselves as Israelites, and not merely as anonymous, worthless Egyptian slaves. Rav Meir Simcha maintains that this is “toasted” by the second cup of wine that is drunk at the first part of Hallel, which celebrates our connection to our ancestors and to our glorious past.¹¹

The fourth expression of redemption, *I will take you to me as a people*, states that G-d will bring us to Him and make us into an independent, sovereign nation. This would only be possible if the Jews retained a hope of building and becoming a nation. This hope is expressed in the fact that the Jews maintained an ongoing connection to the Hebrew language.¹² They realized

deep down that a sovereign nation must have its own language, and their maintenance of Hebrew indicated that the dream of nationhood was alive and well. Our toast to this merit of our ancestors is the last cup of wine, over which the second part of Hallel is recited. This section of Hallel focuses on the future redemption,¹³ and hence is an appropriate way to appreciate our ancestors’ hope for their future redemption.

Karpas

What is the significance of dipping the karpas into salt water at the beginning of the Seder? Why should this be done first? And what does the word *karpas* really mean? The Talmud states¹⁴ that when the Jews brought the Passover offerings back to their homes or tents from the Beit HaMikdash, they carried it over their shoulders like “Ishmaelite traders.” Similarly, some have a custom of carrying the Afikoman wrapped in a cloth and thrown over the shoulder.¹⁵ What is the significance of carrying the Passover offering specifically like “Ishmaelite traders”? Rav Shlomo Kluger¹⁶ explains that this is done to remind us of what caused our exile in Egypt. It was because Joseph’s brothers so hated and envied Joseph that they sold him to the Ishmaelites as a slave.¹⁷ In order to correct the sin of hatred, we reminded ourselves of the cause of the initial exile at the celebration of the Exodus.

Rav Yosef Chaim of Baghdad¹⁸ maintains that dipping the karpas at the very beginning of the Seder is a reminder to us that the cause of the exile was the hatred and jealousy that resulted in the sale of Joseph, so dipping the karpas in salt water reminds us of the brothers dipping

Joseph's coat in the blood of an animal.¹⁹ Linguistically, there is support for this explanation. Rashi in his commentary on the Torah explains that the *ktonet passim*²⁰ of Joseph was a fine wool garment. He cites a similar word, the verse in Megilat Esther that describes the Palace in Shushan as decorated with “*chur karpas and techelet*,”²¹ [hangings of] white, fine wool and blue. The only place in the entire Tanach where the word *karpas* is used is regarding a type of cloth, and this word is similar to the word used to describe Joseph's coat. It is no coincidence that we call the dipped vegetable *karpas*, to remind us of Joseph's garment being dipped in blood.²² By recalling this sin, albeit subtly, we hope to end the exile by correcting the sin of hatred and ending jealousy and resentment.

Bnei Brak

The Haggadah tells us of four rabbis who celebrated the Seder with Rabbi Akivah in Bnei Brak. Why did they all come to the home of Rabbi Akivah? This is especially problematic for Rabbi Eliezer, who maintains that Jews should stay home for Yom Tov.²³ Three explanations follow:

A. Rabbi Reuven Margaliyot²⁴ suggests a possible explanation. A number of passages in the Talmud describe rabbis, together with Rabban Gamliel, traveling together to Rome, where they would lobby the senate to help protect Jewish lives and property.²⁵ It is possible that on one of the trips they returned on a ship and landed on the eve of Pesach. They therefore went to the closest city, Bnei Brak, where Rabbi Akivah lived.²⁶ Ancient Bnei Brak is not located where the modern city is found, but was close to the port of

Jaffa,²⁷ and hence would have been the most convenient place to celebrate the Seder. Rabban Gamliel does not appear in the story mentioned in the Haggadah. Perhaps, Rabbi Margaliyot explains, since he was the Nassi, the Patriarch, they would not have been allowed to lean in his presence, so he did not attend.²⁸

B. Rav Avraham Yitzchak Kook points out that Bnei Brak is mentioned²⁹ as the place where Rami bar Yechezkel, after arriving in Israel from Babylon, saw a goat licking date honey³⁰ under a date palm, its udder dripping milk into the honey. He declared that he had seen with his own eyes that Israel was indeed a “land flowing with milk and honey.”³¹ Therefore, what better place to gather and celebrate the Exodus than a place where they could see and appreciate what a beautiful land that G-d gave to the Jewish people after taking them out of Egypt.

C. Rav Yechiel Michel Epstein³² explains that these rabbis were all living in the time of the Hadrianic persecutions of the Jews, and they found it difficult to be in the appropriate frame of mind to celebrate the Seder properly. Therefore, they went to Rabbi Akivah who, as the Gemara³³ states, was able to see redemption even in the depths of exile: When Rabbi Akivah saw foxes in the Holy of Holies, he laughed while everyone else cried, explaining that seeing the depths of exile was evidence to him that there would be redemption, because the prophecies of both are linked. The others responded, “Akivah you have comforted us.” Therefore, on Pesach, in the midst of persecution, the other rabbis sought out the one person who could comfort them and celebrate redemption even in the midst of a terrible exile.³⁴

Endnotes

- 1 JT *Pesachim* 10:1 (59a).
- 2 BT *Pesachim* 99b.
- 3 *Meshekh Hokhmah*, Shmot 6:6
- 4 *Mekhilta, BeShalah Parsha 6, Yad, Avodat Kokhavim* 1:2.
- 5 Vayikra 24:10, Rashi ad loc.
- 6 See *Ohr Hachaim*, Bereshit 37:21.
- 7 Shmot 5:14, Rashi ad loc, *Ohr Hachaim* Shmot 1:18.
- 8 BT *Ketuvot* 11a, *Gittin* 13a.
- 9 BT *Kiddushin* 99a, *Bava Kama* 88a.
- 10 *Vayikra Rabba* 32:5, *Bamidbar Rabba* 20:22, *Mekhilta* Shmot, *Parshat Bo*, 5.
- 11 *Tehillim* 113, 114, 115.
- 12 *Vayikra Rabba* 32:5, *Bamidbar Rabba* 13:20.
- 13 *Tehillim* 116, 117, 118.
- 14 BT, *Pesachim* 65b, Rashi ad loc.
- 15 *Responsa Maharshah* 88.
- 16 *Haggadat Ma'aseh Yedei Yotzer*.
- 17 *Bereshit* 37:28.
- 18 Ben Ish Chai, *Shanah Rishonah, Parshat Tzav* 32.
- 19 *Bereshit* 37:31.
- 20 *Bereshit* 37:3.
- 21 *Megilat Esther* 1:6.
- 22 Heard from Rabbi Isaac Bernstein OBM.
- 23 BT *Sukkah* 27b.
- 24 *Haggadah Shel Pesach, Be'er Miriam* p. 24.
- 25 *Mishnah, Ma'aser Sheni* 5:9, BT *Shabbat* 122a, *Sukkah* 23a, *Kiddushin* 26b, *Avodah Zarah* 54b, *Horayot* 10a.
- 26 BT *Sanhedrin* 32a.
- 27 See Yehoshua 19:45, *Atlas Da'at Mikrah* p. 162, *Harper-Collins Atlas of the Bible*, p. 122.
- 28 *Shulchan Arukh*, OC 472.
- 29 BT *Ketuvot* 112b.
- 30 Possibly sap or maybe overripe dates dripping syrup.
- 31 Shmot 3:8. See Gil Marks, *Encyclopedia of Jewish Food*, p.153-154.
- 32 *Haggadat Leil Shimurim*.
- 33 BT *Makot* 24a.
- 34 For other examples of Rabbi Akivah's unique perspective, see BT *Sanhedrin* 101a, *Berachot* 61b, JT *Berachot* 9:5, *Sotah* 5:5.

The Methodology of Teaching the Pesach Story

Adults

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Rosh Yeshiva, RIETS



EASY COME, NOT SO EASY GO REFLECTIONS ON THE REMOVAL OF THE MAKKOS

The Haggadah provides a framework through which we fulfill the mitzvah of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim*. In the “Arami Oved Avi” section, pesukim from Sefer Shemos are referenced. These citations do not constitute a comprehensive survey of the core narrative texts, nor do they preclude a closer examination of them. On the contrary, by stating *kol hamarbeh le’saper biyetzias Mitzrayim harei zeh meshubach* — whoever expands on the story of the Exodus is praiseworthy — the Haggadah encourages us to delve into the story’s many details as recorded in the pesukim of Sefer Shemos. Ironically, “expanding on the story” typically takes the form of

divrei Torah that inform the text of the Haggadah, but rarely includes a closer examination of pesukim contained within the narrative itself. As we shall see, broadening the discussion to include a focus on these pesukim can greatly enhance our fulfillment of the mitzvah of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim*.

One of the highlights of the Haggadah is the listing of the Ten Makkos (Plagues). The mention of these makkos, along with the *detzach adash be’achav* acronym coined by Rabbi Yehuda, beckons us to explore patterns embedded within the Torah’s description of the plagues. To cite one example: All the makkos, except for three (*kinim, shechin, chosech*), were

preceded by warnings heralding their imminent arrival. These warnings were delivered to Pharaoh either by the Nile River (*dam, arov, barad*) or in his palace (*tzefarde’a, dever, arbeh, makas bechoros*). These differences are noted by many of the classic commentaries (see, for example, Ramban to 8:15 and Malbim to 7:14), and their insightful answers can generate lively discussions.

This article will focus on a lesser known pattern relating to the removal of the plagues. As will be noted, Pharaoh’s demand that Moshe intercede with Hashem to bring an end to the plagues appears in connection with four makkos —

tz'farde'a (frogs), arov (swarm of wild beasts), barad (hail), and arbeh (grasshoppers). Additionally, the way the Torah describes Moshe's prayers for the plagues' cessation and how it describes the negotiations regarding their removal varies from case to case.

The goal of this essay is to "frame the conversation" surrounding these nuances. For this purpose, it will adhere to the following format: citations of the relevant texts, thought questions relating to the phraseology of the texts, sources and guiding questions that can help resolve some of the textual peculiarities, theological considerations relating to Moshe's acquiescence to Pharaoh's request that he pray for the plagues' removal. It is my hope that this essay will challenge the readers to further "connect the dots" at the Seder and beyond, in the spirit of kol hamarbeh le'saper biyetzias mitzrayim harei zeh meshubach.

צפרדע / Frogs

ויאמר פרעה למשה ולאהרן ויאמר העתירו אל ה' ויסר הצפרדעים ממני ומעמי ואשלחה את העם ויזבחו לה'. ויאמר משה לפרעה התפאר עלי למתי אעתיר לך ולעבדיך ולעמך להכרית הצפרדעים ממך ומבתיך רק ביאר תשארנה. ויאמר למחר ויאמר כדברך למען תדע כי אין פה אלקינג. וסרו הצפרדעים ממך ומבתיך ומעבדיך ומעמך רק ביאר תשארנה. ויצא משה ואהרן מעם פרעה ויצעק משה אל ה' על דבר הצפרדעים אשר שם לפרעה. ויעש ה' כדבר משה וימתו הצפרדעים מן הבתים מן החצרות ומן השדות.

Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and said, "Plead with Hashem to remove the frogs from me and my people, and I will send out the people so that they may sacrifice to Hashem." And Moses said to Pharaoh, "Glorify yourself over me: for what time shall I plead on behalf of you and your servants and your people, that the frogs be cut off from you and your houses, to remain only in the Nile?"

And he said, "For tomorrow." And he [Moses] said, "As you say — that you may know that there is none like Hashem, our God; the frogs shall depart from you and your houses, and from your servants and your people; they shall remain only in the Nile." Then Moses and Aaron left Pharaoh's presence, and Moses cried out to Hashem concerning the frogs which He had inflicted upon Pharaoh. And Hashem did as Moses asked; the frogs died out in the houses, the courtyards, and the fields.

Shemos 8:4-9

Swarm of Wild Beasts / ערוב

ויאמר פרעה אנכי אשלח אתכם וזבחתם לה' אלקיכם במדבר רק הרחק לא תרחיקו ללכת העתירו בעדי. ויאמר משה הנה אנכי יוצא מעמך והעתרת אל ה' וסר הערב מפרעה מעבדי ומעמו מחר רק אל יסר פרעה התל לבתי שלח את העם לזבח לה'. ויצא משה מעם פרעה ויעתר אל ה'. ויעש ה' כדבר משה ויסר הערב מפרעה מעבדי ומעמו לא נשאר אחד.

Pharaoh said, "I will send you and you shall sacrifice to Hashem, your God, in the wilderness; but do not go very far. Plead, then, for me." And Moses said, "When I leave your presence, I will plead with Hashem — and the swarm will depart tomorrow from Pharaoh and his servants and his people; but let not Pharaoh continue to mock, by not sending out the people to sacrifice to Hashem." So Moses left Pharaoh's presence and pleaded with Hashem. And Hashem did as Moses asked: He removed the swarm from Pharaoh, from his servants, and from his people; not one remained.

Shemos 8:24-27

Hail/ ברד

וישלח פרעה ויקרא למשה ולאהרן ויאמר אלהם חטאתי הפעם ה' הצדיק ואני ועמי הרשעים. העתירו אל ה' ורב מהית קלת אלקים וברד ואשלחה אתכם ולא תספון לעמו. ויאמר אליו משה כצאתי את העיר אפרש את כפי אל ה' הקלות יחדלון והברד לא יהיה עוד למען תדע כי לה' הארץ. ויצא משה מעם פרעה את העיר ויפרש כפיו אל ה' ויחדלו הקלות והברד ומטר לא נתפך ארצה.

And Pharaoh sent for Moses and Aaron and said to them, "I have sinned this time. Hashem is in the right, and I and my people are in the wrong. Plead with Hashem that there may be an end of Godly thunder and hail. I will send you out; you need stay no longer." Moses said to him, "When I go out of the city, I shall spread out my hands to Hashem; the thunder will cease and the hail will no longer be, so that you may know that the earth is Hashem's. ... Leaving Pharaoh, Moses went outside the city and spread out his hands to Hashem: the thunder and the hail ceased, and no rain reached the earth.

Shemos 9:27-29,33

Grasshoppers / ארבה

וימהר פרעה לקרא למשה ולאהרן ויאמר חטאתי לה' אלקיכם ולכם. ועתה שא נא חטאתי אף הפעם והעתירו לה' אלקיכם ויסר מעלי רק את המות הזה. ויצא מעם פרעה ויעתר אל ה'. ויהפך ה' רוח ים חזק מאד וישא את הארבה ויתקעוהו ימה סוף לא נשאר ארבה אחד בכל גבול מצרים.

Pharaoh hurriedly summoned Moses and Aaron and said, "I have sinned to Hashem your God, and to you. Forgive my offense just this once, and plead with Hashem your God that He but remove this death from me." He left Pharaoh's presence and pleaded with Hashem. Hashem turned back a very strong west wind, which lifted the locusts and hurled them into the Sea of Reeds; not a single locust remained in all the territory of Egypt.

Shemos 10:16-19

Points to Ponder

Here are a number of questions to consider:

- Why did Pharaoh only ask Moshe to pray for the removal of these four makkos? Why don't we find him making the same request regarding the other makkos?
- The term used to describe these prayers is "*ha'atiru*," from the root "*atar*." Rashi, Bereishis 25:21, writes that this term connotes repeated pleading. Why does the Torah use this term to describe these prayers?
- The first three times that Pharaoh asked Moshe to pray, he added that once the plague is removed he would let the people go. Regarding *arbeh*, he didn't make such an offer. Why the difference?
- The first two times that Pharaoh asked Moshe to pray, Moshe also used the term "*atar*." The third time (*barad*), Moshe said that he will spread out his hands (*efros es kapai*). The fourth time, Moshe takes leave of Pharaoh without mentioning anything about prayer. How do we explain the differences?
- When Moshe actually prays, the term "*atar*" is used for *arov* and *arbeh*. For *tz'farde'a*, the term "*vayitzak*" (he cried out) is used, and regarding *barad*, the term "*vayifros kapav*" (he spread out his hands) is used. What might account for these differences?
- After Moshe prays for the cessation of *tz'farde'a* and *arov*, the Torah states that Hashem acted in accordance with Moshe's prayers. Why is this mentioned only regarding *tz'farde'a* and *arov* and not in connection with *barad* and *arbeh*?
- Why does Moshe leave the city to pray for the cessation of *barad*? Why doesn't he do so for the others?
- We normally think of prayer as a request of Hashem to change His decree. Why was prayer, and specifically intense prayer, necessary in order to remove the plague? Was Moshe trying to accomplish something that wasn't part of Hashem's original plan?

Sources that Address the Textual Inconsistencies

When faced with multiple questions on the same topic, an insight that answers all the questions in one fell swoop can be very gratifying and compelling. However, more often than not, the rigors of Torah study require us to answer the questions individually or in smaller groups. Here are a number of sources that deal with these questions:

Source #1 – Shemos Rabbah no. 10

כיון שהתחילה הפורענות בגופו מיד הרגיש והתחיל צועק העתירו לה' ויסר הצפרדעים.

Once the plagues began inflicting bodily harm, [Pharaoh] immediately felt it and began to scream "Plead with Hashem to remove the frogs."

Questions:

- 1) Does the Midrash's explanation as to why Pharaoh asked Moshe to pray apply to all four of the aforementioned makkos?
- 2) How do we explain why Pharaoh didn't ask Moshe to pray for the end of other makkos where bodily harm was inflicted — *kinim* (lice) and *shechin* (boils)?

Source #2 – Ramban 9:30 (commenting on Moshe's response to Pharaoh's request to end barad)

והנכון עוד שנפרש כי ירמוז גם לפעמים הראשונים, יאמר, כבר ידעתי מכם כי בטרם אתם יראים ובאחרית אתם מורדים, כי לעולם טרם סור מכם המכות אתם יראים את ה' כאשר עשיתם בצפרדעים (לעיל ה' ד) ובערוב (שם שם כד), ותשובו ותמרו את פי ה', וכן תעשו לעולם, ומפני זה לא הזהירו עוד בשובו, אבל התפלל עליו בארבה על דעת כדו שיוסיף לחטוא.

The correct explanation is that this also refers to the previous instances, as if Moshe was saying, "I have come to know about you that beforehand you fear [G-d] and in the end, you rebel. Because every time, before the plague is removed, you fear G-d as you did with the frogs and with the swarm of wild beasts and then you return to rebelling against the word of G-d, and

this is what you will always do.” For this reason, [Moshe] didn’t warn him when he reneged again, but he prayed for him during [the plague of] grasshoppers, knowing that [Pharaoh] would continue to sin.

Questions:

- 1) How do the Ramban’s comments explain the differences in the language of the negotiations concerning the removal of *tz’farde’a*, *arov* and *barad* and the language regarding the removal of *arbeh*?
- 2) If Moshe knew that Pharaoh wasn’t going to listen, why did he continue to pray to end the makkos?

Source #3a – Ibn Ezra, Shemos 8:8-9

טעם ויצעק כי בטח בשם שלא יביישהו, כי אמר אל פרעה מעצמו כדברך יהיה בלא רשות השם. *The reason why the term “vayitzak” (he screamed) was used was because [Moshe] had faith in Hashem that he would not be embarrassed because he spoke to Pharaoh on his own, without Hashem’s permission, saying that he will follow [Pharaoh’s] request.*

Source #3b – Abarbanel, Shemos ch. 8

הנכון בעיני בזה הוא שמה רבינו מעצמו ומבלי צווי אלקים אמר לפרעה התפאר עלי למתי אעתיר לך וגו’ ופרעה השיבו למחא. ולכן פחד משה אלו היה רצון השם יתברך שתתמיד מכת הצפרדע שבעה ימים כמו שהתמידה מכת הדם ושהוא מהר את הקץ שלא ברשות גבוה ומפני זה הוצרך לצעק אל ה’ שיקיים דבר עבדו בזה.

It seems to me that Moshe Rabbeinu said to Pharaoh on his own, without a divine command, “Glorify yourself over me: for what time shall I plead on behalf of you, etc.,” and Pharaoh replied “tomorrow.” Therefore, Moshe was afraid that perhaps Hashem’s will was that the

plague of frogs should last for seven days, just as it did for the plague of blood, and that Moshe truncated its length without divine permission. For this reason, he needed to scream to Hashem that He fulfill the words of His servant.

Questions:

- 1) How does Abarbanel’s answer compare to Ibn Ezra’s?
- 2) Why do you think Moshe guaranteed removal of the plague without first consulting with Hashem?
- 3) Can these explanations be applied to the other plagues? Why or why not?

Source #4 – Ramban, Shemos 9:29

כצאתי את העיר — על דרך הפשט יתכן לומר שהיה משה מתפלל בביתו, רק בפעם הזאת רצה להיות כפיו פרושות השמים ויחדלו הקולות והמטר מיד, ולא יתכן לעשות כן בעיר, על כן אמר כצאתי את העיר ... ורבותינו אמרו שלא היה מתפלל בתוך העיר לפי שהיא מלאה גלולים, וכל שכן שלא היה נדבר עמו אלא חוץ לכרך. אם כן נאמר כי בעבור שהיה פרעה מבקש עתה שיסור הברד מיד, הוצרך משה לפרש לו כי יצטרך לצאת את העיר, ואחרי כן יפרוש כפיו אל ה’ ויסור בתפלתו, והוא האמת.

When I go out of the city — One can explain on a basic level that Moshe ordinarily prayed in his home, but this time, he wanted to have his palms spread out toward the heavens so that the thunder and the rain should end immediately. This couldn’t be done inside the city. Therefore, he said “when I go out of the city.” ... Our Rabbis said that he didn’t pray in the city because it was full of idols and certainly [G-d] didn’t speak to him inside the city. If so, we can say that because Pharaoh was now requesting that the hail cease immediately, Moshe had to explain to him that he had to exit the city and only then could he spread out his hands

to G-d and the plague will be removed when he prayed. This is the truth.

Questions:

- 1) According to the Ramban, what is the significance of Moshe spreading out his hands? Is there a difference between the Ramban’s first explanation and his second?
- 2) According to the second explanation, did Moshe spread out his hands for the other plagues?

Source #5 – HaKesav VeHaKalah, Shemos 8:29

אפרש את כפי. לא יתכן שיעלים התפלה העיקרית ויזכיר פרישת כפים לבד שהוא כטפל אל העיקר. לכן נ”ל כי לשון פרישת כפים משמעותו ג”כ תפלה ... וראיתי להרא”ש שכתב דלענין הסרת הברד שאינו רק בשב ואל תעשה, כמו שנאמר הקולות יחדלון לא הוצרך תפלה רק רמז בעלמא, ובפרישת כפים זולתי תפלה יספיק. ואין זה נכון כי בכל מקום ענין פרישת כפים המכוון בו תפלה.

I shall spread out my hands. It is inconceivable that prayer, which is primary, was absent and only spreading of the hands, which is secondary, is mentioned. Therefore, it seems to me that the phrase “spreading of the hands” also implies prayer ... I saw that Rabbeinu Asher wrote that with regard to the removal of the hail, which was only passive, as it states “the thunder will cease,” there was no need for prayer, just a mere symbolic act, and the spreading of hands without prayer was sufficient. This explanation is not correct because any time that spreading of the hands is mentioned, it refers to prayer.

Questions:

- 1) How would you describe the dispute between the opinions mentioned in this source?
- 2) How do each of these explanations deal with why “spreading of the hands” is only mentioned at *barad*?

Theological Considerations

Along with exploring the Torah's language relating to the removal of the four aforementioned plagues, we must consider a broader theological question as well. Namely, if Moshe did not receive divine permission to pray for the plague's removal (see sources 3A and 3B above), what justified his doing so at Pharaoh's behest? After all, if the plagues were meted out as divine retribution for the Egyptians' wickedness, why relieve them of the suffering that they so justly deserved?

While this question is not directly addressed by the early commentaries, several suggestions present themselves.

First, perhaps we learn from here that even when a harsh judgment is imposed by divine decree upon an individual or nation, it is still appropriate to pray for the alleviation of human suffering. However, it is possible that this might only apply when the afflicted individual or nation acknowledges Hashem as the source of the suffering and expresses some level of guilt and/or a desire to change, as was the case with Pharaoh.

A second possibility is that Moshe felt that honoring Pharaoh's request

to pray for the plagues' removal was consistent with the divine imperative to accord Pharaoh an extra measure of respect in deference to his royal status (see Rashi's comments to Shemos 5:3; 6:13; 11:8).

Third, Moshe's prayers may have been necessary to avert a *chilul Hashem* — a desecration of G-d's name. This is because remaining passive in the face of Pharaoh's request could be misconstrued as an indication that Hashem lacked the power to end the plagues, thus creating the erroneous impression that the curse of their existence was merely a matter of coincidence.

Alternatively, Moshe's acceding to Pharaoh's request may have been designed to bring about a *kiddush Hashem* — a sanctification of G-d's name — since it illustrated that Hashem can bring a plague and remove it at will. Moreover, it demonstrated the trust that Hashem places in His devoted servants, whose bidding He chooses to follow even when doing so serves to override a preexisting Divine decree — in the spirit of *tzadik gozer veHakadosh Baruch Hu mekayem* — a righteous person decrees and Hashem follows suit. [See Abarbanel Devarim ch. 34,

who writes that Moshe Rabbeinu didn't normally need *tzadik gozer veHakadosh Baruch Hu mekayem* in bringing about miracles because he knew G-d's will in advance. He only needed it for the removal of the plagues. See also, the *Tanchuma Yashan* cited in *Torah Sheleimah*, Shemos 9:112, which indicates that Hashem stopped the plagues after Moshe's prayers because of *tzadik gozer veHakadosh Baruch Hu mekayem*.]

Finally, Moshe's prayers on behalf of Pharaoh may be viewed as a vehicle to establish a new paradigm for prayer, with its primary beneficiaries being the Jewish people throughout the course of history. [See *Sefas Emes*, Shemos 5653.]

These approaches reflect a range of perspectives on a profound theological issue. The merit assigned to any one of these perspectives would best be determined by the degree to which it finds support within the text and/or the comments of Chazal and the traditional commentaries. Needless to say, each approach carries far-reaching philosophical and hashkafic implications, and may be a catalyst for continued discussion — *le'hagdil Torah ule'ha'adira*.



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**Commemorating
the 25th Yahrzeit
of Rabbi Joseph B.
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The Rav on Religious
Zionism

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KOL DODI DOFEK: A PRIMER

During his many years as Honorary President of the American Mizrahi, R. Soloveitchik delivered many addresses articulating his conception of Religious Zionism. Several of his Yiddish speeches were transcribed and published in Yiddish, along with Hebrew and English translations of varying quality. *Kol Dodi Dofek* (*KDD*), delivered on Yom haAtsmaut 1956, is his most ambitious statement and the only one that he later prepared for print (in Hebrew). Bearing in mind how little the Rav published in those years, the pains he took over *KDD* testify to the importance of the essay and its message. It was quickly adopted as part of the Israeli school curriculum in Jewish thought.

In truth, *KDD* is much more than a Zionist speech. It formulates a fundamental outlook on the nature of history and Jewish peoplehood. The ideas are of great importance and the structure is also significant.

Our discussion will look at the opening section only in passing. The Rav chooses to begin with a discussion of the Holocaust. In a word, his view is that we cannot presume to discern God's intentions and purposes in history, nor does Judaism encourage us to speculate about such matters. The halakhic imperative of suffering and catastrophe is to repent. Repentance means engaging in self-examination that leads to active response. The question we must ask ourselves is

not why God has brought about this misfortune, but what we are to do about it. As fundamental as this principle is for Jewish theology, it plays an equally important role in the practical realm. Those who passed the Holocaust years in the safety of North America must examine their own hearts with respect to their actions and omissions during those years. Those who are alive today (in 1956) must likewise think about their responsibilities in the face of new challenges and opportunities. Later, the Rav points to the tasks incumbent on his American audience. In the opening section he sets the stage for that part.

The Holocaust is a dark, incomprehensible chapter in Jewish

history. The next section — the famous “Six Knocks” — seems to restore a sense of divine purpose in history. At first blush, this section seems to undercut the Rav’s skepticism about our ability to explain history. Some readers feel as if the Rav, in his Zionist exuberance, had promptly forgotten everything he said at the outset.

To understand why this is not so, we should contrast the Rav’s view of Zionism with more militant or messianic strains in Religious Zionist thinking. Advocates for Religious Zionism often claim that contemporary events, properly interpreted, provide a clue to God’s plan for history. Armed with such knowledge we can be certain that redemption, messianic redemption, is taking place. This implies optimism that history is progressing irreversibly in a favorable direction. Furthermore, the progress envisioned is not merely mundane; it is unmistakable progress toward the messianic goal foretold by the prophets.

As we have seen, the Rav is skeptical about such claims to historical understanding. Whether or not the return of the Jewish people to their land, the reestablishment of Jewish sovereignty and other blessings are irreversible, whether or not they are indisputable harbingers of the messianic age, is not our business to determine. God’s ways are not ours. Whatever the ultimate outcome, we are obligated to respond to the reality we experience here and now. The Rav’s halakhic philosophy is about how we are to *act* rather than in how we *speculate* about God.

Speaking in 1956, the Rav enumerates six dramatic developments connected with the State of Israel. Note that he

does not take these remarkable events as a guide to future divine intention. He asserts the more modest thesis that in these events God is knocking on our door, in the phrase he adopts from Shir haShirim 5.

The first two are political: the very establishment of the state and its victory in 1948 and consequent expansion beyond the narrow borders of the 1947 Partition Plan were improbable, “almost supernatural.”

The third and fourth knocks address Jewish self-awareness. One dispels the notion that the long and abject exile of the Jews was a sign of their rejection by God. He attributes this view to Christian theology. Almost certainly, he derived it from John Henry Newman’s *Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*, which he studied carefully in the early 1950’s; elsewhere he quotes other ideas from this book approvingly. The other is that the state of Israel forces Jews who had despairingly embraced assimilation and self-hatred to reassess their identity as Jews.

The last two knocks address the physical situation of the Jew. The fifth, “perhaps the most important,” is the discovery that Jewish blood is not *hefker* (ownerless property); in other words, Jews are no longer expected to be passive victims. They are able to fight back. The sixth is that Jews today have a homeland, a place of refuge, a place where they will be taken in during times of persecution. These two knocks are entirely pragmatic in content. Even the secularist who cares nothing for Judaism or the Jewish spirit appreciates the value of the Zionist project for sheer Jewish survival and self-respect.

The Six Knocks state what God has done for us. But the important

question is how we (in 1956, the Rav’s audience; today, his readers) will respond. Before drawing practical conclusions, the Rav must deal with the fundamentals of Jewish identity. The reason for this digression is that the leaders of the State of Israel are not religious Jews. “We have complaints against certain leaders in Israel due to their attitude to traditional values and religious observance.” For many non-Zionist Orthodox Jews, including the “Israeli” branch of the Soloveichik family, this justifies a reciprocal attitude of hostility and theoretical indifference to the state.

The Rav’s immediate reply to this argument is that we, meaning Orthodox Jewry, are not free of fault. After all, we did not go to Israel in sufficient numbers to mold the society in its formative years. Even today, he says, speaking (let us remember) to American Orthodox Jews, we do not contribute financially as much as we should to building Torah institutions in Israel. From a halakhic perspective, our task is our own self-examination and repentance, not complaints about others.

The Rav’s deeper response is to analyze the nature of Jewish identity in order to properly understand our relationship to Jews who are concerned with Jewish welfare, even while they turn their backs on religious commitment. Against the Haredi tendency to narrow Jewish solidarity to the community of the committed, the Rav champions a broad conception of shared Jewish identity. Unlike certain “messianic” strands in Religious Zionism, his assessment of secular Zionism is based on what secular Zionists actually say and do rather than on the calculation that their work unconsciously paves the way for ultimate redemption.

There are two faces to Jewish identity: the covenant of fate (*goral*) and the covenant of destiny (*yeud*).

The Rav's distinction between fate and destiny is first presented as abstract phenomenological analysis and concrete sociological observation. In philosophical terms, a group constitutes a community of fate when four conditions are met: they have historical events in common; they identify with each other's suffering; they recognize responsibility in confronting challenges; and they engage in shared action. In fact, the Jewish people meet these criteria. Regardless of the degree or nature of religious commitment, Jews share a history; they feel the suffering of their fellow Jews (here the Rav invokes the famous image of the Siamese twins who are viewed as one person because when scalding water is poured on one head, both cry out in pain); they feel responsibility for other Jews, in good times and in bad; and they are capable of concerted action.

Fate is not chosen. We may try to escape our fate, as Jonah fled from his mission, but to no avail. Destiny is about choice. A nation, like an individual, "freely chooses an existence in which it finds the full realization of its historical experience." Having defined fate and destiny philosophically, the Rav now excavates the theological basis of the duality. The exodus from Egypt constituted the Jewish people in terms of shared fate: God extracted the people from slavery unilaterally. The covenant at Sinai gives the Jewish people its destiny and it is consequently negotiated between God and the nation. The Rav distinguishes two terms for the Jewish collective in the wilderness — the camp (*mahane*),

which comes together out of fear and is organized for military protection — and the congregation (*eda*, deriving from the same root as *edut*, testimony), which expresses the covenant of destiny.

The Rav goes on to explore the laws of conversion, in particular the two stages of *gerut*: circumcision and immersion. Circumcision is what introduces the male convert into the Jewish people. It represents the covenant of Egypt, the indelible physical mark of being separated from other nations to become part of the Jewish people. Immersion represents the Sinai covenant, the "elevation from life as it is to life infused with exalted vision." This section in the essay is of particular interest to *lamdanim* because of the Talmudic reasoning the Rav uses to buttress his argument. For example, he demonstrates, following Ramban, that once circumcision is performed as a halakhic act, as it is for an *eved Kenaani* (not merely as a surgical procedure), there is no need for repetition; it is done once and for all. Immersion must be repeated whenever the individual moves from a lower level of sanctity to a higher one (as when the *eved Kenaani* becomes a full-fledged convert).

Now, having completed his discourse on the religious response to evil and to historical opportunity and his analysis of Jewish peoplehood, the Rav moves back to his assessment of our present obligation. From a purely rhetorical point of view, returning to the main object of the speech is an appropriate way to finish. It leaves the audience with a direct message.

But the Rav does not merely rehash the points he made earlier. The entire frame of reference has been altered by the sections on Jewish peoplehood.

Before that portion of the discourse, the Rav spoke primarily in terms of what might be termed "Orthodox interests," what his son-in-law R. Aharon Lichtenstein sometimes called "tallit and tefillin issues." To be sure, he laments the insufficient population in the Negev — the peace initiatives of the early 1950's did not yet recognize Israel's permanent title to these areas and proposed their transfer to Arab (not yet Palestinian) sovereignty — and he alleges that American Jewry could have expedited settlement of these disputed territories. But this question too is approached in terms of the sanctity of Eretz Yisrael, rather than as a matter of physical security.

In the peroration, after the Rav has defined the duality of Jewish identity and the essential role that the covenant of fate plays in our religious outlook, the focus is not on religion and land but on the religious mandate of survival. At this point, the Rav's thesis is that the survival of the religiously committed community throughout the world is bound up with the fate of the *yishuv* in Israel. In this respect, the threat to Israel is no different than the threat to world Jewry in the Hitler years.

The covenant of fate implies not only the responsibility of religious Jews toward secular Jews; it also implies a common bond that enables the Rav, at the very end of his presentation, to chastise secular Zionism. Some militant Zionist ideologists and activists were bent on creating a "new Jew" who had nothing in common with traditional Judaism or traditional Jews, and who disdained identification with non-Israeli Jews. Others cared deeply about Jewish fate and devoted their lives to the Jewish people yet sinned against the covenant of destiny.

They did not believe, and did not want to believe, in the singular destiny of the Jewish people. All they can offer, in effect, is the compulsory fact of shared fate not the free partnership of a shared spiritual destiny. The Rav ends with the affirmation of the Jewish people's unique vocation: we are engaged in the world yet ineluctably and gloriously set apart.

Sixty years later, the Rav's theological discussions of divine Providence and Jewish identity are part of the permanent corpus of Jewish thought. What about the practical details of his discourse?

On one level, many American Jews, especially the "Yeshiva University" types, have responded to the Rav's challenge. When the Rav chose to build so much of his discourse on the "knocks" of Shir haShirim, he knew full well that R. Yehuda Halevi, in the *Kuzari*, had cited the same verses with respect to the Jewish return after the Babylonian exile. The woman who fails to respond to the man's knocking represents the failure of the Jewish people to go up to Israel in their multitudes. In 1956, aliya was not sufficiently a live option for American Jews, even Orthodox ones. Hence the Rav limited his call to less personal kinds of support. Today the percentage of our people who have made aliya is respectable, and they have done so for a combination of religious and Zionist motives, not under pressure of persecution. They have contributed mightily to the economic flourishing of Israel and to its educational institutions and in particular to the growth of religious education. Most of us have studied at Israeli yeshivot, so that our financial commitment to them is based more on gratitude than on altruism.

The Rav refers to the accusation of "dual loyalty" levelled against American Zionists. In those years these imputations emanated from America's entrenched elites who were intent on marginalizing the Jew. The dominant anti-Zionism of the time appealed straightforwardly to American self-interest rather than moral or pseudo-moral preaching: the Arabs had oil, the Jews did not; in the Cold War era, the interests of the United States dictated appeasing the Arabs rather than catering to a vocal minority group. Even then, the Rav appreciated the courage required of American Jews to stand up for Israel. In 1977 he warned Prime Minister Begin that such support could not be taken for granted, given that most American Jews identified with America and its culture.

The Rav was right. By then the cultural climate was changing. Nationalistic "America First" attempts to neutralize support for Israel were being replaced, especially in the conformist academic and media cultures, with ideological bullying intended to delegitimize Jews who failed to move in lockstep with the progressive agenda of the moment. This challenge is both a threat to Judaism in the Western world and an opportunity for young Jews to reassess their lives. The fourth of the Rav's knocks is still heard, albeit in a different way than the Rav recorded then.

Let me make it clear that our obligation to identify with Israel and to counter anti-Israel propaganda, even at the cost of our acceptance and toleration in powerful circles, does not mean that we must eschew any compromise on maximalist territorial claims or regard every Israeli action or omission as impeccable. Surely this

was not the Rav's position. In 1968 he ruled that decisions about land for peace should be left to military experts, not to rabbis. In 1982 he demanded that Prime Minister Begin appoint a commission of inquiry to investigate Israel's failure to prevent the massacres at the Sabra and Shattila refugee camps perpetrated by the Lebanese Christian militia allied to Israel. Yet there is an enormous distance between the counsels of prudence and criticism grounded in sorrow and love on the one hand, and virtually automatic and often ostentatious allegiance to the fashionable proclamations of the herd on the other.

The Rav was also right about the difficulty secularists faced in inventing the "new Hebrew man" and a new Israeli culture. The old dream of an Israel no longer "a people that dwells alone," but a small nation like any other nation, has been refuted by history. The ideal of a new culture, incorporating some fragments of traditional lore but independent of religious commitment, yet satisfying human spiritual yearning, has not come to pass. An increasingly potent Haredi minority may still champion an insular conception of Jewishness that ignores the covenant of fate. The greater danger is the one the Rav poses in his conclusion — the narrowing of the Israeli covenant of fate to ignore the larger Jewish people and the failure of secular culture to find a place for the covenant of destiny.

**Commemorating
the 25th Yahrzeit
of Rabbi Joseph B.
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The Rav on Religious
Zionism

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THE FIVE DERASHOT AND THE RAV'S ENGAGEMENT WITH THE ZIONIST PROJECT

My husband has a relative who spent his public life fighting a bizarre war against Zionism and the State of Israel. An offended family member once asked this relative: What would the Jews who were interred in Displaced Persons camps after the Shoah have done without the help of various groups who smuggled them to Palestine?¹ He was completely unruffled by the question: They could have stayed right where they were, he replied, and learned Torah. This, of course, is an extremist's response and it would not be fair to view it as the position of the broader Yeshivish community (which in 1946 was shattered), then or thereafter.

The traditional communal rabbinic leaders, though, in the decades prior to World War II, had rejected the Zionist

movement, along with competing modernist movements that they viewed as mortal threats to the Torah way of life. It would not be unfair to assess their basic attitude as a passive one, resting on the bedrock principle that God would protect His people so long as they remained faithful to His laws. This "quietism" (to adopt the description that Lionel Trilling once ascribed to Chazal) is precisely what Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik came to reject as he gradually moved away from the negative reaction of his family and peers to Zionism. He addressed this fundamental distinction between a fatalistic approach [*goral*] and an activist approach seeking fulfillment of the destiny [*yi'ud*] of the Jewish people in the essay "Kol Dodi Dofek" based on a talk he gave in 1956.² Not surprisingly, that same distinction

— between a passive quietism and an active engagement with reality — underlies a talk he gave during those years to the members of the Hapoel HaMizrachi group, and which forms one of the essays in the collection now known as *Hamesh Derashot*, "And Joseph Dreamt a Dream."³

In this essay, the Rav analyzes two Biblical characters, Joseph the Dreamer and Abraham the Builder. Through his analysis of Joseph the Dreamer, or as the Rav depicts him, Biblical Joseph, the Rav develops the tension between *goral* and *yi'ud*, between a Jew who "is responding to the initiatives taken by others as they attempt to impose their vision of the Jews' place upon him," and a Jew who "chooses his own identity"; between a "Jew as object of the will of others or as subject of his own will."⁴

The young Joseph dreamt two dreams. The first dream featured sheaves of grain, encircling and bowing down to Joseph's sheaf in the middle. The second dream featured the sun, the moon and eleven stars, all bowing down to Joseph. In the Rav's reading, the context for the dispute between Joseph and his brothers was the Divine prophecy issued to Abraham that "your descendants will be strangers in an alien land." The brothers, though, focused on the fact that "Jacob dwelt in the land of his father's wanderings." In their view, life should continue as it had, and it was not their job or Jacob's to plan for changed circumstances that might arrive some time in the future. Joseph understood, though, that his two dreams foretold a rapidly approaching future, a future in which both the security of Jacob's family and a continuation of their way of life was in danger. For Joseph, the wheat represented a new economy and the celestial beings a new secular culture. The combination of the two dreams meant that the decree of *Brit ben haBetarim*⁵ would soon begin. The children of Abraham would find themselves strangers in a strange land, no longer living lives in "holiness and purity."⁶ Soon, Jacob and his family would have to confront a new society with "great and powerful technology creating wonders and changing the foundations of our life."⁷

Joseph feared that, "[i]f we will not be prepared for new conditions, the environment will swallow us! Our intellectual forces will completely assimilate" and only by preparing for the future that we be able to survive.⁸

Joseph advocated that it was necessary for Jacob's sons to put aside their shepherd's staff and embrace new

occupations. He insisted that they transition into farmers and builders. He wanted the family to learn how to cut stone and work with wood and metals, and not only rely on the production of woolen products. In short, he tried to prepare his family to adapt to new conditions.⁹ Joseph wanted his brothers to become Jews "of destiny and purpose," Jews who choose their "halakhic covenantal identity" even if this behavior also requires "historical, even political, behavior."¹⁰

Joseph's brothers strongly disagreed. They relished the "holiness and purity"¹¹ of their life in Canaan. They valued the freedom to live in isolation from the other nations. They cherished the opportunity to learn Torah as they grazed their sheep.

*They looked upon the future as a continuation of the present. They perceived all problems from within the framework of their life in Canaan, the land of their fathers' wanderings ... They did not need new frameworks or novel economic methods.*¹²

The brothers wanted to maintain the status quo.

Like the Biblical Joseph, the Joseph of 5662 (= 1902), i.e., the visionaries who founded Mirzahi that year, "had a dark foreboding of something terrifying, an apocryphal vision of catastrophe, of cataclysm, of tempest and imminent destruction." The sheaves of wheat hinted that the Jewish people:

*... would be enveloped by a new economic order. The lion's share of Jewry would be centered in the Western world, and society would be based on science where ... every scientific discovery will be publicized by the newspapers as the greatest sensation.*¹³

The Joseph of 5662:

*... unconsciously sensed that it was forbidden to rely on a continuation of the status quo, that great changes were about to occur in Jewish life for which we would have to be prepared. He sensed the advent of an era when there would be no yeshivot in Brisk, Vilna, and Minsk; when America would be turned into a place of Torah; and when Israel, the State of Israel, would become the core center of Torah.*¹⁴

The Rav's peers and, more important, his family, were opponents of Zionism in any form, including the religious variant.¹⁵ During his early years in America, the Rav was affiliated with Agudah. At some point after the war, though, he had a change of heart and became associated with and ultimately the leading rabbinic figure of the American religious Zionist movement.

The name for the Religious Zionist Movement, or Mizrahi as it is called in Hebrew, was coined from "*merkaz ruchani*," or spiritual center, and refers to the movement that was founded in 1902 [5662] by Rabbi Yitzchak Yakov Reines and others. Rabbi Reines' nascent movement was itself a response to a platform introduced by the Fifth Zionist Congress that had taken place the previous year, a platform that adopted the concept of Cultural, or Spiritual, Zionism. Cultural Zionism, led by, among others, Leo Motzkin, Martin Buber, and Chaim Weizmann, looked to revitalize Jewish culture via the Hebrew language.¹⁶ Secular learning and secular concepts of Judaism would replace part of the Orthodox program so that the State of Israel would not turn into a theocracy.¹⁷

In contrast, Religious Zionism, building on the ideas of the *Mevasrei Zion*, the "harbingers of Zion," sought to:

Israel was acquired. Upon his arrival in the Land of Israel, Abraham built altars on four separate occasions as the Torah describes, and it was through this focus on sacrifice that he acquired a kinyan in the Land of Israel. The first altar that Abraham built was upon his entry into the Land, and on this altar he sacrificed his sense of belonging. Loneliness, “the loss of contact between man and the world in which he grew up, the world in which he was educated and in which he spent his childhood,” notes the Rav, “is one of the tragic experiences that can break a man.”³¹

In parallel, the sacrifice of loneliness was once again offered in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century by members of the early aliyah movements, and by anyone who left behind family, friends, and community, who through their sacrifice helped to acquire and possess the land of Israel. All the builders of the land built “sacrificial altars.” During the War of Independence, during the pogroms of Tel Chai and Jaffa and Hebron, “when Jewish blood flowed throughout the length and breadth of the land of Israel; when the Arab bullet and the Arab knife did not distinguish between the Hebron Yeshiva students and leftwing kibbutzniks ... the entire Jewish settlement erected that great altar whereby the ancient possessory act of Abraham in respect of the land of Israel and the Lord of Israel was repeated.”³²

The second altar that Abraham built was constructed between Bet El and Ai.³³ Rashi, referring to the midrash in *Bereishit Rabbah*, explains that Abraham was praying for the welfare of his future children when they would be conquering the city of Ai

under the leadership of Joshua.³⁴ When discussing this altar, the Rav refers to ordeals of the early Zionists in working the land of Israel, and equates their work with suffering on behalf of acquiring the Torah since:

*There is no contradiction between building up the land and building up of the Torah, between breaking up the earth about the olive trees and clearing rods, and building yeshivot ... The crown of Torah bestows upon us our uniqueness and our individuality.*³⁵

The third altar that Abraham built also relates to the idea of children and preparing for their future. After Abraham separated from Lot, God appeared to him and promised him that his children shall be greater in number than the dust of the land. God commanded Abraham to walk around all four corners of the land which his descendants will be given.³⁶

The fourth and final altar is the one built on Har HaMoriah, where Abraham was prepared to sacrifice his son Isaac. Abraham was commanded to take Isaac together with two lads,³⁷ whom Rashi identifies as Ishmael and Eliezer.³⁸ Why was it necessary for Abraham to take his son by Hagar [Ishmael] and his *aide de camp* [Eliezer]? And furthermore, why were the two young men only able to accompany Abraham to the foot of the mountain? The Rav sees this story as a paradigm for how we are to get along with non-religious Jews, especially those who toiled to make the land of Israel habitable. There must have been some reason why Abraham needed his two companions. Perhaps Abraham would not have survived the journey to the mountain of Moriah if had gone alone with only Isaac. We must cooperate and work with those we live with. But we only cooperate to

a point. Our identity is at stake if we cooperate to a point of watering down ideals and sacrificing the basic tenets of the Torah.

*We, the members of Mizrahi, put into practice the philosophy formulated by Abraham in his declaration to the lads. To build a State of Israel, we march together with all the parties, because we believe that the State of Israel is the road that leads to Mount Moriah, and it is clear to us that we cannot succeed in this journey alone.*³⁹

While the Holocaust and the establishment of the State of Israel convinced the Rav of “the correctness” of Mizrahi’s paths, the Rav notes the following caveat, extending the concept of sacrifice:

*I built an altar upon which I sacrificed sleepless nights, doubts and reservations ... The Mizrahi must understand that Jews like me ... who joined the movement and who draw their nourishment from the ancient Talmudic soil of Abaye and Rava, are in the category of Joseph. They are required to sacrifice on this altar their peace of mind as well as their social relationships and friendships. The Mirzahi must also understand that we do not use the phrase “Zionism plus religious” or “religious Zionism.” For us, there is only one unique noun — Torah. Israel is holy and dear because the Torah sanctified it and because the Torah’s future is tied to it.*⁴⁰

This switch was not an easy one for the Rav to contemplate. He faced opposition from his family and his peers. The switch was representative of his intellectual honesty and desire to provide a haven for the Jews.

But there is a limit to cooperation. In matters which relate to Mount Moriah, to matters that relate to halachic observance, we advance alone. There is to

*be no compromise regarding ... the final goal of our twice millennial journey back to the land of Israel and the ultimate transcendental-eschatological purpose and destination.*⁴¹

What, then, is the Rav's view on Zionism? The essay "And Joseph Dreamt a Dream," penned 60 years after the formation of the Mizrahi Movement, makes clear that the Rav saw Zionism as an extension of his general belief toward "man as an initiator, as active agent, as one who makes historical processes happen and promotes the achievement of social and historical objectives."⁴² How does this belief translate into action, especially in light of his reluctance to recite Hallel on Yom Ha'Atzmaut and his opinion toward aliyah?

Many have commented that the Rav's reluctance to recite Hallel on Yom Ha'Atzmaut stemmed a variety of halakhic considerations. Rav Aharon Lichtenstein, the Rav's son-in-law, noted that one major consideration was the Rav's understanding of *bal tosif*, the prohibition of adding mitzvot to the Torah.⁴³ Another consideration is the concept of *meharef u-megadef*, violation of the Talmudic principle that "He who recites Hallel every day is a blasphemer," since he is seeing God's presence in the miraculous and not in the providential.⁴⁴ Rabbi Moshe Meiselman, the Rav's nephew, notes that if the Rav was present at a minyan where Hallel was being recited on YH, "he simply stood there, silently, with his tallit over his head, until Hallel was concluded."⁴⁵

What was his attitude toward aliyah? Rabbi Meiselman notes that he heard the Rav discuss that the "Ramban's version of the mitzva to settle the Land of Israel is not mainstream halakha and is not relevant in

practice."⁴⁶ He did attempt to make aliyah in 1935 when he made what was to be his only visit to Israel, "wishing to build his home and his future" in the Land of Israel.⁴⁷ He did not receive the position of Chief Rabbi of Tel Aviv and moved to Boston where he founded the Maimonides School in 1937. Yet it appears that he did consider another visit in the 1960's. In a poignant letter of response to Miriam Shiloh of Givat Washington,⁴⁸ he responds to her query about why he never made aliyah, especially since "now is a propitious time as well as a time of spiritual crisis" [she had just taught his essay "Kol Dodi Dofek" to her students]. His response, dated 17 Tammuz 1967, says the following:

Last year we decided, my wife z"l and I, to come to the Land and to spend six months there, to see the Land and the nation dwelling there. But many thoughts are in the heart of man, and what happened happened, and my sighs are many and my heart grieves! ... How could I now ascend to Jerusalem, when I am a man of a harsh and bitter spirit? G-d is not manifest when one is depressed, upset and pained. Madam need not justify her words. I, too, am a simple Jew. In the language of the Sages of Yavneh (Berachot 17), I would say: I am a teacher, and many work with the community in the field of Torah education, as teachers. My work is in the large city of New York, in an institution with many students, and their work is in Givat Washington or in another community in a small institution. Whether one does much or little, so long as one directs his heart toward Heaven. The work all of us do is dedicated to nurturing the values of Judaism, the ancestral tradition and the Torah of our masters, authors of the tradition and its sages.

It is over one hundred years since the formation of the Mizrahi, seventy years since the founding of the State of Israel, and 45 years since the Rav penned this article. Much has changed, and much remains the same. Not everyone who lives in Israel is a Zionist and not all Zionists believe that the focal point of the State of Israel should be Mount Moriah and the service of God. We tend to take for granted the existence of the State of Israel and perhaps are not fully aware of the significant contributions Israel has made in the worlds of science and culture. There are still sacrifices — far too many of them. But without the dream that Joseph dreamt, without his plans for a new future, where would we be today?

Endnotes

1 Many of the survivors did make it to mandatory Palestine, although the intransigence of the British who were enforcing the White Paper of 1939 frustrated the effort at every turn. There is a large and growing literature on the actions of President Truman and his administration following his receipt of the report prepared by Earl G. Harrison and his committee describing the desperate situation of the Jewish survivors. See, for instance, Angelika Konigseder and Juliane Wetzel, *Waiting for Hope: Jewish Displaced Persons in Post-World War II Germany* (Northwestern University Press 2001). A quick glance at some of the literature reveals that disappointingly, though not surprisingly, the actions of the administration in trying to get England to admit Jews in to Palestine is now mired in the same controversy as every other event relating to Jews settling the Land of Israel, in the battle between left, right and center over the legitimacy of the Zionist enterprise and the generosity (or duplicity) of the various nation-state actors depending on one's perspective. According to the *Holocaust Encyclopedia* of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, some 136,000 displaced Jews resettled in Eretz Israel, and over 80,000 in the U.S.

2 Rav Aharon Lichtenstein cites this very point, “the status of man as initiator, as active agent, as one who makes historical processes happen and promotes the achievement of social and historical objectives,” as the “alpha and omega of all forms of Zionism,” and as the key for understanding the Rav’s attitude toward Zionism. <http://www.gush.net/alei/14-02ral-zionism.htm>.

3 In a private communication, the Toras Horav Foundation confirmed that this talk was delivered in 1962. The derashot printed in the various editions over the years were delivered to the Mirzahi / HaPoel HaMizrachi membership between 1961 and 1966 (not 1962-1967 as the English volume indicated) but, except for the greetings sent in December, 1966, are not dated in the published volumes. The talks were given in Yiddish and four (plus the 1966 greetings) were published in Yiddish in 1967. A Hebrew translation of five derashot plus the greetings was issued in 1973 and an English translation of the Hebrew followed about ten years later. Page references in this article are to the Toras Horav reissue of the English version in 2002.

4 Gerald J. Blidstein [1989]. “On the Jewish People in the Writings of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik.” *Tradition* 24,3, p. 28.

5 Bereishit 15, 13.

6 “And Joseph Dreamt a Dream” in *The Rav Speaks: Five Addresses on Israel, History, and the Jewish People*. Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik 2002: Toras HoRav Foundation, p. 28.

7 Dream p. 28.

8 Dream p. 28.

9 Dream p. 27.

10 Blidstein, p. 28.

11 Dream p. 28.

12 Dream p. 29.

13 Dream p. 31.

14 Dream p. 3.

15 Rav Aaron Rakefet-Rothkoff, *The Rav: The World of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, Vol. II*, pp. 112-116, (concerning R. Chaim, the Rav’s grandfather and R. Velvel, his uncle); it is true that the Rav’s father taught in the 1920’s in a Mizrahi seminary in Warsaw before coming to New York. Rakefet Vol. I p. 25-26; Shulamit Meiselman, *The Soloveitchik Heritage: A Daughter’s Memoir* (KTAV, 1995), 203-205. Rav Moshe was severely criticized for doing

so and he was cut off from the mainstream Yeshiva world, according to his daughter. (p. 216). That lesson was not lost on the Rav and it was not at all obvious that he would embrace Mizrahi.

16 Jewish Virtual Library, <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/religious-zionism>, retrieved February 5, 2018.

17 Dream p. 35; the Rav observes that his grandfather loved Zion but wanted no part of Weizmann’s dream. On this point the Rav did not change his position when he became a Mizrahinik.

18 Jewish Virtual Library.

19 Walter Wurzbarger [1994], “Rav Joseph B. Soloveitchik as Posek of Post-Modern Orthodoxy,” *Tradition* 29, 1, p.7.

20 Wurzbarger, p. 10.

21 Wurzbarger, p. 12.

22 Blidstein, p. 29.

23 Blidstein, p. 34.

24 Wurzbarger, p. 11.

25 Dream p. 25.

26 Dream p. 25.

27 Dream p. 32.

28 Dream p. 32.

29 Dream p. 36.

30 Dream p. 36.

31 Dream p. 25.

32 Dream p. 22.

33 Bereishit 12, 8.

34 *Bereishit Rabbah* 39, 16.

35 Dream p. 42.

36 Bereishit 13, 14-18.

37 Bereishit 22, 3.

38 Rashi ad loc based on *Pirkay deRabbi Eliezer* 31.

39 Dream p. 46.

40 Dream p. 36.

41 p. 47.

42 Rav Aharon Lichtenstein, “Rav Soloveitchik’s Approach to Zionism,” *Alei Etzion* 14, 2 2006.

43 In the article listed above, Rav Lichtenstein

draws an analogy from JT *Megillah* 1:7 about reciting Hallel on Purim.

44 Rabbi Moshe Meiselman, Communications, *Tradition* 33,2, 1999. In the original article, which appeared in 1998 in *Tradition* 33, 1, Rabbi Meiselman notes that the Rav explained that there are two ways in which “man sees God in nature. Some see God only in the miraculous. However, our obligation is to see God in the everyday process of nature. It is in this context that we recite the daily section of Psalms recited every morning, *pesukei de-zimra*, wherein we say *hak natan ve-lo ya’avor*, ‘He has given laws (to nature) that cannot be violated.’ Hallel, however, is for the miraculous. The Rav showed that Rashi says that only a prophet can distinguish between the providential and the miraculous. Hence, we may only say Hallel for a miracle identified by a prophet as such. Everything else remains providential. Someone who says Hallel every day sees God only in the miraculous and not in the providential. Similarly, the Rav maintained, someone who recites Hallel on non-miraculous events does so because he has skewed the importance of the providential aspect of God. He, too, is a blasphemer.”

45 It is worth noting that when Rabbi Meiselman consulted the Rav about what to do about reciting Hallel on Yom Ha’Atzmaut when Rabbi Meiselman was the Rosh Yeshiva at YULA, the Rav advised him not “to undermine his communal work.” As a result, writes Rabbi Meiselman, they would recite Hallel after the Kaddish Titkabel and not immediately after Shemoneh Esreh as would be customary on Yom Tov. This was a practice also recorded by Rabbi Walter Wurzbarger in his article “Rav Joseph B. Soloveitchik as Posek of Post-Modern Orthodoxy,” *Tradition* 29, 1, 1994.

46 *Tradition*, 33:2, 1999

47 *Alei Etzion*, 14, 2. During this visit, at a time when he was still affiliated with the Agudah Movement, he applied to be the Chief Rabbi of Tel Aviv, but did not receive the position.

48 Rav Hershel Schachter, *MiPninei HaRav*, 2001, Bet Midrash of Flatbush, p. 254 with English translation by Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner on his blog “The Rebbitzin’s Husband.”

Seven Decades of Torah Life in the State of Israel

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STATE OF ISRAEL IS BORN

The first independent Jewish State in 19 centuries was born in Tel Aviv as the British Mandate over Palestine came to an end at midnight on Friday, and it was immediately subjected to the test of fire. As "Medinat Yisrael" (State of Israel) was proclaimed, the battle for Jerusalem raged, with most of the city falling to the Jews. At the

same time, President Truman announced that the United States would accord recognition to the new State. A few hours later, Palestine was invaded by Moslem armies from the south, east and north, and Tel Aviv was raided from the air. On Friday the United Nations Special Assembly adjourned after adopting a resolution to appoint a mediator but without taking any action on the Partition Resolution of November 29.

Yesterday the battle for the Jerusalem-Tel Aviv road was still under way, and two Arab villages were taken. In the north, Acre town was captured, and the Jewish Army consolidated its positions in Western Galilee.

Most Crowded Hours in Palestine's History

Between Thursday night and this morning Palestine went through what by all standards must be among the most crowded hours in its history.

For the Jewish population there was the anguish over the fate of the few hundred Hagannah men and women in the Kfar Etzion bloc of settlements near Be'erona. Their surrender to a fully equipped superior foreign force desperately in need of a victory was a foregone conclusion. What could not be known, with no communications since Thursday morning, was whether and to what extent the Red Cross and the Truce Comitee would secure civilized conditions for prisoners and wounded, and proper respect for the dead. Doubts on some of these anxious questions have now been resolved.

On Friday afternoon, from Tel Aviv, came the expected announcement of the Jewish State, and its official naming as "Medinat Yisrael"—State of Israel, with the seating in of the first Council of Government. The proclamation of the State was made at midnight, coinciding with the sitting from Haifa of Britain's last High Commissioner. Within the hour, President Truman announced in Washington that the Government of the United States had decided to give de facto recognition to the Jewish State, with

Jews Take Over Security Zones

The battle for Jerusalem, which began when the British forces withdrew on Friday morning, continued all day Friday and yesterday. The crackle of small-arms fire and explosions of mortar shells were still being heard in the early hours of this morning as the battle entered its third day.

Reported efforts on Friday evening and again on Saturday by the U.N. Truce Commission to bring about a "cease fire" were brought to naught when the Arab representatives failed to agree within the specified time limit.

On Friday morning, Jewish forces entered the Russian Compound and Zone C to reoccupy the buildings requisitioned from Jews last year. This operation was almost bloodless, but beyond the western edge of Zone C Arabs engaged the Jews in Jaffa Road. The Arabs were forced back and the Barclays Bank area was taken.

In other parts of the city, fighting flared up. Some civilian cars after another the areas evacuated by the British. By last night, the quarters and

Egyptian Air Force Spitfires Bomb Tel Aviv; One Shot Down

Kfar Etzion, the Tel Aviv broadcasting station, reported at 2 o'clock yesterday afternoon that Tel Aviv had been bombed three times in the previous evening and morning, and that one plane had been shot down and its Egyptian pilot taken prisoner.

In the first raid, four planes attacked from a height of 300 feet. Two dropped bombs, while the others strafed the city. Little damage was caused. In the second attack two hours later, the airport to the north of the city was bombed, and an Air France plane parked there was damaged. The third raid was launched shortly before midnight, but the planes were driven off without causing any damage.

Two settlements in the Negev had also been attacked from the air, the radio reported.

U.S. Recognizes Jewish State

WASHINGTON, Sunday.—Ten minutes after the termination of the British Mandate on Friday, the White House released a formal statement by President Truman that the U.S. Government intended to recognize the Provisional Jewish Government as the de facto authority representing the Jewish State.

The U.S. is also considering lifting the arms embargo but it is not known whether to Palestine only or the entire Middle East, and the establishment of diplomatic relations with the Jewish Provisional Government.

The White House press secretary, Mr. Charles Ross, told correspondents today that reaction so far to the recognition had been overwhelmingly favorable. He said this step had been discussed with Mr. Marshall and Mr. Lovett before action was taken, and it had their complete support.

Mr. Ross said that the President had decided several days ago to grant American recogni-

Proclamation by Head of Government

The creation of "Medinat Yisrael", the State of Israel, was proclaimed at midnight on Friday by Mr. David Ben Gurion, until then Chairman of the Jewish Agency Executive and now head of the State's Provisional Council of Government.

The first act of the Council of Government, as announced by its head, was to abolish all legislation of the 1949 White Paper of the late Mandatory Power, particularly the Ordinances and Orders relating to immigration and land ownership.

In the declaration of independence, Mr. Ben Gurion called on the Arabs of Palestine to restore peace, assuring them full civic rights and full representation in all governmental organs of the State.

Mr. Ben Gurion prefaced the declaration with a review of the historic connection of the Jewish people with the Land of Israel and of their efforts to return, which never ceased throughout the generations of their dispersal. He said the Jewish people proved once the urgency of the need for a Jewish State.

The Balfour Declaration of 1917, confirmed by the League of Nations, had given explicit international recognition to the state of the Jews.

2 Columns Cross Southern Border

By WALTER COLLINS, U.P. Correspondent

CAIRO, Saturday.—A column of fighting in the Kfar Etzion bloc continued throughout Friday, after Kfar Etzion

Etzion Settlers Taken P.O.W.

Fighting in the Kfar Etzion bloc continued throughout Friday, after Kfar Etzion

Special Assembly Adjourns

FLUSHING MEADOWS, Saturday.—The Special U.N. Assembly, called four weeks ago to discuss the U.S. PROPO-



David Ben Gurion, Prime Minister

INTRODUCTION

By the standards of world history, seventy years is a blink of an eye. Yet for the Jewish people, seventy years of Israel's existence is an incredible feat. The State of Israel represents the culmination and realization of the hopes and dreams of thousands of

years, of the desires and yearnings of a people in exile. To Jews, such a relatively short time is infinite in significance.

Israel's seventieth year represents much more than just the year after sixty-nine. Seventy years is worthy of respect. After all, the Mishna in Avot

(5:21) states that it is the seventy-year-old who is the "seiva," the "hoary head," the old, wise, mature person, and the Torah commands us to rise before the seiva in great respect (Leviticus 19:32). The seiva deserves respect for spending a life growing, striving, learning, and teaching.

Indeed, in seventy years, Israel has grown and fought, learned and taught. Though it spends so much of its time simply defending its right to exist, it has accomplished more in its seventy years than many other nations have in their long lifetimes. To these seventy years, we stand in deference and respect.

The RIETS students at the Gruss Kollel in Yerushalayim are proud to be able to express this respect with a unique project, spearheaded by fellow Gruss student Aron White, with the assistance Sam Dratch and Jacob Bernstein. In the following pages, seven semikha students of Gruss will discuss the seven decades of Israel's existence by focusing on a point, moment, or personality from each one of the decades. In doing so, they endeavor to paint but a small picture of the State of Israel, yet great in scope, in an effort to rise before the *seiva* that is Israel this year.

From Israel's beginnings in 1948, culminating in the modern State of Israel of 2018, these seven essays of seven decades read as one thematic whole, of an Israel that is rising, growing, expanding. Each essay expresses in some way the hope laid out in our prayer for the State of Israel that as it continues to rise, it will fulfill our messianic dreams, as "the beginning of the blossoming of our redemption."

In what way is that so? Not too long ago in *Daf Yomi*, an interesting passage appeared at the beginning of *Avoda Zara* 8b. There, the Talmud states:

מאה ושמונים שנה קודם שנחרב הבית פשטה מלכות הרשעה על ישראל פ' שנה עד לא חרב הבית גזרו טומאה על ארץ העמים ועל כלי זכויות מ' שנה עד לא חרב הבית גלתה סנהדרין וישבה לה בחנות.

One hundred and eighty years before the [Second] Temple was destroyed, the evil [Roman] Empire ruled over Israel. Eighty years before the Temple was destroyed, [the Sages] decreed impurity on the land of the nations and on glass vessels. Forty years before the Temple was destroyed, the Sanhedrin was exiled and sat in stores [at the Temple mount].

What is the meaning of these changes? Rav Kook writes beautifully in *Ein Ayah* (*Shabbat* 16) that each of these represented an important step to ready the Jewish people for exile.

One hundred and eighty years before the exile, when the Jewish people were still strong and united, God's wisdom introduced the concept of change of political power. Even while the Jewish people were still together, they would learn what it means to be ruled over by others. This would indeed inoculate them somewhat from the intense political vulnerability of the long exile, since they would have known of it even before leaving the land.

Eighty years before the exile, the Sages saw that the nation would need a protective ideology when they leave Israel. The declaration of impurity on foreign lands emphasized the specialness and worth of the Jewish people and the Land of Israel, even in exile. And the application of impurity to glass vessels, of newly-popular items in Jewish life, symbolized the need to apply the Torah to all new developments in the exile. The first maintains Jewish self-worth even as we are despised in the exile, and the second maintains the Torah's worth and applicability in a world that continually changes.

Finally, forty years before the destruction, the Sanhedrin was exiled. The law, when a people are united, represents the enforcement and

inculcation of that unity, through its moral and spiritual values, a law of love. But as the people became more and more divided, as sectarianism grew, the law was no longer seen as one of accord, but of discord. Slowly but surely, the Sanhedrin ceased to express the law as spiritually edifying — "*dinei nefashot*," and began to be viewed as solely hurtful — "*dinei kenasot*." The exile of the Sanhedrin represented the move of the law from an external force to an internal one, that the law itself is in exile with us, calling on the dispersed multitude to unite within our hearts and minds, even without a land.

In the same way that Rav Kook once wrote that to combat the cause of the destruction, namely, baseless hatred, we need to magnify our baseless love, we can say that to combat exile and truly live in our land, we need to reverse the process the Sages laid out for the needs of the exile. In the following pages, we will learn through our talented writers of the unique politics of Israel and the reestablishment of government in our land; we will learn how Israel has not only helped us realize our self-worth, but has given us pride in our nation and the land; we will learn how the Torah of Israel and its great teachers have tackled the new issues of our age. However, we still wait for the unity of the Jewish people, in the Land of Israel, with a Temple and a Sanhedrin in its rightful place. As Israel endures, we pray for that day when the political, spiritual, and communal unite for us in the future redemption.

Seven Decades of Torah Life in the State of Israel 1948–1957

Aron White

Fellow, YU Israel Kollel



14TH MAY 1948 – A TOUCH OF HOLINESS

The birth of the State of Israel was one of the most incredible moments in Jewish history. But because Israel is such a major part of our lives, and something we have grown up with, it is hard to comprehend that its birth almost didn't happen at all. Independence was not a foregone conclusion, but actually the result of a gripping story — culminating in a decision that came down to a single vote.¹

By May 1948, the UN had approved the Partition Plan, which promised a Jewish state in Palestine, and the worn-out British were preparing to leave Palestine on May 15th. There was international support for a Jewish state, and the British mandatory power were leaving, giving the Zionist leadership a golden opportunity — they had the chance to declare a Jewish State! But while the dream seemed within reach, it was by no means a simple decision. If they declared independence, it was clear

Israel would have to fight a war of survival on the day of its birth. Already since November, 700 Jews had been killed by local Arab attacks, and at this stage, the Jewish army did not even have a single plane — how on earth could they survive an Arab invasion on multiple fronts? U.S. Secretary of State George Marshall told Moshe Sharrett, the foreign minister in waiting, that declaring independence was tremendously risky, and that the Jews could not rely on U.S. support in the upcoming war. Independence beckoned, but with it, great danger.

On Wednesday May 12th 1948, the Moetzet Ha'am — the Jewish government in waiting — gathered to make the fateful decision. Headed by Ben Gurion, the Moetzet Ha'am consisted of thirteen men, though only ten could attend the vote.² History had its eye on them; the ripple effects of these men's decision would be felt around the world, and long into the future. The votes were cast: Four voted

against declaring independence, and six voted for.³ Two days later, on Friday May 14th, Ben Gurion read out the Declaration of Independence, sparking jubilation around the Jewish world. Israel would indeed be badly bruised by the War of Independence but it battled through, and the dream was born.

This story is a truly gripping drama, but it also contains within it a deeper level of Jewish significance. In halakha, there is the concept of a *davar shebikedusha*, a matter of sanctity, like parts of Jewish liturgy, such as *Barchu*, *Kedusha*, and *Kaddish*. A *davar shebikedusha* requires a quorum of ten men in order to be recited. Without this quorum — *minyan* — a *davar shebikedusha* is not recited. However, the *Shulchan Aruch*, *Orach Chaim* 69:1, and later commentaries⁴ qualify that ten men must be present, but only six of them are required to perform the service. For example, if some people in the room already prayed earlier, then as long as there are six

men praying, and an additional four men present, then that is sufficient.

Though the protagonists may not have known it, the decision to declare the state of Israel conformed to the exact rules of a *davar shebikedusha*. A minyan of ten Jewish men gathered, with six of them “performing the service”, voting for independence, fulfilling the minimum requirement of a *davar shebikedusha*. While of course not being a formal ritual or part of halakha, it is poignant that the decision to found the State of Israel conformed to the exact rules of a matter of sanctity.

What is it that makes the State of Israel not only significant, but holy? There is no one answer to this question. For some, the State of Israel is *inherently* holy — it is the living fulfilment of Biblical prophecies, the embodiment of the Divine promise that the Jews will return to the land and make it flower once again. For others, the State of Israel is a *vehicle* for holiness: government institutions rest on Shabbat, air traffic stops on Yom Kippur, and the Israeli government today is by far the largest supporter of Torah learning in the world.⁵ Rabbi Meir Soloveichik also notes a more subtle aspect⁶ — that the State of Israel is bound up with the *experience* of the holy and transcendent. The defining photo in Israel’s history is not of a Nobel Prize winner, a fighter jet, or skyscrapers in Tel Aviv, but of the three paratroopers at the Western Wall in 1967. It is a powerful image; at the end of a hard fought war, planned out in detail and trained for over years, the victorious soldiers look heavenward, humbled by the grand narrative of which they are just a small part — the transcendent is part of Israel’s national DNA. Thus in its essence, its function and its narrative, Israel is tinged with holiness.

Israel was declared in the late afternoon of Friday, May 14th. The Shabbos eve, Erev Shabbat, is a special time. Poignantly, the Mishna says that Erev Shabbat is the time when the more spiritual things in our world were created.⁷ As the sun set on that Friday afternoon, seventy years ago, our people experienced something truly amazing; a moment, whose beauty, and holiness, is wonderfully captured by Yehuda Avner:⁸

“As the sun went down, grimy, exhausted diggers assembled in the glow of a hurricane lamp hanging on the door of a stone ruin, hidden from enemy view, to recite the Sabbath eve prayers — Kabbalat Shabbat. It was a heavenly pause; Shabbat stillness seemed to reign over everything...”

“I have news. I have news.” To a man we scampered back into the flickering glow where Linder grabbed him (Mahler) by the arms and snapped, “Well — talk. What did you find out? ... Has Ben-Gurion declared independence, yes or no?”

(Mahler responded) “David Ben-Gurion declared independence this afternoon in Tel Aviv. The Jewish state comes into being at midnight.”

There was a dead silence. Midnight was minutes away. Even the air seemed to be holding its breath. “Oh, my God, what have we done?” cried one of the women diggers, fitfully rubbing her chin with the tips of her fingers. “What have we done? Oh, my God, what have we done?” and she burst into tears, whether in ecstasy or dismay I will never know. Then cheers, tears, embraces. Every breast filled with exultation as we pumped hands, cuddled, kissed, in an ovation that went on and on. Nobody wanted it to stop. “A leheim to the new state!”

“Wait!” shouted a hassid whom everybody knew as Nussen der hazzan — a cantor by calling, and a most

diligent volunteer digger from the ultra-Orthodox Mea Shearim Jerusalem quarter. “It’s Shabbos. Kiddush first.” Our crowd gathered around him in a hush as Nussen der hazzan clasped the mug and, in a sweet cantorial tone began to chant “Yom hashishi” — the blessing for the sanctification of the Sabbath day. As Nussen’s sacred verses floated off to a higher place of Sabbath bliss, some of us sobbed uncontrollably. Like a violin, his voice swelled, ululated, and trilled in the night, octave upon octave, his eyes closed, his cup stretched out and up. And as he concluded the final consecration — “Blessed art thou O Lord, who has hallowed the Sabbath” — he rose on tiptoe, his arm stiffened, and rocking back and forth like an ecstatic rabbi, voice trembling with excitement, he added the triumphantly exulted festival blessing to commemorate having reached this day — sheheheyanu, vekiyemanu vehegiyanu lezman hazeh.”

“Amen!”

Endnotes

1 The story of these days is told by Ze’ev Sharaf in his book, *Three Days*. Sharaf was the secretary of the transitional government that came to power when Israel was declared.

2 Two members, Yehuda Greenbaum and Rav Yehuda Leib Fischman, were trapped in besieged Yerushalayim, and Rav Yitzchak Meir Levin was in the United States.

3 David Ben Gurion, Moshe Shapira, Aharon Zisling, Moshe Sharret, Mordechai Bentov and Peretz Bernstein voted for, and Pinchas Rosenne, Eliezer Kaplan, David Remez and Bechor-Shalom Shitrit voted against.

4 Mishnah Berura 69:5.

5 See this author’s article “The State We Are In: The Missing Side of the State of Israel,” available at <https://www.torahmusings.com/2015/04/the-state-we-are-in-the-missing-side-of-the-state-of-israel/>

6 Lecture available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pBUqH0G7OjY>

7 Pirkei Avot 5:6, see Maharal, *Derech Chaim* there.

8 Yehuda Avner, *The Prime Ministers*, p. 63.

**Seven Decades of
Torah Life in the
State of Israel
1958–1967**

Chezkie Glatt
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DECIDED TO BE UNDIVIDED

YERUSHALAYIM'S UNIQUE HISTORY AS THE SHARED HEART OF OUR NATION

Summer was in the air — freedom was so close he could almost feel it. My father, just a young boy at the time, dashed up the stairs of his apartment building, a loose knapsack swinging this way and that on his back, excited as could be on that warm day in early June. But even he, with the spring in his step, was not expecting the sight that met his eyes as he walked through the apartment's door. There was his mother, sitting in her usual chair, with her generally stern features shining with a remarkable glow. The normally

hard cheek bones were pulled upward into a wide grin, somehow still maintaining her composure but nearly giving in to an unrestrained joy. She pulled her cigarette from her mouth and quietly, firmly proclaimed, “Yerushalayim, Aaron. Yerushalayim is ours.” The significance of that statement, just barely expressed, was not lost on the small boy.

My grandmother, Anna Glatt a”h, was a Holocaust survivor. She experienced the worst horrors imaginable during the war years, losing 90 relatives from

her hometown and the surrounding area — including both of her parents and all five of her siblings — at the hands of the Nazis. One sister survived Auschwitz alongside her, only to die on the day of liberation. My grandmother's first request of the triumphant soldiers was a shovel with which she could give her sister a proper burial. For the rest of her life, determined as she was to reconstruct her destroyed world, my grandmother carried with her the burden of millions of murdered innocents. She was not quick to smile, let alone smile

widely. My father testified during the shivah for his mother that her grin that day was the largest grin he remembered ever seeing on her face (at least until she was past the age of eighty and was on the floor playing with her great-grandchildren, her truest revenge against the Nazis).

What was it about the recapture of Yerushalayim that so inspired my grandmother, that could shake her out of a lifelong focus on loss and a need to rebuild? I believe it was nothing short of a millenia-long focus on a yearning more enormous than that loss; but this requires further elaboration.

The Gemara, *Yoma* 12a, tells of a dispute between two Tanaim over whether or not Yerushalayim was “*nischalka l’shvatom*,” whether it was divvied up along with the rest of Eretz Yisrael as part of the portion of any specific tribe. The opinion of the Chachamim (and therefore, through the rules of psak, the likely halakhic conclusion) is indeed that it was not. However, the meaning of this enigmatic phrase, that Yerushalayim was not divvied up among the shevatim, is itself open to debate. Various approaches are suggested by the Rishonim; for our purposes in this brief essay, we will specifically highlight two.

One interpretation is found in the Baalei Tosfos.¹ Despite other potential difficulties (nearly explicit verses in Tanach included), this approach maintains that the term is to be understood as it literally reads: unlike the rest of the land, Yerushalayim was never divvied up among the shevatim. It remained the jointly owned property of the entirety of the House of Israel, in the center of which the Beis HaMikdash was built.



The famous march down to the Kotel on Shavuot of 1967. In the middle, wearing a talit, is Rabbi Yeshaya Hadari, the former rosh yeshiva of Yeshivat Hakotel. Behind him to the right is Rabbi Dovid Miller, current rosh kollel of the RIETS Israel Kollel in Jerusalem. One can see Jews of all types and colors walking together, a truly historic episode.

However, working off the *Kesef Mishnah*, *Hilchos Beis HaBechira* 2:10, the opinion of the Rambam, *Hilchos Beis HaBechira* 6:14, appears quite different and perhaps more simply in line with the pesukim in Tanach.² The Rambam seemingly understood this term to mean that although Yerushalayim had, in fact, once been apportioned to the specific tribes of Yehuda and Binyamin respectively, it nonetheless was bestowed later by these very same shevatim into the joint ownership of all of Bnei Yisrael.

Thus, according to either approach, by the time the Beis Hamikdash was constructed, Yerushalayim was in the possession of all of Klal Yisrael, different than the rest of the land and its designated territories. However, while to Tosfos, this had *always* been its status, to the Rambam, it only

attained this unique state after an act of submission on the part of Yehuda and Binyamin.

To paraphrase the Rav in his work *Halakhic Mind*, “from the halakha itself the true philosophy of Judaism will emerge.” To illustrate this point, we can gain a deeper understanding of Yerushalayim’s unique status in our collective hearts by closely examining either of these halakhic approaches.

From the perspective of Tosfos, Yerushalayim was marked from the onset as the place that Hashem had chosen to rest His Presence. Unlike the rest of the conquered regions, Yerushalayim was left unapportioned, and remained in the public sphere more so than any other location. It was noticeably different; it was predestined for the use of all of Klal

Yisrael. Any Jew living during the time prior to the building of the Beis HaMikdash would have been able to appreciate that in some way, this city was singled out for an exceptional purpose.

On the flip side, according to the Rambam, such a presumption would have been far from obvious. While indeed, according to many midrashim and even the pesukim themselves (the Akeida took place on Har HaMoriah,³ for example), the idea of Yerushalayim as a focal point of service to the Ribbono Shel Olam had ancient roots — but it was not at all clear that this would be *the* designated spot for the Beis HaMikdash and the eternal center of our relationship with Hashem. Other places in Eretz Yisrael, such as Beit El (as in fact Yeravam took advantage of for his own purposes),⁴ could have rivaled Yerushalayim as worthy locations of Divine Presence, and might have had an opportunity to be chosen as “*hamakom asher yivchar Hashem Elokeichem bo lishakein shemo sham*”⁵ — the place which Hashem will choose to dwell. It was an act of devotion on the part of the two tribes vying for leadership at a time of turmoil, respectively representing two halves of a long-splintered nation (the eternal drama of the descendants of Rachel and Leah is, in my opinion, one of the great themes underlying the whole of Jewish history), which gave birth to Hashem’s decision to select this designated capital city as His eternal abode. Yehuda might have preferred the city of Chevron, while Binyamin and Yosef’s descendants may have opted for Beit El, but ultimately, both sides were willing to put aside personal ambitions and even personal ownership to settle on Yerushalayim, a city on the border.

This decision was orchestrated by Dovid HaMelech, whose own supreme insight and selflessness ensured that all of Klal Yisrael would feel they truly had a share in the holiest of holies.

These contrasting perspectives highlight, at least for me, what marks Yerushalayim as the most extraordinary site on Earth. On the one hand, it has always been at the core of our nation’s storied past; it has always been the place where our ancestors in every generation looked in prayer and in dream, a city rich in incredibly historic events and swelling with memories of noble deeds. On the other hand, that profound sense of destined greatness is, I believe, further deepened when knowledge of the fact that this *all could have looked very different* if not for the willingness of our people to put aside bickering and squabbling to unite as one proud nation serving its Creator with passion and reverence. This needn’t have necessarily been the particular destiny of the Jewish people, but it emerged as such and forever remains so.

Our Rosh Kollel in the YU Israel Kollel, Rav Dovid Miller, has on occasion relived the scene he experienced on that Shavuot in Yerushalayim in the year 1967. Bearded Vizhnitz chassidim strode beside bare-headed secularists, all of them heading toward the makom Hamikdash, which had so recently come back into their hands. Indeed, Rav Miller discovered years later that a non-Jewish filmmaker videoed this event and upon request, provided Rav Miller with a blurry picture of his younger self walking amid the assorted throngs of “pilgrims.” They all recognized that something far greater than any individual (or even

any individual sect) had taken place, and each person who walked the crowded path to the Kotel on that marvelous day understood that they were each inspired with the same sense of veneration and awe as they made their way to the pulsating heart of a nation steadily rising out of the ashes. To serve Hashem was their common goal, in humility and with reverence for what Yerushalayim, the “*ir shechubra lah yachdav*,” had always stood for.⁶ It was what my grandmother felt in Brooklyn in the sunny, smoke-dimmed light of her small apartment decades ago; it is what we strive to remember daily as we live out our existences in the YU Israel Kollel’s campus, trying to grow in erudition and develop our character. May it be Hashem’s will that all of Klal Yisrael stand as one, petty differences put aside, serving Him in unity in the fashion He most desires, in Yerushalayim HaBenuyah, speedily in our days.

Endnotes

- 1 Tosfos, *Bava Kamma* 82b (s.v. “*V’ein Mitame B’negaim*”).
- 2 See, for example, *Yehoshua* 18:28. For a more thorough analysis of the opinion of the Rambam, please see the following shiur on YUTorah.org given by my Rebbi, Rav Bednarsh: <http://www.yutorah.org/lectures/lecture.cfm/870312/rabbi-assaf-bednarsh/who-owns-yerushalayim/>
- 3 *Bereishis* 22:2.
- 4 *Melachim I* 12:29.
- 5 *Devarim* 12:11.
- 6 See *Talmud Yerushalmi Chagigah* 3:6.

**Seven Decades of
Torah Life in the
State of Israel
1968–1977**

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CHASING A TORAH REVOLUTION: KI MITZION TETZEI TORAH

With a sense of youthful passion, the State of Israel turned twenty years old in 1968, looking to make further strides in its development as a nation among nations. As with many twenty-year-olds, her drive to make a difference and confidence in a better tomorrow led to the planting of seeds, ones whose fruit we still reap today.

...כי מציון תצא תורה ודבר ה' מירושלים
(ישעיהו ב:ג)

... *For Torah emerges from Zion, and the word of God from Jerusalem.*

In his vision of the end of days, Yeshayahu describes a time when Torah will emerge from Jerusalem, spreading forth throughout the world. On the heels of '67, and the successful miracles of the Six Day War, the decade between 1968 and 1978 showcases some of the most significant and revolutionary personalities in the Torah world,

embodying the spirit of this prophecy. While by no means exhaustive, the following *olim* represent some of this decade's influence on Torah study; their impact reverberates today.

- Born in Riga, Latvia, **Dr. Nechama Leibowitz** immigrated to Israel after studying in Germany, and changed the face of **Tanach Education** as she taught her method of study in countless institutions and through the publication of her famous *Gilyonot*. Dr. Leibowitz became a full professor at Tel Aviv University in **1968**, and received the Israel Prize for Education 12 years earlier.

- Born in Paris, France, **Rav Dr. Aharon Lichtenstein** made aliyah after studying in the United States, and in **1971** began strengthening the Dati Leumi community and Hesder Movement through his position as **Rosh Yeshiva at Yeshivat Har Etzion**.

- Born in Baghdad, Iraq, **Rav Ovadia Yosef** immigrated to Jerusalem at the age of four, and "*hechezir atarah l'yoshnnah* — restored the past glory" to the Sephardic community, ultimately serving as the **Sephardic Chief Rabbi** of Tel Aviv from 1968–1973 and **Sephardic Chief Rabbi** of Israel from **1973–1983**.

- Born in Dublin, Ireland, **Rabbi Dr. Yehuda Cooperman** made aliyah after studying in Chicago, and revolutionized advanced women's learning by opening **Michlalah** in 1964. Michlalah received accreditation to grant degrees to students from the Council of Higher Education of the State of Israel in **1978**.

From Sephardim to Ashkenazim, Tanach to Gemara, Haredi to Dati Leumi, and from the "*arba kanfot ha'aretz* — four corners of the world," these four remarkable individuals

ascended to Israel and helped bring about the Torah revolution that occurred from 1968–1978. Upon the footsteps of miracles, two of Isaiah’s prophecies were realized, as the “ingathering of the dispersed” (Isaiah 11:12) made their mark on the “Torah emanating from Zion” (Isaiah 2:3).

There is an additional Torah phenomenon that originated in this decade, one that has turned into something of an educational movement and mainstay in the Anglo-speaking Jewish community: *Shana Ba’Aretz*. What many in the Yeshiva University community now take for granted — that students spend a “gap year” (or more) learning in Israel — was not commonplace before this Torah revolution.

“We created a new world,” said Rabbi Dr. Aaron Rakeffet-Rothkoff,¹ as he recalled the creation of BMT, Beit Midrash L’Torah, in 1969. Together with Rabbi Moshe “Whitey” Horowitz, and with inspiration from Moshe Kobrin, the first Anglo-targeted *Shana Ba’Aretz* program for young men was created, with a mission of “exporting Torah to the Anglo world.” The word of Hashem now had a new route by which to emerge from Jerusalem, influencing Anglo communities around the world as students returned home from studying there.

This contemporary idea to send teenagers to Jerusalem to study Torah has a historical basis, albeit not one of success. The Gemara (*Bava Batra* 21a) describes a time when Chazal instituted an educational system in Jerusalem to solve a crisis facing a vast number of children who did not have parents who could teach them Torah. The location was chosen, explain Tosafot,² so that the students would witness the Kohanim and their service in

Jerusalem, which would inspire them to learn better. The Gemara itself invokes the verse “*ki miTzion teitzei Torah*” to support the idea that the new national educational platform should begin in Zion. Since Jerusalem was too far away to attract children without their parents accompanying them, Chazal instituted additional “schools,” which only attracted older students because they were already far from home.³ Ultimately, Yehoshua ben Gamla, the Kohen Gadol, is credited with creating the first ever localized Jewish educational system, which saved Torah from being lost from that generation.

In the late 60’s and early 70’s a new iteration of this story occurred and is still unfolding before our eyes, as great individuals have established a successful educational system that is far away from home, for children in their later teenage years, and in or around Jerusalem. Years ago, these very criteria made creating a schooling system almost impossible, and yet today they are commonplace components to many of the successful *Shana Ba’Aretz* programs. These programs originated for young women with Machon Gold, in 1958, and for young men with BMT, in 1969, and in the decade after the Six Day War, the *Shana Ba’Aretz* Revolution began. Thousands of Anglo young men and women have come to Israel, attending one of countless *Shana Ba’Aretz* programs to learn and grow, and have benefited from “*avirah d’Eretz Yisrael*.”

In the 21st Mishna of *Pirkei Avot*, Shmuel HaKatan highlighted significant milestones throughout a lifetime, ones that can be apropos to the anniversary of Israel’s existence as well.

בן עשרים לרדוף בן שלשים לכח.

A twenty-year-old chases and a thirty-year-old has attained strength.

It is not surprising to note how many “30-under-30” lists exist to feature those in this age range who *chase* after a better world with passion and a healthy sense of optimism that change is achievable. Perhaps Shmuel HaKatan’s quote can be developed a bit deeper, beyond recognizing common phenomena in the emerging adult population.

Rabbi Shimon ben Tzemach Duran (Rashbetz), a 15th-century Spanish halachic authority, expounds on Shmuel HaKatan’s comments in his *Magen Avot*, a commentary on *Pirkei Avot*, ad loc..

The Rashbetz explains that a child who began his learning at the age of five will have completed the content of Mikrah, Mishna, and Talmud (each over the course of five years) by the age of twenty. It is now the responsibility of this twenty-year-old to *chase* after **these achievements**, to fortify them internally. After all, what better way to prepare oneself in advance of “the strength of a thirty-year-old?”

The Torah revolution that occurred between 1968 and 1978 was the result of decisions that Jews from four corners of the earth made: to fortify the young, passionate state with an identity of Torah. They chased after the achievements of those who came before them to strengthen Eretz Yisrael, and in doing so they changed the world of Torah as well.

Endnotes

1 Thank you to Rabbi Dr. Aaron Rakeffet-Rothkoff for allowing me to interview him about his personal reflections about this time period.

2 Tosafot, *Bava Basra* 21a, d”h “*Ki Mitzion*.”

3 See *Chiddushei Ritva*, *Bava Basra* 21a, d”h “*v’Adayen Machnisin*.”

Seven Decades of Torah Life in the State of Israel 1978–1987

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“PRISONERS OF ZION” AND THE RESPONSIBILITY OF FREEDOM

Just as the origins of modern Zionism can be traced back to the trial of Colonel Alfred Dreyfus, a trial also marks the turn of the fourth decade for the modern state of Israel. In 1978, Anatoly Borisovich Shcharansky’s sentencing to thirteen years of forced labor by the Soviet Government inspired protests around the globe, culminating in the march on Washington D.C. on December 6, 1987, when a quarter of a million people protested in solidarity with Soviet Jewry. With these two events as bookends, I wish to unpack a lesson from this period, fundamental to our celebration of Yom Ha’Atzmaut.

When I asked my mother for her recollections of that time, she was excited to share that she had Anatoly’s name on her bracelet before he changed

it to Natan Sharansky. From your local Bnei Akiva chapter, you could buy a plain silver C-shaped band that bore a name of a “Prisoner of Zion,” which she wore for years. It was that personal connection to the issue that inspired her to join the protests of the Student Struggle for Soviet Jewry (SSSJ), along with her family and friends. “It was what everyone was doing, it was a bit of a social scene,” she conceded.

The bracelet was the brainchild of the SSSJ’s founder, Jacob Birnbaum. He planned to personalize the campaign, and he transformed the movement from “an abstract struggle for ‘Soviet Jewry’ into a concrete struggle for Soviet Jews, with names and stories,” author and journalist Yossi Klein Halevi reported.¹ “Over the years, the personal campaign became

an essential feature of the entire movement, drawing new recruits and energizing veteran activists.”

Natan Sharansky, however, is certainly the most famous refusenik. Perhaps it is due to his high-profile career in the public sector, or for his mesmerizing claim that he kept sane in extended solitary confinement in Soviet prison by playing mental chess games against himself. Yet I think he is famous because of Avital.

Avital married Natan Sharansky the day before she used her expiring visa to flee the USSR in 1974. Avital began her activism as a newlywed, and made her first trip to America to plead on her husband’s behalf in 1975; but it was only after his trial in 1978 that Natan’s plight received widespread attention. Avital began meeting with

dignitaries and diplomats, and found her way into the homes and hearts of Jews the world round.

Thirty years after Sharansky's walk to freedom across the Glienicke Bridge,² their daughter, Rachel Sharansky Denziger, explained how indebted she feels for the strength the protest gave to her parents, while in turn it was her parents who gave strength to the protests. Klein Halevi explained that it was "Birnbbaum's vision of a symbiotic relationship ... American Jews were inspired by the courage of Soviet refuseniks, who in turn were fortified by American Jewish support."

Why is this story about Diaspora Jews relevant to Israeli history?

When God signed a pact with Avraham at the *Brit Bein HaBetarim*, when the Land of Israel was promised to a not-yet existing nation, God explained that a prerequisite to national autonomy was to first be strangers in a land that is not theirs (Gen. 15:13). To a person who does not yet have children, it is an odd selling point to promise that the progeny must first be slaves before they can become masters of their own land.

R' Elazar HaGadol is puzzled as to why the Torah warns us about proper treatment of the "strangers' among us," and the Gemara (*Baba Metziah* 59b) is unsure if the message is repeated 36 times or 46 times. Tosafot add that the inclusion of the ten additional iterations under dispute are the verses that tell us the reason behind the sensitivity, and are not a warning in-and-of themselves. Meaning, on top of the uniquely repetitive statements warning us to treat strangers with love and kindness, there is another set of repetitive verses that reiterate the spirit behind the law. These are verses where Hashem tells us to treat the Other kindly, "for you were strangers in the

land of Egypt" (Shemos 22:20). The connection between our time in Egypt and our treatment of others is repeated in Shemot (23:9), Vayikra (19:10), and in Devarim (10:19; 23:8; 24:18).

We are told that "When strangers become your neighbors, do not wrong them. They are your community ... and love each one as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt." This verse is juxtaposed with themes in the next verse that we should do righteousness because, again, God took us out of Egypt (Vayikra 19:33-36).

Within the basic vision of God's giving the Land of Israel is a prerequisite national training in empathy. To feel for those who have wandered as we have wandered, who have been enslaved as we have been enslaved, who have been persecuted as we have been persecuted. We will recognize their pain as it resonates with our national consciousness. We will hate injustice, because we have been victims of injustice and so we will be a beacon of righteousness from our own soil. It is a fundamental component of our *brit* with God from the *Brit Bein HaBetarim*.

It is injustice that inspires us, and our pursuit of justice that helps us earn our return, as Yeshayahu exclaimed, "Zion is redeemed with justice, and we will return to it through righteousness" (1:27).

That is why it is no coincidence that these movements have been inspired by trials, corrupted manifestations of justice. And it was from the beginning, at the first SSSJ rally on May Day 1964, that Birnbbaum insisted on having posters declaring "Let My People Go!" Egypt, the very first diaspora destination, still informing how we advocate for "strangers" who are our community, who are the names on our bracelets, the visitor in our living room,

and the prisoner on our mind even if they are in a cell across the world. They are strangers, but we know them, for their story is our story.

This message is integrally woven into the fabric of Israeli society. It is no surprise that Israeli support was first on the ground after an earthquake in Haiti in 2010, that we sent relief to New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, and 140 tons of supplies to Indonesia and Sri Lanka after the tsunami in 2004. Going the extra mile, as part of their relief teams, Israel dispatches a troupe of medical clowns to fill the makeshift medical tents with warmth when it is most needed.

As we celebrate the founding of the State of Israel and commemorate Yom Hazikaron, it behooves us to dwell on what made it possible: the sacrifice and hardship, as well as wounds that are fresh and still healing. Central to our national narrative is our capacity to learn compassion and empathy from these experiences, forming a deeper understanding of the human condition.

The Mishna in *Avot* says that "*Ben Arba'im L'Binah*," forty is the age of wisdom. R' Ovadiah ben Abraham of Bartenura, as a prooftext, quotes Devarim (29:4), that it was not until after forty years in the desert that God gave the Jewish people a "*heart for understanding, eyes to see, and ears to hear*." Israel's fourth decade teaches us to open our ears to listen, our eyes to see, and our hearts to feel the plight of others.

Endnotes

1 Klein Halevi, Yossi. "Jacob Birnbbaum and the Struggle for Soviet Jewry" *Azure* (17) Spring 5764/2004.

2 Sharansky Danziger, Rachel "30 Years After Glienicke Bridge" *Times of Israel* Feb. 11, 2016 <http://blogs.timesofisrael.com/30-years-after-glienicke-bridge/>.

Seven Decades of Torah Life in the State of Israel 1988–1997

Ben Keil

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OPERATION SOLOMON

In the decades since the founding of the State of Israel, the Jewish community has witnessed many of the prophecies of redemption recorded in the *Nevi'im Achronim*. One such notable occasion was in late May of 1991, when, in a clandestine military action called Operation Solomon, the Israeli Defense Forces evacuated over 14,000 Ethiopian Jews from Addis Ababa to Israel in the course of two days. While operations Moses and Joshua in the 1980s had already initiated the mass influx of Ethiopian Jews to Israel, the impressive nature of the 1991 operation captured the attention of the global Jewish community. At the conclusion of the operation, when the Israeli government revealed the details of the endeavor, the world stood in awe; after forty flights in thirty-five planes, almost the entire Jewish

community of Ethiopia had been relocated to Israel. The record they set for passengers in an airplane — 1,088 in an El Al 747 with its seats removed, according to Guinness — remains the world record, and includes two babies born in flight.

Many excited witnesses were confident that they were seeing the actualization of the words of Yeshayahu, 11:11:

והיה ביום ההוא יוסיף ה' שנית ידו לקנות
את שאר עמו אשר ישאר מאשור וממצרים
ומפטרס ומכוש ומעילם ומשנער ומחמת
ומאיי הים.

And it will be on that day, Hashem will again increase His hand, to acquire the remnant of His nation which is left, from Assyria, and from Egypt, and from Pasros, and from Kush, and from Elam, and from Shinar, and from Chamas, and from the islands.

Usually in Tanach, the land of Kush seems best identified as a part of Africa; in particular, the area South of Egypt, and the historical location of the ancient Kingdom of Kush (circa. 800 BCE-350 CE). Understanding the verse this way, it would seem that, in the evacuation of the Ethiopians, this element of Yeshayahu's prophecy was coming true.

However, when it comes to this particular reference, the *Targum Yehonasan* seems dissatisfied with this typical approach. While through most of Tanach the Targum doesn't actually translate Kush and just transliterates it, a number of times he instead translates it as Hodu or India. (See Isaiah 18:1 and Tzephania 3:10.) That there would be confusion about the term is not surprising, since there were two different kingdoms, on opposite sides of the Ancient world,

with very similar names. Toward the twilight of the African Kingdom of Kush, the Asian Kushan Empire sprung up for a few centuries in what is now northern India and Pakistan, including the mountain range still known as the Hindu Kush, on the Pakistan-Afghan border. The Empire organized at about the year zero, and had influence in Asia for almost 400 years. The origin of its name is unclear, and while the Empire clearly did not exist during the time of the *Nevi'im*, historians are unsure regarding how long the term Kush had been used to describe the geographic area.

In two of the places in which the *Targum Yehonasan* translates Kush as Hodu (Yeshaya 18:1 and Tzephania 3:10), the prophet refers to “Naharei Kush,” the rivers of Kush. Considering that Nubia is mostly desert, and like Egypt, dependent on the Nile as the primary water source, it is possible that the mention of rivers is what pushed

the Targum to deviate from his usual identification of Kush as African.

The dispute regarding the location of Kush is even recorded in the Gemara (*Megillah* 11a). Regarding the first pasuk of Esther, which notes that Achashverosh ruled “From Hodu to Kush,” Rav and Shmuel disagree. One says that Kush was near Hodu, apparently identifying it with the geographic area of the Hindu Kush, adjacent to the Indian subcontinent, and near Persia, the seat of Achashverosh’s power. The other says that Kush was far from Hodu, indicating the African location that we usually presume.

What remains a mystery is why in Yeshaya 11:11, the *Targum* identified the area with India instead of Africa, especially considering that, in the list in the pasuk, it follows Egypt and Pasros, Upper Egypt, squarely between Lower Egypt and the Kingdom of Kush. Perhaps he was

swayed by the latter half of the verse, which lists Elam, Shinar, and Chamas, locations in Mesopotamia and Central Asia, to identify Kush with those locations instead.

When we look at history, however miraculous, it is comfortable for us to fit modern events into the prophecies we have preserved for millennia, but often, in our haste to connect our present with our past, we can overlook details of our tradition. But the reality that the IDF managed to relocate the Ethiopian Jewish community to Israel over a weekend doesn’t need to have been prophesied to be miraculous. If the decades since the State was founded have taught us anything, it is that prophecy is not the only way Hashem speaks to us in the modern world. Sometimes we hear the voice of God out of the pages of the prophets, and at other times, in the newspaper headlines, as we continue to carve out our destiny in Eretz Yisrael.

The Marcos and Adina Katz

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State of Israel
1998–2007**

Eli Muschel

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TURNING OUR EYES TOWARD OUR FATHER IN HEAVEN¹

During the Second Intifada, Rabbi Moshe Faskowitz, the Rabbi Emeritus of the Torah Center of Hillcrest in Queens, NY, traveled to Israel. During his visit, while making conversation with his non-religious cab driver, Rabbi Faskowitz asked the driver where he was from. The driver responded that he was from the Gilo neighborhood of Jerusalem, an area which Rabbi Faskowitz knew was under consistent gunfire. While discussing how difficult it must be for the driver's family and the other residents of the area, Rabbi Faskowitz remarked how he wished Mashiach would come already to put an end to the violence and suffering. The cab driver, somewhat taken aback, responded, "What do you mean Mashiach should come?! Mashiach

bah! Mi tofais et kol hakadurim? — Mashiach is already here! Who else is catching all the bullets?"²

The cab driver's remarks seem to us as cute, an encouraging perspective of hope during a turbulent and tense time. However, there is tremendous depth to what he said. In fact, the cab driver's words allude to one of the deep secrets of *geulah*, redemption.

In the third *drush* of *Drashos HaRan*, the Ran deals with a famous question. Moshe Rabbeinu had every quality necessary for being the greatest leader and greatest prophet of all time. As the Gemara in *Nedarim* says:

אין הקב"ה משרה שכינתו אלא על גבור
ועשיר חכם ועניו, וכולם ממשה,
*The Holy One, Blessed be He, rests His
Divine Presence only upon one who*

is mighty, and wealthy, and wise, and humble. And all of these qualities are derived from Moses.

Nedarim 38a

But there is one most basic quality necessary for being a great leader and great prophet³ that Moshe did not have — he was a *kevad peh*, he had a speech impediment. How could it be, asks the Ran, and why would it be, that Hashem gave Moshe all the prerequisites for being the prophet to redeem klal Yisrael and lead them out of Egypt — except for this most basic and natural gift of speech?

The Ran explains that Matan Torah was the greatest event in the history of Klal Yisrael, the moment that eternally bonded us with HaKadosh Baruch Hu and made us into His chosen nation. Because of the unique significance

of this auspicious moment, Hashem wanted the process of the giving of the Torah, which started with the redemption from Egypt, to be done in a most supernatural way, one that would prove, without the possibility of questioning or doubt, that *Moshe emes v'Toraso emes*, Moshe and his Torah are true. We all know that someone who is a great orator can stand in front of a crowd and say things that are absolutely false, but because of his great persuasiveness, the audience will believe and accept everything he says. And the opposite is true as well. Someone with a speech impediment can express things that are obviously true, but because he can't articulate it well, people simply won't believe him. Hashem knew that if Moshe was a great speaker, later generations would say the Jews only accepted the Torah because of Moshe's power of oration. Had Moshe been a gifted orator, Kabalas HaTorah, the culmination of the redemption from Egypt, might have been discredited as a natural event, a performance staged by a human being with truth-distorting powers of persuasion. To dispel this illusion of a human-engineered Matan Torah, Moshe was given a speech impediment. His inability to convince Bnei Yisrael of the veracity of the Torah through his own faculty of speech served to emphasize that though he led Klal Yisrael from Egypt to Har Sinai, ultimately the redemption was brought about through Divine intervention alone, not through human effort or initiative.

The Navi Michah says:

כִּי־מִי צִאֲתָהּ מִצְרַיִם אֲרָאֶנּוּ נִפְלְאוֹת.
I will show him wondrous deeds as in the days when You left the land of Egypt.

Michah 7:15

Chazal derive from this verse⁴ that

the ultimate redemption will in many ways parallel *geulas Mitzrayim* — the redemption from Egypt. Perhaps we can extend the parallel to include the Ran's fundamental teaching as well.

In difficult times, we tend to adopt a “take-charge” perspective; we think of what we can do, what is in our hands to change the situation. The Ran is teaching us that although Hashem wants us to put in human initiative — and especially in difficult times, he wants us to strengthen our efforts in Torah, *avodah*, and *gemillus chasadim* — we must ultimately remember that the *geulah* is completely in Hashem's “hands” and not in ours. As important as our efforts are in shaping the destiny of klal Yisrael, those efforts always require Divine assistance. We can and must do the job that is upon us while realizing that ultimately it is not our own efforts that will bring Mashiach, but rather *yeshuas Hashem* — the salvation of Hashem. Just as it was Hashem's intervention alone that brought about *geulas Mitzrayim* — a message that Moshe's speech impediment underscored — so too, all future *geulos* will be the result of Divine intervention, not human initiative.

There's a phrase often quoted by Jews in times of *tzaros* — *yeshuas Hashem k'heref ayin*⁵ — typically translated as Hashem's salvation comes in the blink of an eye. We use this as a source of encouragement when a situation looks bleak. We remind ourselves that no matter how bad things look right now, our fortune can turn around in an instant. But Rav Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev, the *Kedushas Levi*, had a different way of understanding this phrase. He points out that the word *heref* in Tanach often has a connotation of desisting or turning away, as in “*heref mimeni v'ashmidem*

— release me and I will destroy them.”⁶ The Berditchever explained that *yeshuas Hashem*, Hashem's salvation, comes *k'heref ayin*, only when we turn our eyes away from ourselves, namely when we abandon the perspective that the *yeshua* will come from our own efforts. Only at that point, when we realize that nothing else can save us, that there are no more ideas to try, no more people to ask, nowhere else to turn but to HaKadosh Baruch Hu, only then does *geulah* really begin — *yeshuas Hashem k'heref ayin*.

We find Bnei Yisrael reaching this point of *heref ayin* at the end of Parshas Shemos, when they give up trying to deal with Pharaoh diplomatically, when they realize they cannot save themselves *b'derech hateva*, when they abandon their hope in mortal man, even their trusted leaders Moshe and Aharon, and thus they say (Shemos 5:21) “*yeireh Hashem aleichem v'yishpot*,” “may Hashem look upon you [Moshe and Aharon] and judge.” Only now, after this necessary realization, do we find Hashem saying (Shemos 6:1) “*Atah tireh asher E'eseh l'Pharoh*,” “**Now** you will see what I shall do to Pharaoh.” The *yeshuos* of Hashem are now ready to begin.

Galus Mitzrayim was not the only time in our history that diplomacy did not result in *geulah*. With the history of violence and terror that Klal Yisrael in Eretz Yisrael has been subject to for many years, but especially in the last 70, isn't it remarkable that of all the diplomats and politicians, many of whom had the best credentials and were considered the “best in the business,” not a single one of them was able to bring peace to the Middle East? That no attempt to make peace *b'derech hateva* succeeded highlights

the supernatural unfolding history of Israel and precludes a “non-Divine” reading of Israel’s history, similar to how Moshe’s speech impediment precluded a “non-Divine” understanding of Matan Torah.

The Land of Israel, specifically, is a place whose very essence engenders and necessitates the perspective of our constant, total reliance on Hashem. The Mabit teaches us⁷ that the way of Hashem’s *hashgacha* (providence) is that for every nation and land in the world, Hashem provides them with their sustenance at one time. When it comes to the land of Egypt, for example, Hashem fills up the Nile River once, and the land is constantly sustained and nourished from that point on. This is not the case, however, when it comes to Eretz Yisrael, about which the Torah says:

אֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ דֹרֵשׁ אֹתָהּ תָּמִיד עֵינֵי ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ בָּהּ מִרְשִׁית הַשָּׁנָה וְעַד אַחֲרִית שָׁנָה.
It is a land which the Lord your God looks after, on which the Lord your God always keeps His eye, from year's beginning to year's end.
Devarim 11:12

When it comes to the Land of Israel, we need to come to Hashem every single day to ask Him to sustain us here. But, asks the Mabit, doesn't that make Eretz Yisrael seem inferior to the other lands? Isn't it a deficiency that Israel needs constant supervision rather than receiving everything it needs in advance? The answer, says the Mabit, is that Hashem does this out of His love for us. Hashem provides for Israel in the way that ensures we are always looking up at our Father in heaven, never forgetting that it is He who constantly and consistently provides us with everything we need.

Even today, years after the Second Intifada has passed, *b'chasdei Hashem*, we still need to cling to this message. In action, of course, we still need to do our *hishtadlus*. Hashem wants us to learn, to *daven*, to improve our *bein adam l'chaveiro*. One day, we may even find out which of our efforts were helpful in bringing the *geulah*. But all of this *hishtadlus* must be done with the attitude that the *geulah* is ultimately in Hashem's “hands,” not ours. At a time when we are seeing world leaders

recognize Israel in unprecedented ways, we must not forget what Rabbi Faskowitz's Israeli cab driver understood, that *yeshuas Hashem k'heref ayin*, the *geulah* is something that only comes when we realize that Hashem is the only One who can bring it.

Endnotes

1 The sources in this article are based on a shiur given by Rav Moshe Weinberger in 2002 in Kehillas Aish Kodesh, Woodmere, NY titled “The Matzav in Eretz Yisroel: A Child's Eyes.” The shiur can be found on YUTorah. Thanks to Rav Weinberger for reviewing this article.

2 <http://www.yihillcrest.org/dvarshuki/Vaeira08.html>.

3 Rashi to Shmos 7:1 says that *nevuah* means to speak to a crowd.

4 See *Shemos Rabbah* 15:12 and 14:3; *Maseches Rosh Hashana* 11A; *Sefermo and Ba'al HaTurim* on Shemos 12:41-42.

5 The earliest appearance of this phrase seems to be in *piyutim*.

6 Devarim 9:14. See also, Shmuel I 15:16 and Shmuel II 24:16.

7 See Chapter 5 of *Sha'ar HaTeffilah* in *Beis Elokim*.

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THE MODERN STATE OF ISRAEL: TO DREAM WITH EYES WIDE OPEN

There is a joke told in certain circles that the Chabad and Zionist movements should get together — because Chabad has a messiah but no *geulah*, and the Zionists have a *geulah* but no messiah. While the philosophies of both movements are more sophisticated than this joke implies, it highlights one of the most fundamental ideas in the Zionist world view — the existence of a modern-day redemption. A main theme of the religious Zionist view is that the current State of Israel is part of Hashem’s plan for the ultimate redemption. Whether it is the birth pangs or footsteps of the messiah, or the beginning of the *geulah*, our time is portrayed as one of redemption. But as evident from the aforementioned joke, the existence and parameters of this redemption are

highly contested. With the opportunity to discuss the modern era of 5768–5778, I aim to call for a contemporary collection of thoughts, a *cheshbon hanefesh*, of where we are as a state and as a nation in this redemption process.

One of the staples of the Pesach Seder is the drinking of four cups of wine. As the *Torah Temima* (Shemot 6:6) points out, the vast majority of commentators and codifiers of halacha explain that the four cups represent the four “*leshonot shel geulah*,” languages of redemption. The Talmud Yerushalmi (*Pesachim* 10:1), however, presents these four phrases not as languages of redemption, but as four distinct redemptions. *Geulat Mitzrayim*, the redemption from Egypt, is but a title given to four singular redemptions. The *Torah Temima* praises this formulation as appropriate

both within the words of the Torah and within the requirement to drink four separate cups of wine. After all, why celebrate one event four separate times? The *geulah* was thus four small-scale and individual redemptions and not one single salvation.

But why would the Torah categorize the redemption in four independent parts? Why would the standard understanding of one redemption not suffice? Rabbi Yaakov Kranz, the Dubner Maggid, explains that the redemption from Egypt was characterized as four separate salvations to teach us a lesson in complacency. The Jews were challenged to not view their redemption as over once the servitude was no longer hard, nor once they were free in Egypt, and not even when they left Egypt before receiving the Torah.

Each stage of redemption was merely an introduction to the next stage. The Jews were not to become complacent, they were not to feel already redeemed. Each Jew was not to be satisfied with any one step, but should instead investigate further, to see where there was more room for redemption, and to strive for that next step.

There is another lesson to be learned: appreciation. If the redemption had been talked about as one act, the Jews would not have respected the significance of their unique status in each step of the redemptive process. Their national understanding would remain unchanged from one stage to another, in expectation of a redemption not yet here. The easing of labor, relief from slavery, and Exodus from Egypt would remain unappreciated, overlooked, and taken for granted because the redemptions of receiving the Torah and entering the land were not yet realized. To overlook the gifts of G-d with expectations of greater ones is to relate to Him with ignorance and arrogance. Taken together, these two ideas form a call for an honest understanding of the redemptive process, one that is neither complacent nor ignorant, one that both sees future growth while still acknowledging a substantive past and present. Redemption is a process, and as is true in every process, there are many points of triumph along the way before the ultimate goal is attained. This idea is lost on many in contemporary society. On the one hand, there are those for whom the redemption has arrived in full. Those who read the Haftarah of *geulah* on Yom Ha'atzmaut, not out of wishful optimism or prayer, but as an accurate reflection of the state of current events. The words "and the wolf lies with the lamb" come off their lips with no sense of irony, as a

perception of reality, not as a plea for a bright future. The constant assaults in the U.N. over the past ten years, the recent growth in the BDS movement, and the constant threat of war remain happily overlooked or imagined away. These people live in a dream state; a state of arrogant comfort that is less philosophically warranted than it is naïve. They feel we have nothing left to work on, nothing left to earn. It is them the Torah addresses when it says that *geulah* is a long process, a process with which you should never feel complacent. There are more redemptions and more work to be done to merit them, and this work should not be dreamed away.

On the other hand lies those for whom the blessings of Eretz Yisrael, its strength and prosperity, don't even register to their senses. Those who would more easily say *baruch Hashem* on finding a five-dollar bill than on Eretz Yisrael being called Eretz Yisrael once again. These people forget that tradition always had a future in mind. All the bracha goes unobserved and unappreciated — trying to be noticed by the eyes and ears of those who are willfully asleep. They are like those who open a stocked refrigerator complaining that they have nothing to eat. Both of these camps deny an authentic evaluation of where we are as a nation. Both must remember that *geulah* comes in parts, and our current position in the process must both be appreciated and appraised.

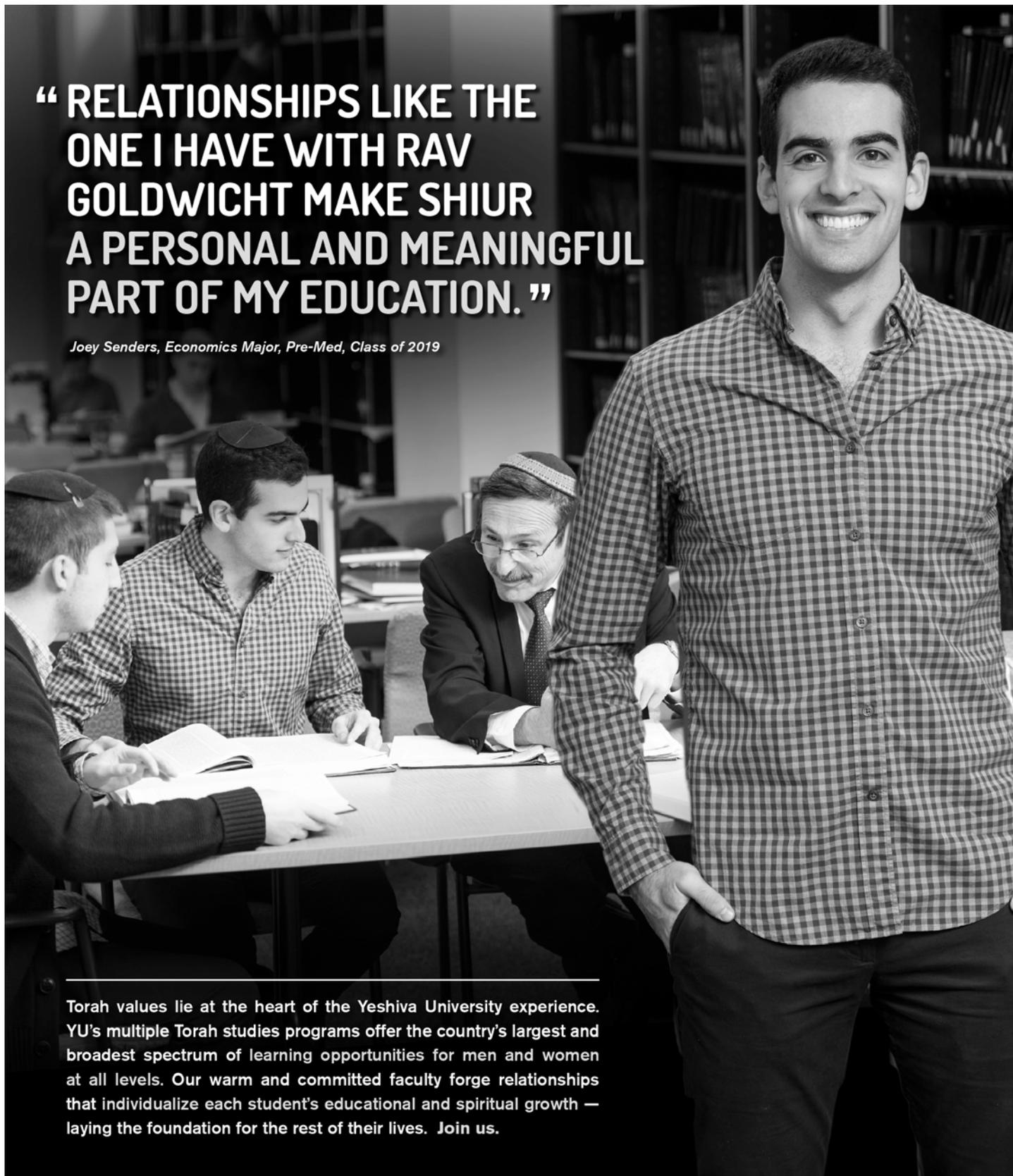
We need to genuinely understand who we are as a people as well. We are wont to deem Israel as the ultimate *ohr lagoyim*, light onto the nations, in its current state; pointing to our democracy within a neighborhood of dictators, and our unprecedented advancements in technology in the

last decade. These claims blissfully dream away the corruption scandals that have rocked our government in the past decade and forget that some of those at the helm of high-tech in Tel Aviv care little to nothing of being an *ohr lagoyim*, let alone for the *mesorah* of Torah itself. But to only criticize is to miss the fact that we have a moral enough nation to follow the example given to us in Tanach to hold the corrupt accountable, no matter the office. To only condemn is to miss the fact that the Jews behind Israeli technology startups are making the world a better, more sophisticated place. Those that point fingers at kollel members for abstaining from military service should first recognize the magnificence of a country in which Torah learning is more widespread than ever before. While those who chastise the military for its secular factions must first admit that it is certainly a holy endeavor to protect the Holy Land. We must honestly admit that although our *ohr* may flicker, it most certainly shines as well.

In the end, we must try and emulate the prayer of King David in Tehillim 126, who prayed that when the Jews return Israel, "*hayinu kecholmim*," they will be *like* dreamers. We cannot be dreaming to the point where we lose all faculty of judgment, nor can we be asleep and remain blind to the unprecedented blessing and opportunity we have as a state. We must reflect on ourselves, not as critics or fanatics, but as willful participants looking to bring the redemption. We must be *like* dreamers in our feeling of euphoria and wonder, but pinch ourselves awake when we realize we are dreaming. A *geulah* has come but *The Geulah* has not, and we must be steadfast in making sure it does arrive while never ignoring that it is almost here.

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