



INSIGHTS FROM THE RAV ON THE MAGGID SECTION OF THE HAGGADAH

As the thirtieth Yahrzeit of the Rav approaches, we are again privileged to share a collection of his insights on the Haggadah. As we noted in these pages in advance of his twentieth Yahrzeit, the Rav often observed that the Yom Tov experience of one who devoted time before its arrival to studying and reviewing the laws and themes of the holiday is immeasurably greater than the Yom Tov experience of one who did not do so. The Rav himself would thus offer many special shiurim prior to each holiday, including, of course, Pesach. What follows here is a small sampling of his many profound lessons and teachings relating to the Haggadah. I was zocheh to hear a few of these thoughts directly from the Rav myself; the others are culled from notes written and published in various venues by others. Any mistakes or inaccuracies here should be attributed solely to me.

הא לחמא עניא די אכלו אבהתנא
בארעא דמצרים. כל דכפין ייתי
ויכול כל דצריך ייתי ויפסח.

This is the bread of affliction which our ancestors ate in the land of Egypt. Let all who are hungry come and eat; let all who are in need come and observe Pesach.

We begin *Maggid* with a reference to the matzoh, describing it as “the bread of affliction which our ancestors ate in the land of Egypt.” Immediately thereafter, we declare that anyone who is hungry may come and eat (with us) and anyone who is in need may come and

observe Pesach (with us). What is the connection between the fact that our ancestors ate matzoh in Egypt and our invitation to others to join us?

When in Egypt, not all the Jews there were slaves; Chazal tell us, for example, that the enslavement was not imposed upon the tribe of Levi (see Rashi to *Shemos* 5:4, *d”h lechu*, citing *Shemos Rabbah* 5:16). It may further be presumed that not every Jew who was a slave suffered in the identical fashion; some may have been subjected to much harder physical labor than others, and some may have been more deprived

of basic necessities than others. What they shared was a sense of solidarity, of responsibility for one another. Those who had food, who were able to get even a small piece of matzoh to eat, shared what they had with those who were worse off, breaking their own matzoh in half, as we symbolically do at *Yachatz*. And it was this spirit of unity that led to the redemption.

When we invite the less fortunate to join us at our Pesach Seder, we are carrying on this tradition of solidarity and responsibility. By using the double language of this invitation, extending

it both to those who are hungry and to those who are in need, we are reaching out both to the poor among us, that is, those people who are literally impoverished and may truly not have enough food for themselves and their family members, as well as to those who may be financially quite wealthy and who have plenty to eat, but are "in need" because they are lonely, because they don't "fit in" anywhere, and because they have nobody with whom to celebrate and enjoy the holiday. We begin our retelling of the story of *yetzias Mitzrayim* by announcing that following the example of our ancestors in Egypt, we are one people, always ready to help each other.

מה נשתנה הלילה הזה מכל הלילות.
How different this night is from all other nights.

In the introduction to his *Hilchos Chametz U'Matzoh*, the Rambam records that there are two *mitzvos asei* incumbent upon us nowadays at the Seder on Pesach night (in the absence of the Beis HaMikdash, when we are unable eat the meat of the Korban Pesach, which we obviously cannot offer), namely the mitzvah to eat matzoh, and the mitzvah to tell the story of *yetzias Mitzrayim*. Among the Rabbinic mitzvos of this evening is the requirement to eat maror, which was Biblically mandated only as an accompaniment to the Korban Pesach and is now performed as a commemoration of what was done in the past (see *Pesachim* 120a, and Rambam *ibid.* 7:12).

It is noteworthy that the questions presented as part of the *Mah Nishtanah* include one question about matzoh, one question about maror, and two questions connected to the telling of the story of *yetzias Mitzrayim*, the one about dipping, a practice introduced in

order to inspire children to question, sensing something irregular, thus setting the stage for sharing the story (see *Pesachim* 114b and Rashi to 114a there, *d"h 'ad*), and the one about reclining, a practice designed to highlight our having achieved freedom as we reenact that which we talk about in relating the story (see Rambam, *ibid.* 7:7). One may wonder, then, why there are two separate questions in the *Mah Nishtanah* regarding the mitzvah of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim*, and only one each regarding matzoh and maror, and, we may add, none at all regarding another prominent (Rabbinic) mitzvah of the night, namely, the obligation to drink four cups of wine.

The answer is that the mitzvah of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim* actually has two very different aspects to it. One aspect is the simple retelling of the story to one's children (see *Shemos* 13:8), particularly as prompted by their questions (*ibid.* 13:14); that aspect, the intellectual aspect, is represented by the question about dipping, which is done, as mentioned above, to encourage the children to raise questions. The second aspect is the reliving of the experience, and the demonstration, both to ourselves and to others, that we truly feel as though we personally have just been redeemed from Egypt (see the Mishnah in *Pesachim* 116a and Rambam, *ibid.* 7:6). That aspect, the experiential aspect, is represented by the question about reclining, through which we indeed show that we are now free people, able to recline and eat in the manner of nobility. The drinking of the four cups of wine is just another example of that demonstration of freedom (note that the Rambam, *ibid.* 7:7, clearly states as much in linking the mitzvah to recline with that to drink the four cups as manifestations of freedom); no separate question is thus needed about the four cups, as the question about reclining already "covers" this aspect.

עבדים היינו לפרעה במצרים.
We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt.

We begin our response to the questions of the *Mah Nishtanah* by reporting the undeniable historical fact that "*Avadim hayinu L'Paroh...*" we were slaves to Paroh. It must be emphasized, though, that our statement is that we were indeed slaves to Paroh, but not that we were "*Avdei Paroh...*," Paroh's slaves. What is the difference? The former phrase describes a legal, social, status; each Jew in Egypt "belonged" to Paroh and had to function as a slave to him. This status did not, however, define the essential personality of any Jew there. He was a slave in the sense of being in a particular political and economic condition, a defined station in life, but that condition, that station, was incidental and external to who he truly was. The Jew in Egypt retained his independent mind, his own approach to reality, and thus continued to long for redemption. His status as a slave to Paroh was not existential; it was extrinsic to his personality, and he was therefore able to retain his dignity and his spiritual essence.

Strikingly, Paroh's Egyptian servants are indeed referred to as "*Avdei Paroh*" (*Shemos* 10:7 and 11:3); these people were in fact Paroh's slaves in the fullest sense of the term. They were inwardly and intrinsically slaves, their entire personality was identified with Paroh, and serving him was their entire purpose in life. They had no aspirations for freedom or for a change of status; this was their way of life. Jews, however, may find themselves in a certain socio-economic situation in which they suffer from terrible oppression, but this does not extinguish their desire for redemption. It is only before Hashem that we surrender our freedom; our status as servants to Him

alone is substantive, not incidental, existential not foreign, intrinsic to our personalities, not extrinsic. When reciting *Hallel*, we thus proudly declare ourselves “*Avdei Hashem*” (*Tehillim* 113:1), but we are not *Avdei Paroh* (see *Megillah* 14a).

ברוך המקום ברוך הוא ברוך שנתן
תורה לעמו ישראל ברוך הוא.

Blessed is the Omnipresent One, blessed is He; Blessed is He Who gave the Torah to His people Israel, blessed is He.

The Haggadah introduces the famous passage regarding the “Four Sons” with a paragraph that serves as a kind of abbreviated *Bircas HaTorah*, preceding our embarking on the first of many expositions of Torah verses relating to *yetzias Mitzrayim* that follow. In this paragraph, Hashem is referred to as *HaMakom*, the Omnipresent. Why is this particular Divine Name used specifically here?

The Gemara (*Chagigah* 13b) discusses the prophets Yechezkel and Yeshayah, whose respective prophetic styles were very different, and notes that they each perceived the identical vision of Hashem’s throne, but their reaction and hence their depiction of it were not at all alike. Yechezkel’s description is quite detailed, while Yeshayah’s is relatively brief. The Gemara explains this distinction by comparing Yechezkel to a villager who rarely gets a glimpse of the king and is thus elaborately descriptive when he eventually does, while Yeshayah is likened to a dweller in the capital city who sees the king regularly and is thus not as dramatic in his presentation of what he sees.

This distinction might not, however, have anything to do with the level or intensity of the prophecies of Yechezkel and Yeshayah. Rather, their different styles reflect the very different times in

which they lived. Yeshayah lived when the Beis HaMikdash was still standing and Hashem’s Divine Presence could therefore still be openly perceived. His vision of Hashem’s throne was brief, as a detailed description was then not necessary, and his signature description was about His holiness (*Kadosh, kadosh, kadosh*... — Yeshayah 6:3), which then was still palpable. Yechezkel, however, flourished during the time following the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash, and he prophesied while in exile. A more descriptive presentation was then needed, and his signature depiction was about Hashem being distant and transcendent, no longer immanent (*Baruch Kevod Hashem Mimkomo* — Yechezkel 3:12), but even having receded to “His place,” still relating to us.

The name “*HaMakom*” referring to Hashem thus describes His interaction with us from a distance, during challenging times, when His holiness is not that perceptible. One of the four sons is of course the *rasha*, the wicked son. He is alienated from holiness and thus far away from the God defined as holy. But although he is removed from Hashem, Hashem is still ready to embrace him, for while He may be distant, He Himself is still “the place of the entire world” (see *Bereishis Rabbah* 68:9). As such, He does not abandon anybody, and He is prepared to include everybody without concern for the person’s current moral standing. As we introduce the Four Sons with a word about the giving of the Torah, we refer to Hashem specifically as “*HaMakom*,” calling our attention to those who may yet seem far away from Hashem, because we wish to stress that the Torah was given to everybody, even the *rasha*, and he too has a share in it. Hashem is ready to invest in and devote significant attention to him as well, as we too should be.

כנגד ארבעה בנים דברה תורה.

The Torah addresses itself to four sons.

Why is it that particularly on the night of Pesach we stress the importance of reaching out to all different types of students, as represented by the “Four Sons?” A famous passage in the Gemara (*Niddah* 30b) relates that every embryo, while yet in the mother’s womb, is taught Torah by an angel, but before being born, he is smacked upon the face and he forgets what he has learned. The obvious question is, why bother to teach the child Torah at all if he is going to forget everything anyhow? The answer is that since the child has already learned Torah in the womb, that Torah, while ostensibly forgotten, remains in the deep recesses of his heart and mind. When he starts to learn during his lifetime, he then subconsciously begins to recall that which is embedded within him, and that recollection of something from long ago enables him to better internalize and actualize that which he is now learning.

On the night of *yetzias Mitzrayim*, every Jew experienced, among other things, the public display of *giluy Shechinah*, Divine revelation, which raised each person, at least for a moment, to a place of great understanding and perception of the Divine. Everybody there felt the presence of Hashem, and the extraordinary *giluy Shechinah* of that great night became embedded in our national psyche, and in the heart and mind of every individual Jew. At the Seder, we thus address every type of Jew, regardless of his intellectual ability or level of interest, and we restage the events of *yetzias Mitzrayim* in an attempt to reawaken that *giluy Shechinah* experience resting in the inner conscience of each and every Jew. The Seder night is thus a most appropriate night to try to connect with every type of student.

יכול מראש חדש.

One might think [that the discussion of the exodus should start] from Rosh Chodesh.

Why might one think that the mitzvah of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim* should be in effect starting from Rosh Chodesh Nissan (if not for a specific source limiting it to the night of Pesach, as it is connected specifically to the mitzvah to eat matzoh and maror, which applies only that night)? We do not find such a similar proposition regarding, for example, the mitzvah of lulav, suggesting that it should be obligatory starting at the beginning of the month (of Tishrei). Why is *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim* different?

The answer may be derived from the Rambam's presentation of the mitzvah of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim* (*Hilchos Chametz U'Matzoh* 7:1), which he says is derived from the verse in the Torah that directs us to always remember ("zachor") the day when we left Egypt (Shemos 13:3). He then notes that this mitzvah is parallel to that which directs us to always remember the day of Shabbos (Shemos 20:8), which is also introduced by the same word "zachor." When it comes to Shabbos, we find that there is a requirement to remember it not only on the day of Shabbos itself,

Like Avraham, who overcame hostile public opinion, we too have the power of our free will to elevate ourselves without succumbing to the values of the culture around us that do not dovetail with those expected of the covenantal nation.

but starting already at the beginning of the week (see *Beitzah* 16a); the Ramban (to Shemos *ibid.*,) points out that this is why we identify the days of the week based on their progression towards Shabbos ("Yom Rishon BaShabbos," "Yom Sheini BaShabbos," etc.). This being the case, just as one must remember the Shabbos by anticipating, yearning for, and talking about it in advance of the day itself, perhaps so too we should remember the day of *yetzias Mitzrayim* by anticipating, yearning for, and talking about it in advance of the day itself. Hence the suggestion to begin relating the story of *yetzias Mitzrayim* on Rosh Chodesh Nissan, in order to be able to better prepare for and focus upon the day of *yetzias Mitzrayim* when it ultimately arrives.

מתחלה עובדי עבודה זרה היו
אבותינו.

Initially our ancestors were idol worshippers.

The Mishnah (*Pesachim* 116a) directs us that in retelling the story of *yetzias Mitzrayim* on Pesach night, we should begin the narrative by sharing the negative element and conclude with the positive element. The Gemara there records one opinion according to which the "negative element" is the fact that our ancestors were originally idol worshippers. But while that negative piece of information is certainly true, dating back to Terach, the father of Avraham Avinu, who was of course an idolator, there is a positive lesson to be derived from this presentation as well, and that is the lesson of Avraham Avinu himself.

It is clear from the verses that are subsequently cited in the Haggadah (*Yehoshua* 24:2-4) that it was Hashem Himself who "took" Avraham and led him far away from the land of his upbringing; the initiative was that

of Hashem, as He, in effect, chose Avraham and invited him to embark on his fateful mission. In that sense, it is not the case that our ancestors initially did anything to deserve being selected; they were simple idol worshippers like everybody else. At this point of the Seder, as we just begin to relate the events of *yetzias Mitzrayim*, we express our indebtedness and our gratitude to Hashem for the fact that it was our forefather Avraham whom He "took" to be the founder of the covenantal nation.

At the same time, though, we also focus here upon the greatness of Avraham himself. After all, he lived as part of a culture where idol worship was the norm and which had its own code of ethics and morality. Despite this, however, he was determined to discover and hone his relationship with Hashem, thereby demonstrating that if someone is truly determined to "find" Hashem, he can do so even if it means going against what society stands for and encourages. Whatever Avraham accomplished can be accomplished by others, and even in modern times, we should not be swayed from pursuing our mission by the expectations of the society around us. Like Avraham, who overcame hostile public opinion, we too have the power of our free will to elevate ourselves without succumbing to the values of the culture around us that do not dovetail with those expected of the covenantal nation. Our way of life revolves around finding Hashem in all our activities, in whatever we do (see Rambam, *Hilchos De'os* 3:3, citing *Mishlei* 3:6).

אלו קרבנו לפני הר סיני ולא נתן לנו
את התורה דיינו.

If He had only brought us before Mount Sinai and had not given us the Torah, it would have sufficed for us.

In the famous passage of *Dayeinu*, the *Ba'al HaHaggadah* declares that it would

have been sufficient had Hashem only brought us before Mount Sinai but had not given us the Torah. The implication of this seems to be that there was independent importance in coming to Mount Sinai, quite apart from the fact that we received the Torah there. The question, of course, is what this means. Wasn't the entire purpose of going to Mount Sinai in order to receive the Torah? What happened there that was of value other than our having been given the Torah there?

The event of *Ma'amad Har Sinai*, the assembly at Mount Sinai, actually had two goals and hence two results. One was intellectual — the Jewish people there acquired the knowledge of Hashem's Torah and all its intricacies. The second was experiential — the people there perceived *giluy Shechinah*, Divine revelation, and were thus able to see Hashem in a manner not attained by even the greatest of our prophets (see *Mechilta to Parashas Yisro, Mechilta DeBaChodesh* No. 3). Even had we not received the Torah at Mount Sinai, and hence not achieved the intellectual result of that event, there was still independent worth in our simply being at Mount Sinai and experiencing the *giluy Shechinah* which was such an integral part of the event. And that alone would indeed have sufficed to obligate us to extend our thanks to Hashem.

When we engage today in the mitzvah of *talmud Torah*, we similarly focus upon the above two aspects. On the one hand, learning Torah is an intellectual pursuit; we study, we analyze, we infer, we conceptualize. This is the work of the intellect. Beyond that, however, one who learns Torah properly feels that he is confronting the infinite, and reacts with a feeling of excitement, awe, and even ecstasy, as he recognizes that he is in the midst of an encounter with the Divine. The experience of *talmud Torah* is thus not only an intellectual one but

an emotional one as well. The sense of *giluy Shechinah* that characterizes this experiential aspect of our having received the Torah at Sinai, while clearly intertwined with the intellectual aspect, stands on its own as significant enough to be highlighted.

—•—

מצה זו שאנו אוכלין על שום מה. על שום שלא הספיק בצקם של אבותינו להחמיץ עד שנגלה עליהם מלך מלכי המלכים הקב"ה וגאלם.

This matzoh that we eat is for what reason? It is because the dough of our ancestors did not have time to leaven before the King of Kings revealed Himself to them and redeemed them.

The Mishnah (*Pesachim* 116b), cited in the Haggadah, quotes Rabban Gamliel as having taught that the reason we eat matzoh on Pesach night is that the Jewish people were redeemed from Egypt suddenly, and in great haste, before there was time for their dough to rise and become leavened (see *Shemos* 12:39). The problem with this explanation is that they had already been commanded beforehand to eat matzoh, as an accompaniment to the Korban Pesach that was offered prior to their having been redeemed (*ibid.* 12:8). This matzoh clearly had nothing to do with their having to rush out before their bread could be properly baked.

The real question being addressed in this Mishnah is thus not why Hashem gave us this particular mitzvah to eat matzoh, or what He wants from us when we perform it. Rather, the question is what the mitzvah means to us, what we ourselves should think about and remember, what we should have in mind. Rabban Gamliel was looking to explain not why we eat matzoh, in the sense of why Hashem commanded us to do so, or what His motivation was historically in requiring

this action, as that to a great extent is ultimately unknowable to us, but rather what message we should draw from performing this mitzvah, what we are meant to understand by doing so, and what the action should symbolize to us. And the answer is that our redemption from Egypt, while awaited and anticipated, ultimately came suddenly and in an unexpected manner, and so too will our future redemption.

—•—

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

In every generation a person is obligated to envision himself as if he had come out of Egypt.

Towards the end of *Maggid*, we cite the words of the Mishnah (*Pesachim* 116b), which teach that we are all to view ourselves as though we personally came out of Egypt. How exactly can we accomplish this? By trying to see the events of *Yetzias Mitzrayim* as something new, and not as an old, historical happening that took place in days of yore. We are to view our Biblical heroes — Avraham Avinu, Moshe Rabbeinu, etc. — as people who are alive, with whom we can interact and from whom we can draw personal inspiration. When relating the story of *Yetzias Mitzratyim* to our children, we should strive to present it as our own story, not as something that happened to unnamed ancestors of ours several millennia ago. We should talk as if we are an eyewitness to these events, not as someone relating testimony that we have heard second or third hand (which is unacceptable in *Beis Din*) even if it originates with a perfectly reliable source. By delving into, acting out, and recreating the events of *Yetzias Mitzrayim*, we demonstrate that they are still very much alive and part of our own personal story.