

## Four Pesach Conversations With Hashem

Moshe Taragin

Sefer Bereishit, provides scant information about Hashem and creation. Instead, the narrative is dominated by reports about the family life of our ancestors, including the friction between wives, sibling tensions, and strained parent-child relationships. The familial relations of Bereishit serve as a model for our covenant with Hashem which is forged in the book of Shemot.

Our annual Pesach seder affirms our commitment to Jewish family, a value which preserved us through an extended exile when we lacked national identity or political experience. The story we tell our family on Pesach is *about the concept of family* in Judaism. Jewish history is a story of faith and family.

## Four Pesach voices

The Torah outlines four different conversations about the yetziat Mitzrayim. Based on these four outlines Chazal envisioned a dialogue with four different types of children: the wise *chacham*, the wicked *rasha*, the simple *tam*, and the confused *she'eino yodei'a lish'ol*. Of course, no child, or for that matter no adult, neatly fits these profiles. We all possess characteristics of each child and during Pesach we conduct each of these four conversations in parallel.

## A New Chapter

This year our story will include not only the events of 3300 years ago, but also the struggle of the past six months. We are currently authoring a fateful chapter in the book of Jewish history and this year our Pesach conversations will probe the connections between the ancient sections and the contemporary chapters of our story.

That "updated" Pesach conversation will also be conducted through the classic four voices of Pesach: the voice of the wise child, the voice of the rebellious child, the voice of the simple child and voice of the confused child.

## Our Conversation with Hashem

Alongside our dialogue with our children, we will also dialogue with our Hashem our collective Father, about the attacks of October 7<sup>th</sup>. In truth, we have all conducted these conversations in numerous different voices with Hashem over the past six months. We have been speaking with Hashem, praying to Him, and wondering about His decisions. Pesach will only amplify those conversations, but they have been ongoing since October 7<sup>th</sup>.

What are the four voices of this year's Pesach conversation with Hashem about the tragedy and its aftermath? How have we spoken with Him in the past about this critical chapter of Jewish history? How will we continue this conversation over the next month? What are the four voices of Pesach 2024?

## The Conversation of *Wisdom*

Much of our conversation with Hashem has been centered upon analyzing this overwhelming tragedy. We have asked Him: how could this happen in our homeland? Didn't persecution of Jews end with our return to Israel? What messages was He sending us by allowing this pogrom? What are the long-term ramifications for our people and for our sense of peoplehood?

For months we have ruminated over these questions, sharing our questions with Hashem, and seeking His wisdom to decipher this perplexing mystery.

We have also employed wisdom about the future to help stabilize the present. The gemara (Tamid 32a) asserts that a wise person "sees into the future". While we can't precisely predict the future we do hold on to divine prophecies and promises which assure us of a better future. This type of wisdom provides solace during trying periods and this wisdom helps offset the frustrations of the present.

In our conversation with Hashem about wisdom, we also have wondered if, in the past, we were too confident or too wise. Militarily, we certainly were overconfident about our security measures and the intelligence

reports which made us feel invulnerable to this type of attack. Were we similarly too confident that life in Israel was divinely charmed and immune to this type of tragedy? Were we too smart for our own good? Did our national success go to our heads?

### The Conversation of Evil

During this war we often spoke with Hashem about evil. On this dark day we faced the type of pure evil we never imagined existed. As Jews, we harbor a positive outlook of humanity, coupled with a deep belief in the dignity of man. Our minds simply could not fathom the type of brutality and barbarism which was perpetrated against us. The monstrosities we faced made us realize that our war isn't just about land and security but is a battle between a culture which venerates life and one which celebrates death. Between those who respect the dignity of the human condition and those who disgrace humanity. We have repeatedly asked Hashem to help us eliminate evilness from our world.

But, in our conversation with Hashem about evil people we also acknowledged our own past misconduct in labeling the wrong people as wicked. In the leadup to October 7<sup>th</sup> we allowed social and political divisions to divide us to the point that we villainized fellow members of our own nation. We labeled the wrong people wicked. We must take accountability for our crimes of misidentifying evil in our world.

The Hagaddah's responds to the evil child's aggressive questioning: "since he has excluded himself from the overall Jewish community, his teeth should be shattered". Unfortunately, we were all guilty of excluding, but not of excluding ourselves. We excluded too many other Jews from our broader vision of the Jewish family. None of us was immune to that evil voice and we all must take responsibility for behaving in part, like the evil child.

### The Unpretentious Conversation

Though much of our conversation with Hashem was analytical and investigative, there were numerous tense moments during which we suspended our thinking and prayed in a more desperate and

straightforward tone. Facing the real possibility of death, we bargained with Hashem for life. Knowing that our children were in the line of fire, we desperately screamed out to Him from the abyss, without sophistication and without analysis of our situation or of our future. We just begged Him for life, for our children, our soldiers, and our hostages.

We awoke every morning and, prior to reading political analysis, we wished that there would not be any announcements of fallen soldiers. Sometimes our wishes were answered while other times our hearts fell, and we lost our breath even before we rose from bed. These raw feelings of pain, fear, and anguish provided moments of deep and raw conversations with Hashem. Far deeper than the conversations based on wisdom or analysis.

### The Conversation of Bewilderment

For much of the past six months we have just been simply bewildered. There are just too many layers to process. The brutality of October 7<sup>th</sup>. The casualty numbers of that one day. The hostages who are still living through hell. The mounting death toll of the ground invasion. The rabid antisemitism which this war has incited. The swirling moral confusion which had muddled public opinion about our just war. The unknown future, especially in the North.

There is so much to process that we often find ourselves paralyzed or overwhelmed, or both. It is precisely at these moments that we suspend our inquiry and turn completely to Hashem, as the child who is "unable to question". Helpless and hapless, we fall back upon our faith to keep us standing. Faith allows us to live even when we can't even articulate the questions.

This month let us continue to speak with Hashem in each of these four Pesach voices.

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*(Kodesh Press, April, 2024), which provides religious responses to the massacres of Oct. 7 and the ensuing war.*