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CONGREGATION AHAVAT YISRAEL

TORAH JOURNAL

PERSPECTIVES

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PERSPECTIVES

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Upon these foundations do the pillars of Torah Stand...



יהי זכרם ברוך



SAM MEZRAHI, IN LOVING AND BLESSED MEMORY OF HIS GRANDPARENTS,
SAMUEL & REINA MEZRAHI (a'h)

NANCY MEZRAHI, IN LOVING AND BLESSED MEMORY OF HER PARENTS,
ALLAN & NANCY SCHIFF (a'h)



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The light of Israel sparkles and its flame will never be extinguished...



IN HONOR OF MARION BLUMENTHAL LAZAN
AND HER 101 YEAR MOTHER,
RUTH BLUMENTHAL MEYBERG

UPON THEIR LIBERATION BY RUSSIAN FORCES
FROM A GERMAN TRAIN LEAVING
BERGEN-BELSEN AND HEADED EASTWARD
APRIL 23, 1945—10 IYAR 5705



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יהי זכרם ברוך



MICHAEL ADLER, IN LOVING AND BLESSED MEMORY OF HIS AUNT,
FELICE HAMADA SCHOENBERG (a'h)

MICHAEL ADLER, IN LOVING AND BLESSED MEMORY OF HIS UNCLE,
EDWARD M. ADLER (a'h)

MICHAEL BEYLUS, IN LOVING AND BLESSED MEMORY OF HIS GRANDFATHER,
HARAV ALTER YEHOSHUA YOSEF RUBIN (a'h)

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DUVY GOLDBERG, IN LOVING AND BLESSED MEMORY OF HIS FATHER,
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SARA GOLDBERG, IN LOVING AND BLESSED MEMORY OF HER FATHER,
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JEREMY KIRSCHNER, IN LOVING AND BLESSED MEMORY OF HIS FATHER,
JOSEPH KIRSCHNER (a'h)

CARYN LIEBMAN, IN LOVING AND BLESSED MEMORY OF HER FATHER,
DONALD LIEBMAN (a'h)

MENDY & SHEILA WEISSMAN, IN LOVING AND BLESSED MEMORY
OF THEIR PARENTS
JOSEPH & MIRIAM WEISSMAN (a'h) • MEYER & TERRY RESNICK (a'h)



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INTRODUCTION

With great pride and gratitude to Hashem, and with thanks to our esteemed Rabbi Heshy Blumstein, we present to you this first, of what is hopeful to be one of many, future publications of Torah, compiled by those who honor our Synagogue with their tireless efforts to disseminate Torah to the Congregation and the wider community, on a continual basis.

The efforts, labors and contributions of renowned Torah scholars—chief among them, HaRav Yonah Metzger; Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky and Rabbi Pesach Lerner—deserve our special appreciation.

In the Rambam's greatest work, the Mishneh Torah, it is written that the Mitzvah—the obligation to learn, to understand and teach Torah, applies to:

Each and every Jew, whether poor, whether wealthy, whether healthy or infirm, whether young or an aged individual whose strength is weak, even a poor person dependant on charity and goes door-to-door, and even a husband with a wife and children, [all] are required to establish time, day and night, to learn Torah. [Ramabam, Hilchot Talmud Torah 1:8.]

Rambam anticipates each and every seemingly logical excuse for not learning, and concludes that they are all invalid. Learning is the core and succor of the Jewish soul. Regardless of age, level of scholarship, income, persecution or illness, a Jew must learn. Learning defines the life of the Jewish people and is our *raison-d'etre*. A Jew must always find a way to keep learning at the center of his/her existence. Without the study and learning of the Torah, observance loses its meaning, its joy and flavor. However, when Torah is studied deeply and creatively, the individual begins to understand how each Jewish law and concept is the expression and perspective of a treasure trove of wisdom and insight. Observance is therefore transformed from rote habit into a deeply meaningful act that ennobles the soul and illuminates the mind. As the Psalmist, David HaMelech, states:

G-d's Torah is perfect, restoring the soul; the testimony of G-d is faithful, making the simple one wise. The orders of G-d are upright, causing the heart to rejoice; the commandment of G-d is clear, enlightening the eyes. [Psalms 19:8-9.]

Throughout these pages, the reader will embark on a tour-de-force of Torah in all of its majesty. Expanding on homiletical, Halachik, philosophical and instructive interpretation and discourse, the authors of these articles have presented sometimes original analyses and perspectives of subjects studied throughout the ages by the greatest Torah sages.

Whether the reader is a novice to the study of Torah or the Haggadah or already a scholar, each person should find for themselves an appealing Torah gem, worthwhile to their very own personal Torah tastes. As the Haggadah states: “And even if all of us were wise, all men of understanding, all elderly, all of us knowing the Torah, there is still a Mitzvah upon us to tell about the Exodus from Egypt. And whoever talks about it at length is praiseworthy.”

In an effort to keep the flame of Torah learning burning brightly in the hearts of the Young Israel of Hewlett members, we have taken the time, effort and expense to write and publish “Perspectives.” It is a gift to the Young Israel of Hewlett family from its writers and supporters to engage the mind and bring joy to the heart of our members during this festive Pesach Holiday.

{The Editors}



בס"ד, ד' ניסן, תשס"ט
29 מרץ, 2009
תב" - 499 סט

לאחי ורעי
בני קהילת "יאנג איזראל" אשר ב"וולט"
ארה"ב

שלום רב לאוהבי תורתך!

ידוע הוא בשער בת רבים ארגון הקהילות היהודיות "יאנג יזראל" אשר ברחבי ארה"ב. ארגון שדעתו זקנים נוחה הימנו. ואי אפשר שלא להתפעל ולהעריך את פעולותיו הנשגבות למען קירוב אחינו בני ישראל לתורה ולמעשים טובים, אהבת ישראל ולאהבת ארץ ישראל. ואני קורא עליו את המקרא בהושע (י"א, א') "כי נער ישראל לאוהבהו".

מיוחדת היא קהילת "יאנג יזראל" אשר ביוולט, שבה זכיתי להתארח בשבת קדש והתרשמתי מן האווירה הקסומה שבקרב צעירי הצאן, אשר אירחוני בחמימות כה רבה ובצמאון רב לשמוע דבר ה', קהילה המעודדת לפעילות ענפה של אהבת תורה וארץ ישראל כאחד.

עתה, זכתה הקהילה שמקרב חבריה יוצא תכריך תורני ובו לקט מאמרים לקראת חג הפסח הבעלי"ט. מתוך חיבת הקדש וחביבות הקהילה הנפלאה הזו, אמרתי להוסיף גם מאשר עמי בענייני הפסח, ולשלחם אליכם לזיכוי הרבים.

המשנה בפסחים (קט"ז ע"א) מסבירה את האופן שבו אנו מצווים לקיים את מצות סיפור יציאת מצרים בליל הסדר וקובעת: **"מתחיל בגנות ומסיים בשבח"**, דהיינו, אב המבקש לקיים את מצות "והגדת לבנך" עליו ללמד את בנו על ההיסטוריה הקשה של עמנו מתחילתה כאשר בתיאור מלא זה יש בו גנאי כשאבותינו שהיו עבדים למצרים, ולאחר מכן עליו לסיים בשבח כלפי הקב"ה, על שהוציאנו מעבדות לחרות ונתן לנו תורת אמת במעמד הר סיני.

בשאלת "מאי גנות" נחלקו בגמרא שני אמוראים רב ושמואל, רב אמר: "מתחילה עובדי ע"ז היו אבותינו" ושמואל אמר "עבדים היינו". הרמב"ם פוסק כמהגנו לומר את שניהם, גם "עבדים היינו" וגם "מתחילה עובדי ע"ז היו אבותינו". שומה עלינו לתת את דעתנו, במה נחלקו רב ושמואל!



על נוסח הברכה הנאמרת בהגדה "על גאולתנו ועל פדות נפשנו", שאלו המפרשים מהו פשר הכפילות הזו, "גאולתנו" ו"פדות נפשנו"? בשם הגר"ח מכריסק מוסבר, כי על ההבדל בין "גאולה" ל"פדיון", ניתן ללמוד מגאולת "שדה אחוזה" ומפדיון "מעשר שני", האמורים בתורה.

בגאולת "שדה אחוזה" החוזרת לבעליה ביובל, אומרת התורה "גאולה תהיה לו", ומשמעות גאולה זו היא, העברת רשות ובעלות מראובן לשמעון, אך אין שום שינוי מהותי בגופה של השדה, העוברת מרשות אחת לרשות האחרת.

מה שאין כן בהגדרת המושג "פדיון" הבא לידי ביטוי ב"מעשר שני", חל שינוי במהות הדבר הנפדה. לפני הפדיון הוא קדוש, ולאחר שנפדה - יצא לחולין.

בעבדות מצרים היו שתי הגדרות אלה; יצאנו מרשותו של פרעה, בבחינת "ממצרים גאלתנו", אך גם חל בנו שינוי מהותי ביציאתנו מעבדות לחרות. לפיכך גם התקיים בנו "ומבית עבדים פדיתנו".

על כן אנו מברכים "על גאולתנו" – יציאתנו הפיזית מארץ מצרים, מעבדותינו לפרעה, ליציאה לחרות "פדות נפשנו" – כי עתה חל בנו שינוי מהותי - מעבר מעבדות לחרות.

בזאת נבין את מחלוקתם של רב ושמואל. שניהם מסכימים כי יש לספר לביל פסח גם על הגנות שבעברנו וגם על השבח: דהיינו, יש גנות ושבח רוחניים ויש גנות ושבח פיזיים. הגופניים – "עבדים היינו לפרעה במצרים... ויוציאנו". הרוחניים – "מתחילה עובדי ע"ז היו אבותינו ועכשיו קירבנו המקום לעבודתו". מחלוקתם של רב ושמואל עוסקת בשאלה איזו מהן יש להדגיש יותר ולהקדים, לפיכך פסקו רבותינו לומר את שניהם כאחד, גם "עבדים היינו" וגם "מתחילה עובדי ע"ז היו אבותינו".

בעומק הדברים נראה להסביר, כי רב סובר שהגנות הגדולה ביותר ליהודי היא עבודה זרה, שכן השורש היהודי הוא האמונה. על כן גנותו ושפלותו היא "מתחילה עובדי ע"ז היו אבותינו". ואילו שמואל סובר כי הגנות היא "עבדים היינו לפרעה במצרים" שעניינה השעבוד לזוהמת מצרים ששקעו אבותינו בטומאתה. זו הגנות הגדולה ליהודי המוגדר גוי קדוש - "כי עם קדוש אתה לה' אלוהיך" וקדושתו של יהודי היא, בעצם היותו "גוי קדוש"! לכן, גנותו הגדולה היא בהיותו עבד המשועבד לטומאת מצרים ולתרבותה.




אנו מזכירים לבילל הפסח את שתי הדעות גם יחד, כי שתייהן – האמונה והקדושה, הן עיקריו של כל יהודי, שכן שורש נשמתו היא האמונה התלויה בקדושה, וככל שאנו נטהר ונתקדש יותר אמונתנו תהא בהירה יותר. נמצא א"כ, שכל מחלוקתם אינה אלא במה להתחיל.

שני יסודות אלה רמוזים בדם הפסח ודם המילה, שבזכותם יצאו ישראל ממצרים. פסח – הוא ביטוי לאמונה אשר פסח ה' על בתי בני ישראל, ובכך התגלתה במלא כחה ההשגחה הפרטית. ההמילה – עניינה הקדושה, כניסתו של כל יהודי לקדושת ישראל. סיפור יציאת מצרים הוא סיפור עלייתנו אל הארץ המובטחת, ועל כך נאמר ש"כל המרבה הרי זה משובח" שהרי כל מהות היציאה היתה "ולחביאך אל המקום אשר הכינותי". בשאיפתנו להשיג את שני יסודות אלו - האמונה והקדושה, נזכה אי"ה לקיים בהידור את מצוות סיפור יציאת מצרים ולגאולה שלמה בארצנו הקדושה.

יה"ר מלפני אבינו שבשמים, שתזכו אי"ה לאכול מן הפסחים ומן הזבחים בבנין בית מקדשנו במהרה בימנו אמן!

הכו"ח ביקרא דאורייתא,
ובברכת פסח כשר ושמוח,


יונה מצגר
הרב הראשי לישראל



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26 Adar 5769/March 22, 2009

Dear Friends,

The Holiday of Pesach, the Seder and the Haggadah in some form, date back thousands of years, to yetziat Mitzrayim, to the Exodus from Egypt.

The Holiday of Pesach and the Haggadah are the most written about topics in Judaism. Perhaps, that is because in every generation we actually re-live the trials and tribulations, the miracles and hopes that our forefathers endured and experienced. In every generation, we can therefore add our experiences, attitudes and interpretations to the Pesach Seder and Haggadah.

It is an honor to extend our wishes of bracha and hatzlacha to the Young Israel of Hewlett, NY, under the able leadership of the morah d'atra, Rabbi Heshy Blumstein, as your members and friends add their chidushei Torah, Torah thoughts, to the vast collection of Torah insights about the Holiday of Pesach.

We commend the editorial expertise of Rabbi Judah Cohen, who has produced such a beautiful and professional volume.

We pray to the Almighty that this Holiday of Pesach truly be a Holiday of freedom. May we greet the Moshiach, speedily in our days.

Chag Sameach!

Sincerely yours,

Rabbi Pesach Lerner
Executive Vice President
National Council of Young Israel

Legacy... Community... Family...

SHLOMO Z. MOSTOFSKY, ESQ., President RABBI PESACH LERNER, Executive Vice President

LAVAN—BLACK OR WHITE?

By: Rabbi Heshy Blumstein¹

The Rabbinical authors of the Haggadah established important themes for the Passover Holiday by incorporating certain *pesukim* of the Torah into the text of the Haggadah. In the Book of Devarim, Parshat Ki Tavoh, we read: “And you shall call out and say before the Lord, your G-d, ‘An Aramean [sought to] destroy my forefather [Yaakov], and he went down to Egypt and sojourned there with a small number of people, and there, he became a great, mighty, and numerous nation.’”²

This *pasuk* was repeated when the first fruits of Israel were brought to Jerusalem to be consecrated by the farmers of Israel. This Mitzvah is known as *Bikkurim*. This *pasuk* has a prominent position in the Pesach Haggadah and it forms the textual basis for the Mitzvah of *Sippur Yetziat Mitzrayim* (the recounting of the Exodus). What is the connection between these two Mitzvot: *Bikkurim* and *Sippur Yetziat Mitzrayim*?

A commentary by the Maharal (*zt"l*), sheds light on the connection.³ In the Haggadah we read: “The more one recites the miracle of the Exodus, the more one is praiseworthy.” The Maharal questions this rabbinic statement. How is this in consonance with the warning given by *Chazal* that one is not permitted to elaborate on the praises of Hashem?⁴ The Maharal explains that this teaching of *Chazal* applies when one is trying to describe the qualities of Hashem. In such a case, it is belittling to Hashem to only mention a portion of His praises. When one elaborates, they purport that they have captured on some level, the depth of Hashem’s praises. That of course, is impossible, and therefore we don’t elaborate on Hashem’s praises. However, when one is displaying *Hakarat Hatov*, one’s obligation to be grateful to Hashem, then they must thank Him to the best of their ability. The Mitzvah of *Sippur Yetziat Mitzrayim* is based on a requirement to express *Hakarat Hatov*. *Bikkurim* is also founded on the concept of gratitude. Therefore, we perform this Mitzvah with enthusiasm and include as much praise as possible. For that reason, the authors of the Haggadah borrow the verses of *Bikkurim* found in the Torah, and use it as a text within the Haggadah.

¹ Rav, Young Israel of Hewlett, Congregation Ahavat Yisrael.

² Deuteronomy 26:5.

³ R’ Yehuda Loewe, Maharal of Prague (1526-1612). *Sefer Geverut Hashem* ch.1.

⁴ *Shulchan Aruch*, *Ohr HaChaim* 119:1. *And see*, *Tr. Berachot* 33b.

This essay began by translating the word, *Arami*, as Aramean. Who exactly was this Aramean? Translating *Arami*, as Aramaean in English, is based on the interpretation of Rashi who demonstrates that *Arami* actually refers to Lavan.⁵ It has however been suggested by several other Rishonim, such as the Ibn Ezra, that it is difficult to assume that *Arami*, could really refer to Lavan, because Lavan should have no significant role in our history. The Ibn Ezra contends that the word *Arami*, instead refers to Yaakov. Ibn Ezra understands this *pasuk* to mean: “When our father Yaakov lived in Aram, he was poor and penniless, Hashem showed favor upon Yaakov and he became a very wealthy individual.”⁶ Ibn Ezra’s interpretation seems to fit well within the theme of *Bikkurim*.

On the other hand, Rashi asserts that the word *Arami*, refers to Lavan, because the Torah clearly calls Lavan an Aramean. The sagely authors of the Haggadah seem to be drawn towards Rashi’s interpretation; which begs the question—Why does Lavan play such a significant role in the Haggadah? Furthermore, when exactly did Lavan try to destroy Yaakov? Clearly when we study the *pesukim* in the Torah, we see that he did chase Yaakov when Yaakov fled his household. We can speculate that Lavan only wanted to bring him back home, because he prospered when Yaakov was with him.

Nonetheless, there is no real proof that Lavan’s desire was to kill Yaakov. Although Hashem does appear to Lavan in a dream and warns him not to harm Yaakov, as the verse states: “And God came to Lavan the Aramean in a dream of the night, and He said to him, ‘Beware lest you speak with Yaakov either good or evil;’”⁷ this *pasuk* does not necessarily have to mean that Lavan’s plan was to destroy Yaakov.

Corroborating Rashi’s interpretation that *Arami* refers to Lavan, the Haggadah states: “Come and learn what Lavan the Aramean wanted to do to our father Yaakov—for Pharaoh decreed only against the male [newborns]

⁵ Rashi, Deuteronomy 26:5. See for example, s.v.: “An Aramean [sought to] destroy my forefather,” “[The declarer] mentions [here] the kind deeds of the Omnipresent [by stating]: ‘An Aramean [sought to] destroy my forefather.’ That is, Lavan, when he pursued Yaakov, sought to uproot [i.e., annihilate] all [the Jews], and since he intended to do so, the Omnipresent considered it as though he had actually done it, for [regarding] the pagan nations of the world, the Holy One, Blessed is He, considers the [mere] intention [of an evil deed] as [being equivalent to] the actual perpetration [of the deed itself].”

⁶ Ibn Ezra, Deuteronomy 26:5.

⁷ Genesis 31:24.

while Lavan wanted to uproot everything.”⁸ This passage in the Haggadah is difficult to understand in that it sounds as if Lavan was a worse arch-enemy of the Jewish people than Pharaoh. Why do we give Lavan ‘top billing,’ as the arch-enemy of Israel in a story that clearly should label Pharaoh as the arch-enemy.

The Ner Uziel explains⁹ that in the Torah there is always a connection between a person’s name and his or her essence. For example, Kayin is derived from the word *Kinah*, which means jealousy. In fact, Kayin was jealous enough to even kill his brother, Hevel. Lavan however, means white, which is generally a symbol of purity and cleanliness. Why then would Lavan have such a name? There are many wicked people in the Torah: Eisav, Yishmael, Pharaoh; each person possessing certain attributes that made them unique and very dangerous. Lavan too had a characteristic which made him very dangerous. He just knew how to hide it better.

The first time Lavan meets Yaakov, Lavan is extremely friendly. However, the Midrash explains that Lavan was only friendly because he had assumed that Yaakov was wealthy and he wanted to take advantage of him.¹⁰ Lavan offers Yaakov a job and insists on paying him, but it was not out of a sense of what is right or wrong. Rather, he knew that all the while Yaakov worked for him, he would be able to manipulate him and force him to do what he wanted; and this is exactly what happened. Yaakov agreed to work seven years for Rachel, whereupon Lavan switched Rachel for her older sister Leah, instead of fulfilling his end of the bargained for work, by providing Rachel as a wife. When Yaakov protested, Lavan responded, “What did you think? Would I marry off my younger daughter before my older daughter? We don’t do such disrespectful things where we come from.”¹¹ You, Yaakov, took your older brother’s birth right. See, we’re just not like you, we are honest.”

Thus, it is clear that Lavan was not merely deceitful—but that he tried to convince others that he was actually righteous. In reality, Lavan is the epitome of a hypocrite. On the surface he looks white, but beneath it all, he is black.

Returning to the Haggadah’s statement that Lavan wanted to uproot everything—which in Hebrew is, *HaKol*; is code, referencing Yaakov Avinu.

⁸ Haggadah.

⁹ Rabbi Uziel Milevsky, Ner Uziel, ‘Perspectives on the Parsha,’ Parshat Ki Tavoh.

¹⁰ Rashi, Genesis 29:13, quoting, Midrash Genesis Rabbah.

¹¹ See for example, Genesis 29:26.

When Yaakov and Eisav meet, Yaakov proudly exclaimed to his brother Eisav: “*yesh li kol*, [I have everything].”¹² What does Yaakov mean when he proclaims, “I have everything”?

Ethics of Our Fathers teaches that a person can reach a level where he feels that he has everything if only one is happy with what they already possess. As ben Zoma says: “Who is wealthy—one who is happy with one’s portion.”¹³ Although many of our forefathers were blessed with great wealth, it was Yaakov alone who was able to claim, “I have everything.” This is because Yaakov was the *Middah* (attribute) of truth—*Emet*. A person can only feel as if he has everything, when he sees his possessions in the true light—that everything, *Kol*, is a gift from Hashem.

The exact opposite of Yaakov, is Lavan, who represents, *Sheker* (lies). This is why Lavan is worse than Pharaoh. Pharaoh wanted to destroy us, but he was clear in his intentions. Lavan wanted to destroy us, but he hid his true intentions. A hidden enemy is worse than a revealed enemy. Lavan personifies the *Middah* of *Sheker*, and that is one of the most destructive characteristics of all.

This concept is underscored by the teaching of the Bais HaLevi, who translates the words that Yaakov used as he prayed to Hashem prior to his fateful meeting with his brother Eisav: “*Hatzeleini na miyad achiv miyad Eisav* [Please save me from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Eisav];”¹⁴ to mean, that Yaakov understood that Eisav is a danger when he acts like Eisav with his true intentions clearly revealed. But, when Eisav acts as a brother, with feigned love, when it’s just an act, and there are no true feelings of love and affection; then the danger is that much greater.

The difference between Yaakov and Lavan can be understood by studying the verses that discuss the final goodbyes between Yaakov and Lavan. It is clear from the text, that Yaakov’s intention was to escape from his father-in-law Lavan, and never to have a relationship with him. Lavan however, wanted to hold on to Yaakov. Not because Lavan thought he could gain spiritually from Yaakov, but because he believed that his monetary successes were due to Yaakov. Lavan was not interested in the welfare of his children; he was solely interested in his own welfare.

Rav Yeruchem Levovitz (*zt”l*), the famed Mashgiach of the Mir Yeshivah, explains that there exist two approaches to departing from someone. A person

¹² Genesis 33:11.

¹³ Ethics of Our Fathers 4:1.

¹⁴ Bais HaLevi, Genesis 32:12.

has an encounter or a relationship. In the absence of benefit, they effect a permanent separation. They resolutely bid each other goodbye—with no residual connections, no lingering ties. This is one way to separate. Alternately, when two parties of mutual affection are forced to separate, it is only a physical one. However, emotionally and spiritually they are still aligned. This is a different type of separation—one of body, not of mind. One of the ways to establish a continued relationship, even though there is a physical separation, is to linger awhile, and to draw each others' company for a little bit longer. This is what Lavan tried to do in delaying Yaakov from leaving. Yaakov clearly wanted an abrupt separation from Lavan to make sure to sever all ties, for Lavan in his duplicity was the antithesis to the Judaism that Yaakov promoted. To Yaakov, the relationship was dead.¹⁵

The ability to know when relationships need to be fostered and when relationships need to be severed is a difficult decision which requires much deliberation.

Hashem revealed His might in Egypt for all to observe. There were no doubters; G-d took the children of Israel out of Egypt in a miraculous way. There was no hidden secret agenda, there was no ploy to enslave, to destroy, kill or manipulate. Instead, Hashem manifested His generosity and His loving kindness through His honest relationship with His people. Thus, it is always incumbent upon us to know to whom we owe our allegiance: to Hashem; to express our *Hakarat Hatov* to Him, and to no other. A relationship with Hashem, even though there may be separations, will never cease to be. Hashem's love for His Chosen people, the children of Israel, and our love in return, is forever.



¹⁵ HaRav Yeruchem Levovitz, Mashgiach Mir, Poland (1875-1936). Sefer, Daas Torah. (See also, Rabbi Tzvi Fried, Rabbi of Young Israel of Bedford-Bay/Madison, New York. Parshat Vayetze, 7 Kislev 5765, November 20, 2004.)

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CAN WE TALK?—A PESACH MESSAGE

By: Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky¹

Many of our rituals involve some sort of speech. We pray, we read the Torah, we recite blessings. But, each and every one of those verbal exercises is very personal. They are acts between us and our Creator. From the silent *Amidah* to the blessings over fruit, from the Grace After Meals, to the additional supplications of the High Holy Days, the Jew pours his heart out to his Maker, asking, beseeching even imploring. True, many of our prayer rituals require a quorum, and there is interactive expression between both the cantor or *Shliach Tzibur* and the Congregation. Still, most of those interactions are basically directing the intonations in one and the same direction—heavenward. But technically, a Jew can lead a Jewish Life, by fulfilling almost every ritual in verbal solitude, without discussing anything with his co-religionists, except for Pesach.

Yes. Pesach is different. The Mitzvah of the evening (other than the ubiquitous consumption Mitzvos that accompany most every Jewish festival), revolves around a different type of speech. It asks us not to pray or to focus on supplications. The Mitzvah is communication. The Mitzvah is to talk to each other: parent to child; scholar to layman; and Rabbi to student; and, vice versa.

Pesach represents our original miraculous Exodus from slavery. But what is a miracle if there is no one to share it with. There is hardly any joy in an event that one cannot share.

One of the earliest rabbi jokes I heard (from one of the many philanthropists whose sense of humor I so obligingly endure), is the tale of the clergyman who snuck out of synagogue on the holiest day of the year to indulge in a quick hole of golf.

With only one stroke of the golf club his ball hits a tree, careens off an awning, skims over the water trap, and glides across the green only to miraculously dribble into the awaiting cup. A hole in one! An obvious miracle! The angels in Heaven are stirring. “How could you allow such a miracle?” they ask the Almighty.

In the tale, the Lord simply smiles and replies. “Who can he tell?”

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There is no joy, there is no history, and perhaps there is no true freedom without the ability to communicate the joy.

There is no freedom without the ability to impart your ideas and vision to someone else. There is no freedom if you are unable to ask questions of each other. In addition, there is definitely no freedom if one cannot trace his roots back to an original redemption that came with a clear-cut and well-defined sense of purpose and ultimate mission.

Pesach is that special time of year, not only to celebrate our freedom but also to communicate it. Maybe that is why it was that very same holiday that was always associated with the most pernicious of all fabrications about Judaism that came from our worst enemies. But lies have a way, like termites, to slowly gnaw at truth, and the holes that are bored become a haven to the infestation of worms that corrode the very core of our own beliefs.

My grandfather Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetzky of blessed memory, related a horrific story that a colleague of his related to him back in Lithuania.

This friend was the Rabbi of a small *shtetl* where lived a very ignorant laborer who somehow fell into some money. Though he was the same boor as he was previously, money can do wonders for a person's self image. And so, before the Holiday of Pesach, this laborer called his Rabbi to a corner and said he would like to discuss a very important yet private matter with him.

When the Rabbi agreed, the man whispered to him, "This year, I would like to get some of the special *Matzos*." The Rabbi looked at him bewildered. "All our *Matzos* are special. I supervise the entire process from the harvesting of the wheat until they come out of the oven. What kind of *Matzos* are you talking about?"

Again, the man was cryptic. In an even more desperate voice, he reiterated his plea. "This year I have given much more charity. I am even sitting near the *Mizrach Vant* (the Eastern Wall), of the synagogue. I truly think that I can finally get some of the special *Matzos*."

Stupefied, the Rabbi shook his head in wonder. "Can you be more specific?"

This time, the man motioned to the Rabbi to draw closer. He looked around furtively. When he saw that they were not being watched, he whispered in the Rabbi's ear, "I want the *Matzos* with the blood."

My grandfather's friend recoiled in horror. He described to my grandfather how it took him a tremendous amount of time to convince this Jewish man that there never was, and never will be a *Matzoh* with one of the most forbidden consumables in the Torah—blood.

Imagine, for years upon years we are trying to fight the blood libel. And now, we not only have to fight our enemies, we have to fight those horrific notions within our own community.

I tell this story because I am frightened by the erosion of *Mesorah* (tradition) that seems to be treated as an anachronism; or something out of a Hollywood production. Movies filled with distorted depictions of our *Avos* and *Imahos* are glorified in Jewish media and true traditions are labeled as a relic of fables and challenged as ancient lore. But Divinity has a way of chiding us: “If you want to claim that My stories are fables, if you are reluctant to pass on your heritage as truth, then I will show you what true fables are.”

It was not more than a few years back when the old ingredient, blood, the component of all the libels, now pervaded a new form of ceremonial delicacy, the most innocuous form of Jewish edibles—*Hamantashen*.

Dr. Umayma Ahmad Al-Jalahma, is a faculty member at King Faisal University in Al-Damman. In a scholarly article entitled: “The Jewish Holiday of Purim,”² the Doctor explained, “the Jew must prepare very special pastries, the filling of which is not only costly and rare—it cannot be found at all on the local and international markets.”

He then went on to tell his eager audience about the special ingredient: “For this Holiday, the victim must be a mature adolescent who is, of course, a non-Jew—that is, a Christian or a Muslim. His blood is taken and dried into granules. The cleric blends these granules into the pastry dough.”

“Before I go into the details, I would like to clarify that the Jews’ spilling human blood to prepare pastry for their holidays is a well-established fact, historically and legally, all throughout history. This was one of the main reasons for the persecution and exile that were their lot in Europe and Asia at various times.”

² MEMRI Special Dispatch No.: 354, March 12, 2002, “Special Ingredient For Jewish Holidays is Human Blood From Non-Jewish Youth.” (<http://www.memri.org>)

He then went into the so-called, “Halachic aspects” of this very notable ritual: “Unfortunately, this filling cannot be left out, or substituted with any alternative serving the same purpose. For this Holiday, the Jewish people must obtain human blood so that their clerics can prepare the holiday pastries. In other words, the practice cannot be carried out as required if human blood is not spilled!”

It makes me sick to quote his diatribe even further. I think that enough has been said. We, to whom the absurdity of the macabre accusation crosses the borders of the macabre, probably do not know whether to laugh or cry.

The Israeli government is caught in a “*hasbara*” crisis in which it is trying to respond to scores of misguided reporters who portray Israel’s defensive actions as perceived aggression against a helpless band of barefoot refugees. A good portion of its people now wants it to leave the lands that were promised them by a G-d that told them that we would endure bondage and then be granted a land—the land that is now known as Israel. But when the *Mesorah* is distorted on the first part then it is also distorted, muddled and forgotten on the second part.

And we wonder how sixty some odd years after a Holocaust there are organized deniers who consider the entire episode a Jewish plot. How long is it before the Jewish kids on college campuses are tempted to lend credibility to if not buy into these repugnant ideas? How long will it be before they ask for the blood *Matzos*?

One of the Torah’s greatest legacies is transmission. It is the basis for all oral law and for the unwavering faith that held Jewish hands while they were marched into gas chambers, with heads held high and with spirits kept strong.

The night of transmission was and will always be, the night of the Seder. It was and is the evening that the Torah mandates a father sit his child down and relate the story of the Exodus as related to him by his father all the way back to the very day that they quit Egypt. It was the evening for every Jew, even the most skeptical, to link him or herself to the eternal message of our sacred national origins and ultimate mission.

The Haggadah determines a Biblical response to each type of question and each type of questioner. It has answers for the wise son, as well as for the skeptic, another for the simple son and even an offensive salvo to initiate conversation with one who is unable to ask on his own.

The Seder night is the time for every Jew to join his hands across the sea of time and let his fingers grasp the soul of forebears who were actually there.

But if the chain of truth is snapped, and the *Mesorah* is just a relic of the past, then we have lost a generation. What is left are simple Jews turning a curious ear to the naysayers. Their self-esteem and national pride converted into a murky cloud of meaningless customs. And, they eventually nod their heads to Holocaust deniers, and blood libelers.

Only as recently as last year did a prominent West Coast Rabbi begin to question the authenticity of the Exodus story and even the Jews' undeniable claim to the Land of Israel.

If our own flesh and (may I say) blood, question the tenets of our heritage, what do we expect from 100 million of our distant Arab cousins.

You know that invectives can seed enough doubt that will have an unending tail, when you are on a plane and a businessman who holds an executive position in a Fortune 500 company, furrows his brow and asks in earnest: "There really weren't 4,000 of your people who took off from work in the Trade Center on September 11, were there?"

If we are not clear among ourselves who we are, where we come from, and where we are supposed to be heading, then our enemies will do it for us. And, the ramifications are frightening.

The first ploy that our enemies use is disinformation. It goes back as early as Egypt. When the Haggadah details the story of our exile in Egypt and our redemption, it bases a large portion of the narration on four verses in Devorim 26:5-9 that summarize the entire episode. The first verse mentions that Lavan the Arami afflicted his son-in-law Yaakov, who eventually sojourned with few in number to the land of Egypt. The next verse begins in an unclear manner by stating that, "the Egyptians made evil of us." The Hebrew conjugation that is used for the words "made evil of us" could mean a few different things. It may mean that the Egyptians acted cruelly towards us. It also can be interpreted that the Egyptians made us into bad people by creating a system where Jews became Kapos and mistreated Jews. Yet, the Haggadah seems to interpret the verse in a totally different direction.

The Haggadah quotes the verse in Devorim, “the Egyptians made evil of us,” and elucidates it by adding, “as it is written: ‘Come let us devise a plan against them, lest they will increase, and if a war breaks out they will join our enemies and drive [us] from the land.’”³

How is the verse in Shemos an explanation of the words, “the Egyptians made evil of us?” It seems the Egyptians were worried about the increasing Jewish population. But, the verse does not mention that the Egyptians, at that point, actually inflicted any suffering upon the Jews. Nor does the verse prove that the Egyptians affected our own brotherhood and made us evil to each other. That also happened during the later stages of our exile. How then, does the Haggadah understand the words in Devorim, “the Egyptians made evil of us?” And, how is the fear of insurrection a proof of the Haggadah’s interpretation of the words, “the Egyptians made evil of us?”

The author’s of the Haggadah knew that history has no new ideas. The tactics of the Der Sturmer or the Protocols of the Elders of Zion were not devised in this century. They began in Egypt. The blood libels of years past and the false images from Gaza to the invectives of so-called friends are all part of the “*vayareu osanu*—the Egyptians made evil of us.”

We live in a world where we are under a constant barrage. We are attacked physically and verbally. We must realize that we must pray to Hashem on every front. And if we are not *Mechazek* our own *Emunah* then we may fall prey to their words.

The Haggadah interprets the verse, “the Egyptians made evil of us,” to mean that they slandered us. They claimed we were not loyal citizens and would become a fifth column during a war. Oppression begins with character assassination. The rest is child’s play. No matter who we are, we must remember that on every level—from individuals to entire nations—words destroy.

Perhaps the lesson of the Seder must be renewed to all of us. If we do not tell our children what our parents were supposed to tell us, then what will our children tell themselves when faced with an unprecedented barrage of falsehoods and slurs about themselves and their heritage?

³ Shemos 1:11.

So when your child asks the four questions this year, make sure you really do know the answers. And if you do not, then make sure you have the right person to ask as well. It may not only be a discussion that forges your relationship; it may be the discussion that ensures our future.



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FOUR CUPS OF WINE

By: Rabbi Pesach Lerner¹

The Talmud relates that when Alexander the Great conquered the land of Israel, the Egyptians came to Alexander and lodged a long-standing complaint against the Jews. The Egyptians declared: “It is written in the Torah, that when the Israelites left Egypt they borrowed gold and silver vessels from our ancestors; thus far, these items have not been returned. We now demand that this debt be repaid.”²

One of the Sages of Israel, Gaviha ben Pasisa, undertook the defense of his countrymen, before the court of Alexander the Great. “It is true,” he said, “that this debt is still outstanding but we have a counter-claim. The Torah says ‘and the sojourn of the Jewish people in Egypt lasted four hundred thirty years.’³ Six hundred thousand Jews worked for the Egyptians for four hundred thirty years and received no wages. Settle this account,” said Gaviha ben Pasisa, “and we will return the gold and silver our ancestors borrowed.” The enormous sum demanded by the Jews deterred the Egyptians from pressing their claim. In fact, the Talmud explains that due to this counter-claim, the Egyptians fled their homes and left their full-fields and vineyards to their Jewish neighbors.

In connection with this episode discussed in the Talmud, Rabbi Shmuel Eidels (often referred to as the MaHarsha),⁴ poses a difficult question. How could Gaviha ben Pasisa suggest that the Jewish people were entitled to the

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² Tr. Sanhedrin 91a.

³ Exodus 12:40-41. *And see*, Rashi *ad loci*, s.v.: ‘*Shloshim shanah vi’arba mai’ot shanah*:’ “Altogether, from the time that Isaac was born, until now, were 400 years. From the time that Abraham had seed [i.e., had a child, the prophecy] ‘that your seed will be strangers,’ was fulfilled; and there were another 30 years from the decree ‘between the parts,’ until Isaac was born... And only when you count 400 years from the time that Isaac was born, you will find 210 years from their entry into Egypt. This is one of the things that [the Sages] changed for King Ptolemy.”

⁴ Rabbi Shmuel Eliezer Halevi Eidels (1555-1631), was a renowned rabbi and Talmudist famous for his commentary on the Talmud, *Chiddushei Halachot*. Rabbi Eidels is also known as MaHarsha; which is a Hebrew acronym for: ‘Our Teacher, Rabbi Shmuel Eidels.’

wages of six hundred thousand workers for a period of four hundred thirty years? In truth, the Jews did not remain in Egypt for more than two hundred ten years and the actual period of slave labor was only for eighty-six years. Was Gaviha ben Pasisa not concerned to be challenged and have his counter-claim dismissed?⁵

Rabbi Dr. Marcus Lehmann of Mainz, Germany,⁶ answers the MaHarsha's question as follows: The Torah tells us: "and the Children of Israel went up '*Chamushim*'—armed—out of the land of Egypt."⁷ The great commentator Rashi, quoting the Mechilta, provides another explanation to the word '*Chamushim*'—a fifth. Only a fifth—twenty-percent (20%)—of the Jewish people left Egypt whereas four-fifth of them died and were buried in Egypt during the three days of darkness.⁸ Therefore, since the number of the Jewish people that left Egypt included six hundred thousand working males, there must have been five times that amount—three million—during the years of Egyptian bondage. Thus, three million Jewish male workers served the Egyptian nation for the eighty-six years of actual servitude. It all equals out; whether six hundred thousand worked for four hundred thirty years or three million worked for eighty-six years, Gaviha ben Pasisa had no reason to fear a challenge by the Egyptians. Had they countered his claim by contending that the Jews had labored for only eighty-six years, his reply would have been obvious.

Rabbi Dr. Lehmann adds a beautiful addition to his answer of the MaHarsha's question. The custom at the Pesach Seder is to drink four-cups of wine in commemoration of the four expressions of freedom and deliverance the Jewish nation experienced: "and I will bring you out... and I will deliver you... and I will redeem you... and I will take you to Me as a people..."⁹ Another reason for the four-cups of wine, explains Rabbi Dr. Lehmann, is as follows: The servitude of the Jewish people was originally intended to last four hundred thirty years, five times the actual eighty-six years ($5 \times 86 = 430$). There were four

⁵ See generally, MaHarsha, Tr. Yoma 91a, s.v.: '*Shuv*;' and see *ad loci*, s.v.: '*Shel*.'

⁶ Marcus or Meyer Lehmann (1831 in Verden, Hanover–1890 in Mainz), was a rabbi in Germany who strove to preserve Orthodox Judaism against the growing influence of the Reform movement.

⁷ Exodus 13:18.

⁸ Rashi, Exodus 13:18, s.v. '*VaChamushim*.'

⁹ Exodus 6:6-7.

periods of eighty-six ($4 \times 86 = 344$) years that we did not work. We therefore raise our cups of wine four-times, for each one of those periods of eighty-six years that we were not subject to servitude in Egypt. We praise the Almighty for His deliverance of four-sets of eighty-six years, each time with a 'Kos/כוס' a cup of wine. The numerical value (*Gematria*) of the Hebrew word 'כוס/Kos,' is eighty-six. With our Kos/כוס' of eighty-six, we thank Hashem for His deliverance of an eighty-six year period.



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BREAD & WINE—SEED OF SIN & NECTAR OF REDEMPTION!

By: Rabbi Judah Z. Cohen, Esq.

I. Pesach—Wine & Bread/Food

Jewish people have a fascination with food; some say it's an obsession, especially with wine and bread. Indeed, every Sabbath and Holiday we make blessings over wine and bread; at every instance before and after ingesting and partaking of any food substance a blessing is recited. On the night of Pesach, at the Seder, this passion is exalted to extreme heights to the extent that we ritually eat unleavened bread and imbibe four cups of wine; inclusive of many more ritualized foodstuffs. But, it is the drinking of four cups of wine and eating three unleavened cakes of bread (Matzot) which form the centerpiece of the Seder.

During the Seder, we have a dual primary obligation to consume both wine and unleavened bread. Why on the night of Pesach do we drink four cups of wine or wine at all? Moreover, why is wine always juxtaposed with bread, and in this instance, to bread's so-called opposite form, Matzoh; or even food itself?

The most prevalent answer postulated as to why the four cups of wine are drunk on the night of Pesach relates to the four expressions of redemption mentioned in the Torah.

Wherefore say unto the children of Israel: I am the Lord, and I will bring you out [והוצאתי] from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you [והצלתני] from their bondage, and I will redeem you [וגאלתי] with an outstretched arm, and with great judgment; and I will take you [ולקחתי] to Me for a people, and I will be to you as a G-d; and ye shall know that I am the Lord your G-d, Who brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.¹

Each of the four cups of wine consumed on the night of Pesach is a reference and reminder of each occasioned reason by which G-d chose to

¹ Exodus 6:6-8. The fifth expression of redemption, reads: "...Who has brought [המוציא] you out from under the burdens of Egyptians. And I will bring you [והבאתי] to the land..." Note, the use of the Hebrew word [המוציא] for the redemptive expression: "I will bring you...", as mirroring the very same word used when making a blessing over bread.

deliver the Jewish people from servitude to freedom. The celebration of the night of Pesach is a recognition of the Jewish people's status transformation from bondage to freedom. The process of the Pesach Seder begins with the derogatory and concludes with the praiseworthy.²

Evidently, the number four plays a corollary between the four expressions of redemption and the four cups of wine. Albeit, wine itself is not mentioned nor hinted to at all in the above cited verses oft utilized as the reason for drinking four cups of wine as the symbol of our salvation from bondage. If the Jewish people's deliverance from slavery is tied to these expressions, why then is wine the drink of choice as the symbol of liberation? One could assume that any food or beverage or a different ritual could be performed as the emblem expressing emancipation. Therefore, is there any significance to the juxtaposition of wine and unleavened-bread/Matzoh or food, on the night of Pesach?

According to many, the fulfillment of G-d's prophetic promise to Abraham that his descendants, the Jewish people, would be "...enslaved and oppressed [ועבדם וענו אותם ארבע מאות שנה],"³ commences when Joseph's brothers sell him into slavery.^{4,5} Commenting on the sale, our Rabbis teach that Joseph underwent four sales culminating in his enslavement in Egypt. For example, the brothers sell Joseph to the Midianites, who sell him to the Ishmaelites, who re-sell him to the Midianites and finally the Midianites to the Egyptians; comprising four distinct transactions.⁶

Yet, as the brothers contemplate the sale and fate of their brother—while Joseph lingers in his entombing prison pit—his brothers sit down to a meal of bread (וישב לאכל לחם).⁷ Is it possible that the brothers' sin of selling Joseph was compounded by the subsequent meal of bread? As the meal concludes, the Midrash comments that the brothers then refrained from drinking wine until they meet again, (*intimating that they consumed wine at that meal*).⁸ Upon their reunion, twenty-two years later, Joseph sets a table of bread and the brothers eat

² Tr. Pesachim 116b. "*Hamatcheel bignoot u'misayaim bi'shvach.*

³ Genesis 15:13.

⁴ Genesis 37:25-28; Siftei Chachamim, *ad loci*, letter 'Bet': "G-d acquiesced with them [the brothers' acts of sale], in order to bring about the decree of '...and they will enslave them and oppress them...'" (Genesis 13:15.)

⁵ Tr. Shabbat 10a.

⁶ Daat Zekainim Me'Baalei Hatosafot, Genesis 37:28.

⁷ Genesis 37:25.

⁸ Genesis Rabbah 92:5; Rashi Genesis 43:34; Targum Yonatan ben Uziel, *ad loci*.

and drink wine, until they become intoxicated. . .

“⁹וַיֹּאמֶר שִׂמּוּ לַחֶם... וְיִשְׂתּוּ וְיִשְׂכְּרוּ עִמּוֹ”¹⁰ The proximity of wine and bread to each other in these verses seems to signify something more important than the mere fact that this is what was eaten and drank.

Nevertheless, according to the Midrash—the four cups of wine on the night of Pesach are related to the four times that the word ‘cup’ is mentioned by Pharaoh’s jailed wine-butler as he recounts his dream to Joseph in the common prison they share.¹¹

And Pharaoh’s cup was in my hand [כּוּס פּרעה בידו]: and I took the grapes, and pressed them into Pharaoh’s cup. . . [כּוּס פּרעה], and I gave the cup into Pharaoh’s palm [כּוּס פּרעה]. And Joseph said to him, “This is its meaning: the three tendrils are three days. In another three days, Pharaoh will number you, and he will restore you to your position, and you will place Pharaoh’s cup into his hand. . . [כּוּס פּרעה בידו], according to [your] previous custom, when you were his cupbearer.”¹²

Joseph clarifies the dreams of the wine-steward which leads to the wine-steward’s freedom as contrasted to his counterpart, the baker-of-bread, who is later executed. The interpretations of the dreams of wine and bread foreshadow Joseph’s personal liberation from jail, servitude and exile. Summoned from prison to interpret the vexing dreams plaguing Pharaoh, Joseph understands the nature of those dreams, interprets them through Divine inspiration, leading not merely to his personal freedom but to his ultimate appointment as viceroy to Pharaoh. Joseph experiences a firsthand metamorphosis from enslavement to emancipation, *לחרות מעבדות*.

The night of Pesach and the rituals of the Seder are inextricably intertwined with the fabric of Joseph’s experiences with wine and bread. At the Seder we make blessings over four cups of wine and we eat unleavened bread in memoriam and homage to Joseph’s descent into Egypt and ultimate triumph over it. Likewise, the Jewish people; while at first slaves in Egypt, become transfigured through the hand of G-d into freemen who eventually march

⁹ Genesis 43:34.

¹⁰ Genesis 43:31.

¹¹ Genesis Rabbah 88:5.

¹² Genesis 40:11-13.

triumphantly to Sinai to receive the Torah and ultimately settle in Israel as a G-dly nation. This is the purpose of the Pesach Seder; to recount this tale of bondage to freedom and to echo the story of our forefathers, by reliving their experiences¹³ through wine and bread.

II. From Original-Sin to Sinai

Wine and bread played a critical role in the events leading to the descent into Egypt and Exodus therefrom; but there exists not merely a further correlation between these two foodstuffs with Pesach, but with something more fundamental. Wine and bread appear pregnant with symbolic meaning from the beginning of time—why?

According to the Talmud, the reason for making blessings over food is in order to appreciate G-d's constant stewardship over mankind in providing human sustenance. Without the blessing and the vocalized expression of appreciation, a person declares himself an ingrate; and his omission to bless is tantamount to stealing from the Creator.¹⁴

In the beginning, man sinned when he transgressed G-d's command and ate of the Tree in the Garden of Eden. Of concern however, is what species of tree was this forbidden Tree? According to the Midrash, the Tree from which Adam and Eve ate was either a stalk of wheat or a grape-vine.¹⁵ In other words, did Adam and Eve partake of wine or bread? Whether the Tree in the Garden of Eden was grapes/wine or wheat/bread is unimportant in relation to the common placement of these two foodstuffs in proximity to each other. What is important is that man's first transgression was committed through either wine or bread; or both.

As such, are Pesach and the rituals of wine and unleavened bread/Matzoh/food at the Seder, connected with original-sin? The entire purpose of the Exodus was to bring the nation of Israel to its spiritual zenith at Sinai harmonizing with G-d through His commandments. The Jew must constantly strive for a return to paradise/Eden. The spiritual nirvana of Eden is the goal and to fulfill this harmonious feat the nation of Israel must somehow rectify original-sin. Each time one eats or drinks, one must make a blessing in

¹³Tr. Pesachim 116b. *"Bichol dor v'dor chayav adam lirot et atzmo ki'eelu yatza Mimitzrayim."*

¹⁴ Tr. Berachot 35b.

¹⁵ Genesis Rabbah 15:7: *"Rebbe Meir omair Chitim hayu... Rebbe Yehudah bar Eelæe omair Anavim hayu."*

order to elevate original-sin and draw the process of eating and drinking from the well of its originating transgression.

Indeed, when the world was created and G-d completed creating, the verse, capturing this moment reads: “And G-d saw that all that He had accomplished and it was very good; it was evening and it was morning, the sixth day [יום הששי].”¹⁶ Rashi comments that the entire world was created on the condition that Israel accept the Torah on the sixth day of Sivan at Sinai. Creation and Sinai were thus one fluid moment in time inexorably linked with each other. But, when man sinned and ate from the Tree without permission, resulting in his primordial exile; the river connecting these two originating fonts branched-off and the smooth flow of time and G-dliness became sluiced. Correspondingly, in order to reconnect these branching tributaries with the wellsprings of Torah/Sinai and Eden, original-sin which came about through either eating bread/food and/or drinking wine or both combined; needs be rectified (תיקון העולם).

With the dawn of a later generation (דור הפלגה), again mankind sinned and G-d punished man and earth with cleansing flood waters. When Noah, the unscathed residual survivor of that drowned era emerges from the ark; in lieu of planting a wheat-field (i.e., bread)¹⁷ and starting the process of re-creation, instead of providing for the sustenance of his family and the future,¹⁸ he wallows in self-congratulatory deceit, drinking himself drunk with the same grape seedlings from the Tree of Eden.¹⁹ Noah had an opportunity to rectify original sin and instead lauded himself over his own survival through intoxicating wine.

¹⁶ Genesis 1:31, *id.*, Rashi; *and see*, Rashi, Tr. Shabbat 88a.

¹⁷ On the importance of bread; *see for example*, Aruch Hashulchan, Orech Chaim 171:3.

¹⁸ Rashi Genesis 9:20 s.v.: ‘*Vayachel*,’ “[H]e [Noah] made himself profane, for he should have first engaged in planting something different.” *Citing*, Genesis Rabbah 36:3.

¹⁹ Malbim, commenting on this verse notes the similarity between the aftermath of Adam’s sin, in that he knew he was naked and the aftermath of Noah’s sin, in that his children uncovered him. For instance, Noah was naked to his children. Also compare Noah and Abraham: Noah planted a vineyard [ויטע כרם...וישת מן היין וישכר] for himself, while Abraham planted an ‘Ashel’ tree [ויטע אשל], which according to the Rabbis provided nourishment of both food and drink. And also see, commentary noting that both Noah’s vineyard and Abraham’s ‘Ashel’ tree both came from the garden of Eden. Compare also, the verse: “And G-d planted a garden in Eden [ויטע ה' אלקים גן בעדן]....” Jacob also planted trees for the benefit of his future children who one day needed them to craft a Mishkan. (Genesis 9:20; Targum Yonatan ben Uziel, Genesis 21:33; Malbim, *ad loci*. Rashi, Exodus 25:5, s.v.: “*ViAtzei shittim*.” *And see*, Baal HaTurim, Genesis 9:20.)

Generations later, however, we find our forefather Abraham, caught-up in the process of bringing G-dliness into the world. The Torah teaches that after Abraham circumcised himself, and while sitting near his tent, in the heat of the day, in Eilonei Mamrei (באלני ממרא),²⁰ he observed three angels/wanderers emanating from the desert. Abraham ran to greet them and bade them wash their feet from their unholiness and come rest in the shade of a tree, (*the tree symbolizing the Tree of Eden?*).²¹ Turning to his wife, Abraham directs that she bake three cakes of bread for the newly arrived guests. Rashi notes that these events took place on the night of Pesach. The three cakes of bread were Matzot and the angels desired to favor Sarah with the cup of wine recited at the Grace After Meals. In fact, the entire meal itself was consumed under a tree (תחת העץ).²²

Interestingly enough, the Midrash notes that Abraham was destined to originally have been born prior to Adam. However, since Adam had the potential for sin, Abraham was created at a subsequent time, in order to have the ability to rectify any prior iniquities.²³

Indeed, Abraham's life purpose was to correct the transgressions of the past. On the night of Pesach no-less, Abraham in the shade of a tree commences correcting the iniquities of the first Tree, by baking Matzot, reciting blessings over wine and generally acting in good-faith towards his fellow man.

Inheriting Abraham's legacy, Isaac, born on Pesach,²⁴ carries on his father's tradition of fealty to G-d, even offering himself-up as a sacrifice to G-d. In fact, when Isaac transmits the blessings of his father to his son Jacob, it occurred on the night of Pesach.²⁵

While Abraham begins the rectification process, it still needs to culminate with his future offspring marrying themselves to G-d and Eden at Sinai. Along the way, as previously noted, the brothers depart from the mending ways of their forefathers, and instead opt to not merely sell their brother into slavery but to celebrate the transaction by eating a meal with drink.

²⁰ Genesis 18:1. 'Eilonei' and 'Eelan' have the same Hebrew letters [אלני=אילן], possibly meaning tree.

²¹ Genesis 18:1-4.

²² Rashi, Genesis 18:8-10.

²³ Genesis Rabbah 14:6.

²⁴ Rashi, Genesis 18:10 s.v.: 'Qàais chayah.'

²⁵ Rashi, Genesis 27:9 s.v.: 'Shnei gi'diyei eezim.'

Eventually, the Jewish people come to stand at the foot of Sinai, before G-d, in order to acquire and accept upon themselves the Torah. There they stood trembling, supposedly ready to re-engage creation with the delivery and acceptance of the Torah; instead they falter. They fashion a golden-calf, and then rejoice with it, as the Torah states: "... and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and they got up to make merry [וישב העם לאכל ושתו ויקמו לצחק].” They exacerbated their crime against G-d by raucously engaging in an orgy of food and wine, even committing murder.^{26, 27} The Jewish people destroyed their marriage to G-d and their own freedom and ultimate deliverance by shackling themselves once again to those transgressions which were previously successful in divorcing man from G-d.²⁸

Reacting to the sin of the golden-calf, G-d says to Moshe: “Now leave Me alone, and My anger will be kindled against them so that I will consume [ואכלם] them, and I will make you into a great nation.” The word in Hebrew for, “I will consume them”, is literally: “I will eat them [ואכלם].”²⁹ The Jewish people sinned with food and drink, and they were to be punished by a G-dly consumption. But, Moshe pleaded on behalf of Israel, and G-d had mercy, and the Jewish people were not “consumed.” Original sin endured and its supposed rectification at Sinai failed.

Four cardinal sins befell the world of proto-Judea: **(i)** Adam and Eve’s sin of wine or bread or both from the Tree in the Garden of Eden; **(ii)** Noah’s drunken transgression in not providing for the future through the omission to plant a field of wheat/food for the future; **(iii)** the crime of the brothers for selling Joseph compounded by their meal with wine; and **(iv)** even the breach of the covenant conducted by the children of Israel in celebrating a golden-calf with food and drink. These four iniquities, perpetuated over time, through both wine and bread/food, constantly repeating, and always found in proximity to each other, requires rectification.

²⁶ Exodus 32:6; and see, Rashi *ad loci*.

²⁷ Betzalel was the son of Uri [אורי], which means light, who was the son of Chur [חור], who attempted to bring the light of freedom [חורין] to Israel from the idolatry of the golden-calf. (Ohr HaChaim, Exodus 31:2.)

²⁸ Rashi, Exodus 23:20 s.v.: 'Heeneih anochi...', “Here they were informed that they were destined to sin, and the Shechinah would say to them, “for I will not ascend in your midst.”

²⁹ Exodus 32:1.

III. From Sinai to Esther

Following Sinai, the Jewish people were commanded to build a Mishkan in order that G-d shall dwell in the midst of the people.³⁰ Ramban explains that the Mishkan served to replicate Sinai. Therefore, each time the Jewish people properly worshipped within it, they essentially re-enacted the events of Sinai.³¹ Indeed, the Midrash teaches that the Mishkan served to expiate the sins of the golden-calf.³²

At the time of the dedication of the Mishkan, in the month of Nisan, two leaders emerge from the children of Aaron: Nadav and Avihu, to lead the Jewish people back to a relationship with G-d. Perhaps, a new generation would succeed in re-uniting the Jewish people with Sinai and Eden through the dedication of the Mishkan. Nadav and Avihu were considered so great, their knowledge so sublime and their understanding of G-d and Torah so sagacious, that upon them, Moshe remarked: “Now I [Moshe] see that they are greater than you [Aaron] and me [עכשיו רואה אני שהם גדולים ממני וממך].”³³ Nadav and Avihu were destined to dedicate the Mishkan and eventually carry-on in place of Moshe and Aaron. However, Nadav and Avihu, in their arrogance, drank wine, intoxicating themselves before G-d, in derogation of G-d’s command not to drink wine before entering the sacred realm of the Mishkan.³⁴ Two leaders destined to uplift the children of Israel instead attempt only to uplift themselves. Their sin causes G-d to immediately destroy them. In describing Nadav and Avihu’s punishment, the Torah explicitly states, as it did beforehand by the punishment sought to be exacted upon the Jewish people for cavorting with a golden-calf: “And they brought before G-d a strange fire which He had not commanded them. And fire went forth from before G-d and consumed [ate] them [וַתֹּאכַל אֹתָם], and they died before the Lord.”³⁵

³⁰ Exodus 25:8.

³¹ Ramban, Exodus 25:1.

³² You will find that on the Day of Atonement their sin [of worshipping the golden calf] was forgiven, and on the same day the Holy One Blessed be He said to them: ‘And let them make Me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them’ in order that all the nations should know that the sin of the golden-calf had been atoned for. It is therefore called the ‘Mishkan Eidut,’ a testimony to all the inhabitants of the world that the Holy One Blessed be He dwells in our sanctuary. Said the Holy One, Blessed be He, “Let the gold of the Mishkan come and atone for the gold of which the calf was made ...”. (Midrash Tanchuma, Exodus 25:8.)

³³ Rashi, Leviticus 10:13 s.v.: ‘*Hoo Asher Debair.*’

³⁴ Rashi, Leviticus 9:2 s.v.: ‘*VaTaizei eish,*’ “*Shtooyei yayin nichnisu li’mikdash ...*”.

³⁵ Leviticus 10:1-2.

Sinai and the condition precedent for the world's continued existence was tainted through the sin of the golden-calf. The Mishkan, the symbolic traveling representation of Sinai, was blemished through the faulty dedication of Nadav and Avihu.³⁶ The miraculous dowry that G-d provided for his chosen bride the Jewish people: the plagues on Egypt, the splitting of the Sea of Reeds, the revelation on Sinai, the mercy and forgiveness demonstrated by the giving of a second set of Tablets, the atoning nature of the Mishkan, were all polluted by acts revolving around eating and drinking.

Accordingly, the permanent destiny of the Chosen Jewish people; their return to spiritual Eden and the marriage between the Torah and Creation, would have to await a future event.

In later times, when the Jewish people lived under the thumbprint of Achashveirosh and Haman, all were invited to a party-feast featuring a plethora of choice wines.³⁷ Thereat, partaking of the party under the shade of the trees of the garden,³⁸ with the feast it offered from both the baker-of-bread and the wine-steward,³⁹ the Jewish people became drunken gluttons. Because of the Jewish people's participation in Achashveirosh's meal, the Heavenly Court acquiesced in the plan Haman devised to destroy the nation of Israel.⁴⁰

Fearing for the plight of her people, Esther declares that all Jews are to fast for three days, commencing on the first day of Pesach.⁴¹ Concluding the three days of abstinence, Esther orchestrates a private banquet in which she invites both Achashveirosh and Haman. Esther piques Achashveirosh's interest by characterizing the banquet as a drinking party (המשתה). Rashi poignantly explains that the word for banquet in Hebrew (משתה), is synonymous with the consumption of wine.⁴²

³⁶ See generally, Tr. Eruvin 63a.

³⁷ Esther 1:5-7.

³⁸ Rashi, Esther 1:5 s.v.: 'Beitan,' "Natuà bi'eelanot."

³⁹ Rashi, Esther 1:8 s.v.: 'Âl kol rav baito,' "Âl kol sàrai ha'seudah sar ha'ofim... vi'sar ha'mashkim."

⁴⁰ Rashi, Esther 4:1 s.v.: 'U'Mordechai yada.'

⁴¹ Rashi, Esther 4:17 s.v.: 'Va'Yàvor,' "Âl daat li'hitanot bi'yom tov reeshon shel Pesach."

⁴² Rashi, Esther 5:5 s.v.: 'El hamishteh,' "Kol seudah niqraàt al shem hayayin she'hoo ha'eeqar."

Both Achashveirosh and Haman, attend the banquet, and what transpires, unfolds as follows:

So the king and Haman came to drink [e.g., wine] [לשתות] with Queen Esther. And the king said to Esther also on the second day during the wine [היין] feast, “What is your petition, Queen Esther, and it shall be given to you. And what is your request, even up to half the kingdom, and it shall be granted.”

* * *

And Haman became terrified before the king and the queen. And the king arose in his fury from the wine [היין] feast to the orchard garden, and Haman stood to beg for his life of Queen Esther, for he saw that evil was determined against him by the king. Then the king returned from the orchard garden to the house of the wine [היין] feast, and Haman was falling on the couch upon which Esther was, and the king said, “Will you even force the queen with me in the house?” The word came out of the king’s mouth, and they covered Haman’s face.⁴³

During Pesach, at a banquet for the king, with the fate of the Jewish people lying under a Damoclean sword, we find four expressions of wine within these passages. Perhaps, these four references to wine echo the symbolism of the redemptive expressions mentioned in Exodus. It is because of this wine party, and the efforts of Esther by refraining from food (i.e., bread), and the exposé of Haman thereat, that the Jewish people are once again redeemed.

Indeed, the very next verse sees Charvonah, a compatriot of Haman and co-conspirator in the plot to destroy the Jews, rush to appease Achashveirosh by suggesting that Haman be hanged from the Tree (הנה העץ).⁴⁴ Immediately apparent, even to the most casual and cursory reader of the Megillah is the importance that wine and food served within the Megillah; and especially in this particular scene. Not only was wine and feasting the downfall of the Jews, it was their success as well.

⁴³ Esther 7:1-8. *And see*, Rashi, Song of Songs (Shir HaShirimi) 1:2 s.v.: ‘*Ki tovim,*’ “*Kol seudat oneg vi’simcha niqraat al shem hayayin.*”

⁴⁴ Esther 7:9. *And see*, Tr. Megillah 16a

Upon the Jewish people's escape from the clutches of the evil Haman, the Talmud proclaims: "Said Rava... they re-accepted it [the Torah] in the days of Achashveirosh, for it is written, '[the Jews] confirmed, and took upon themselves,' they confirmed what they had accepted long before. . . [קימו וקבלו היהודים קיימו מה שקבלו כבר]." Rashi explains that in the days of Purim, the nation of Israel re-accepted the Torah out of love of G-d for the miracle that He performed for the nation.⁴⁵

During the Purim age, the Jewish people re-united with Sinai. They commenced rectifying the iniquities of the past through their abstinence from wine and food by fasting on Pesach. The acts of Esther and the Jewish people within the Megillah, ushered in a new dawn,⁴⁶ beginning the process of the flowering of the Jewish people's final redemption.

IV. The Future—Purim, Pesach—Wine & Love

In the present, several thousand years after the miracles of Egypt, millennia succeeding the events of Sinai; and eons post the triumphs of Purim, the Jewish people remain steadfast and continue to celebrate and elevate these monumental Divine happenings. But, of all the Holidays presently celebrated, Purim is designated the singular Holiday which will be celebrated in the future days. As it says: "Purim will not cease in the future to come... [שכל המועדים עתידין ליבטל וימי הפרים אין בטלים לעולם]."⁴⁷ "...These days of Purim shall not disappear from among the Jews, nor the memory of them perish from their descendants."⁴⁸

Purim will come to symbolize the moment in time when the fusion between man and G-d was re-forged. Purim marked the start of our return to Eden. That was then and this is now; but what of tomorrow?

As such, on Pesach, the Rabbis directed that the Book, Song of Songs, be read publicly. The Rabbis in delving the depths of this distinguished song of

⁴⁵ Esther 9:27. *And see*, Tr. Shabbat 88a, and Rashi thereat.

⁴⁶ Maharsha, Tr. Yoma 29a.

⁴⁷ Yalqut Shimoni, Proverbs (Mishlei) 9:994. *See also*, Rambam, Hilchot Megillah 2:18: "All prophetic books and the sacred writings will cease (to be recited) during the Messianic era, except the Book of Esther. It will continue to exist, just as the Five Books of the Torah and the Oral Torah that will never cease."

⁴⁸ Esther 9:28.

love⁴⁹ expressing G-d's enduring and faithful love for his Chosen nation on their eventual re-marriage, explain, that it portends the future. Rashi's introduction to Song of Songs states:

Shlomo saw with Ruach Hakodesh that Israel is destined to be exiled ... and to remember the first love that they were a treasure among all the nations, saying, "Let me go and return to my first husband" ... He wrote this book with Ruach Hakodesh in the metaphor of an abandoned woman, who desires her husband ... and admits her rebellion. Her husband also shares in her troubles, and mentions the Chesed of her youth, ... letting her know that she is still his wife, and he is her husband, and he is destined to return to her.⁵⁰

Hence, in the end-days, the future days of redemption when the Jewish nation will be welcomed-back into the loving folds of G-d's embrace, the Song sings: "He brought me to the banquet hall of wine, and his attraction to me [was symbolic of his] love [הביאני אל בית היין]."⁵¹

Similarly, prior to the advent of the children of Israel into the Land of Israel, Moshe proclaimed: "You neither ate bread, nor drank new wine or old wine, in order that you would know that I am the Lord, your G-d. . . [לחם לא אכלתם ויין ושכר לא שתיתם למען תדעו כי אני ה' אלוקיכם]."⁵²

When the world is complete and the sins of the past are expiated, then will we, the Jewish people—upon our fitting and redeeming return to the Promised Land—lift our glasses of wine and toast our inevitable redemptive return with the fifth expression of redemption: "and I will bring you to the Land [והבאתי]."

והוצאתי... המוציא [לחם]...כי תבוא... והבאתי... הביאני...היין



⁴⁹ Mishnah, Yadayim 3:5.

⁵⁰ Rashi's Introduction to Song of Songs (Shir HaShirim).

⁵¹ Song of Songs (Shir HaShirim) 2:4.

⁵² Deuteronomy 29:5. (כי תבוא)

“EVEN IF WE WERE ALL WISE...”

By: Rabbi Richard Borah

I. The Obligation to Experience the Redemption from Egypt At the Seder

Each year at the Seder, every Jew is obligated to recount the story of how G-d brought the Jewish people out of Egypt, “with a strong hand and an outstretched arm,” performing great miracles and wonders on their behalf. This Mitzvah of recounting the Exodus (סיפור יציאת מצרים), is required of all Jewish adults, men and women. It is fulfilled in the telling or in the listening to the story as expressed in the Haggadah. It states clearly in the Mishnah Torah of the Rambam and the Haggadah itself, that our greatest scholars are required to perform this Mitzvah, even when scholars are reciting it to each other or when an individual scholar is alone and recites it to himself. The Haggadah states: “Even if we were all men of wisdom, understanding, experience, and knowledge of the Torah, it would still be an obligation upon us to tell about the Exodus from Egypt. The more one tells about the Exodus, the more he is praiseworthy.”¹

This statement in the Haggadah is followed by a description of the great Torah Sages of the Mishna (Tannaim²) who were performing a Seder among themselves in Bnei Brak. Maimonides, in his great work states that even “a great scholar,” is obligated in the Mitzvah of recounting the redemption at the Seder. The Rambam states: “Even great men of wisdom [חכמים גדולים] are obligated to recount the redemption from Egypt and all who increase their recounting of what occurred, they are praiseworthy.”³

This specific detail of the Rambam describing the requirement that even “great scholars” are required to perform the Mitzvah of recounting the redemption at the Seder, is, it seems to me, a response to an unstated question, “Why is a scholar, who is thoroughly versed in the details of the story of the redemption from Egypt, required to recount it to other scholars who also know

¹ הגדה של פסח.

² The Tannaim were the Rabbinic sages whose views are recorded in the Mishnah, from approximately 70-200 BCE. The period of the Tannaim, also referred to as the Mishnaic period, lasted about 130 years.

³ רמבם הל' חמץ ומצה ז"א.

it very well, or to himself?’ One could ask, ‘What purpose does it serve for such individuals to review a story they know so well?’

This idea (that perhaps you might think no purpose is to be served for the scholar to recount the Exodus), seems at first to me to be a curious one, requiring investigation. Torah scholars never complete their task of study. The Torah is “as deep as the sea” and “everything is contained within it.” So, why might one think that the scholar has completely exhausted the area of the redemption from Egypt any more than a scholar would be completely done with a Parsha in the Chumash or a Tractate of the Talmud? These are endless pursuits as the finite human mind attempts to understand the Divine revelations of the Torah! How could one consider that even the greatest scholar is done with understanding the redemption of the Jewish people from Egypt?!

The Rav (Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *zt'l*) analyzes the fact that the Rambam uses the term “great scholars [חכמים גדולים],” instead of the Haggadah’s term, “scholars [חכמים],” when describing the obligation to recount the redemption. The Rav states:

The Rambam in the 7th chapter of the Laws of Chometz and Matzah adds to the words of the Haggadah and writes, “even great scholars are obligated to recount into the redemption from Egypt.” This is the Rambam explaining the intent of the Haggadah that not only is a scholar obligated in recounting the redemption from Egypt, but also a great scholar is obligated. It seems that the Rambam learns this from the description (in the event that follows) about Rabbi Eliezer, that comes immediately after this statement to bring a support for the statement “even if we were all men of wisdom and understanding we would be obligated in recounting the redemption from Egypt,” since even the Tannaim recounted the redemption from Egypt.⁴

The Rambam’s clarification of the phrase “scholars [חכמים]” to include “great scholars [חכמים גדולים],” is illuminating. It makes clear that there is no level of scholarship or wisdom that would exempt a person from the obligation to recount the redemption from Egypt at the Seder. The Rav explains this specifically in his commentary on the Haggadah’s statement: “It is an obligation upon us to recount *into* the redemption from Egypt”. The Rav focuses in on the

⁴ הגדה של פסח' שיח הגר"ד' ד"ה, ואפילו כלנו חכמים.'⁴

unusual phrase here, “into the redemption from Egypt [בִּיצִיאת מצרים].” The Rav explains:

It would seem that the Haggadah should have written ‘it is an obligation upon us to recount the redemption from Egypt. . .

[את יציאת מצרים].’ But, since the Haggadah states. . .

‘בִּיצִיאת מצרים’ we must reflect on this particular language. We can explain this particular choice of words. It seems that the distinction between the two phrases is as follows: to recount something means to describe the thing and after you have described it and know it, there is no more to recount. This is not the case with. . .

‘בִּיצִיאת מצרים’. In this case, the explanation of the use of the phrase is to delve deeply into it and to clarify its foundations and not merely to recount the event. This is the meaning of the Haggadah when it states, “even if we were all men of wisdom and understanding and knowledgeable in the Torah” – even if we knew all the facts of the event of the redemption we have to delve deeply into the area.⁵

The Rav’s explanation, of course, makes perfect sense. The Torah scholar is not simply supposed to recount the story in its narrative form (i.e., the events that occurred), but must continually plum the depths of the underlying legal and philosophical principles that are associated with the events and laws of the redemption from Egypt. Once this is included as part of the Mitzvah of “telling the story of the redemption from Egypt,” it is clear to us that no scholar can ever complete the task. But I would ask the following: Of course this is so! Why might we have thought that the Mitzvah of סיפור יציאת מצרים (recounting the redemption from Egypt), would be limited to the telling of the series of events that occurred and no more? What about this Mitzvah of סיפור leaves us open to this possible interpretation? Why do we even *require* the clarification of the Haggadah and in the Halachic sources that in-depth analysis of the redemption is part of the Mitzvah?

II. This Recounting [סיפור] is Different than Other Storytelling

Perhaps we can explain why it is necessary for the Haggadah, the Rambam and the Rav to clarify for us that the Mitzvah of recounting the redemption includes in-depth study. First of all, the words ‘סיפור יציאת מצרים’

⁵ הגדה של פסח' שיח הגר"ד ד"ה 'מצוה עליו לספר ביציאת מצרים'.

is simply translated to: “tell the story of the redemption from Egypt.” It is not a Mitzvah of learning Torah (תלמוד תורה). Telling the story of an event does not usually include an analysis of the underlying concepts beneath the story. If, for example, I describe a hurricane that hit a particular town and destroyed some buildings and uprooted trees, I don’t usually include a discussion of meteorology and how hurricanes are formed. This is not “the telling of the story” of what happened. It is true that many news stories do go into background to explain the story, but these are two separate parts and I could certainly assume that the fulfillment of the Mitzvah of recounting (סיפור), would be confined to the description of events and would not include the background and analysis. If this is so, then I can see why I would have thought that יציאת מצרים might be limited to the description of events and, if this is the case, why the great scholars might be exempt. The basic events of the story of the redemption are completely known to them. To recount the events alone would add nothing to their knowledge. So the Haggadah and the Halachah comes to tell us that the analysis and background *are* included in the Mitzvah of סיפור and therefore, of course the scholars (even the greatest scholars), can benefit from further delving into the subject and are, therefore, obligated in this Mitzvah.

But we still have not explained:

- 1) Why it is that סיפור, in the case of the Haggadah, departs from its usual structure and includes background, analysis and studying the underlying principals of the story?
- 2) If this inclusion of in-depth analysis is part of the Mitzvah of recounting the story of the redemption from Egypt, why was the Mitzvah called סיפור and not learning about the redemption from Egypt (לימוד יציאת מצרים)?
- 3) If the Mitzvah includes the delving into the depths of study of the redemption and the Mitzvot related to it, why is it that the Mitzvah is performed in its optimal way when the facts of the “miracles and wonders” are told to a child who does not yet know the story? If the essence of this Mitzvah is the learning dimension, then it seems to me that the scholars’ סיפור, should be the optimal way to carry out the Mitzvah and not merely the default case which you might not think is even required!

Let’s address these questions one at a time. First, why is it that סיפור includes the in-depth analysis? The usual purpose of telling a story is to relate to someone the external aspects of the event. As the journalists say, the “who, what, where, why, when and how,” are the basis of reporting any story. This constitutes the usual boundaries of סיפור. But, the סיפור of the redemption of the Jewish people from Egypt serves a different purpose from that of the usual story. The fulfillment of the Mitzvah of the recounting of the Exodus (סיפור יציאת מצרים), is not simply to assure that the reader or

listener is informed of an event that occurred in the past. Instead, the reader of the Haggadah and those listening are supposed to *experience the redemption from Egypt themselves*. The Rav explains this point in analyzing once again the term. . .

“סיפור **ב**יצאת מצרים [to tell the story *in* the redemption from Egypt].” The Rav focuses again on the unusual use of the term “*in* the redemption [**ב**יצאת]” instead of, “*about* the redemption [**את** יציאת מצרים].” The Rav states:

It requires explanation why it states in the Haggadah that one is to “recount *into* the redemption from Egypt [**ב**יצאת מצרים],” whereas one would think the Haggadah should state to “recount *on* the redemption from Egypt [**על** יציאת מצרים].” It seems that the use of the phrase [**ב**יצאת מצרים], is to convey to us that the form and character of the recounting is to be done such that we enter with all our strength *into* [**ב**] the story and the Mitzvah is to tell all the details with full emotion until it seems on account of this telling that one feels as if he went out of Egypt. This is the recounting “into the redemption from Egypt [**ב**יצאת מצרים],” specifically, to be completely immersed in the body of the story, since this recounting is a “fulfillment of the heart [קיום שבלב],” and one is obligated to be completely absorbed *into* the story.⁶

We can understand from the Rav’s explanation that the Mitzvah of recounting the story of the Exodus (סיפור יציאת מצרים), is not simply a case of being informed about something that happened to others. At the Seder, the person is supposed to re-experience the events of the Exodus himself or herself, to feel it deeply as if it is happening to him or her right at that moment. There is an obligation, it seems, to call upon one’s imagination to relive the actual redemption in all of its glory.

There are other indications in the Haggadah of this obligation to actually experience the redemption from Egypt in the fulfillment of the Mitzvah סיפור יציאת מצרים. It states in the Haggadah:

In every generation one is obligated to look upon himself as if he personally had gone forth out of Egypt as it says: “And you shall relate to your child on that day, saying: “It is because of this that G-d acted for me when I came forth out of Egypt.” Not only our father did the Holy One Blessed be He redeem, but us too, He

⁶ הררי קדם' חלק ב' דה' מצוה עלינו וכו' דף ריג.

redeemed, together with them, as it says: “And He brought us out from there that He might bring us home to give to us the land which He had sworn to our fathers.”

What does the Haggadah really mean to say when it states that, “one is obligated to look upon himself [לראות את עצמו], as if he personally had gone forth out of Egypt?” You and I were not actually brought out of Egypt with Moshe and Aaron since we had not yet come into existence! Why am I then obligated to look at myself as if I was? It is certainly true that I have *benefited* from the redemption. In a similar way I would be “saved” if my mother was saved by a lifeguard from drowning when she was a child. The lifeguard did not “save me.” But, without the lifeguard’s actions, I would not be alive today. Is this all that is meant by the Haggadah: that I should realize that I owe my current situation of freedom to the redemption from Egypt? If so, why does the Haggadah state, “to look upon himself as if he personally had gone forth out of Egypt,” instead of stating, “as if he was redeemed from Egypt.” The Haggadah requires, that I look at myself not only as being redeemed through the Exodus; but that I was actually, “brought forth out of Egypt!” It does seem that it is required to actually *imagine* oneself as going through the experience of the actual redemption. One could ask the question: ‘Why is this experiencing of the redemption necessary?’

III. The Jew’s Relationship to G-d Requires Experiencing the Redemption From Egypt

Perhaps we can explain this requirement in the following manner: The act of redemption from Egypt was not only a historical event that created the Jewish nation at a point in time. The redemption from Egypt is an event that reveals the full relationship of G-d to each Jew. This revelation and the miracles and wonders were not simply to bring the Jews out of slavery to embark on a new path. Rather, the redemption’s purpose was to establish a new level of intimacy in the relationship between G-d and man. Until the redemption, the Creator had not revealed the full expression of His power, His concern for the Jewish people nor His relationship to the affairs of mankind. It is the experiencing of the redemption that fully revealed G-d to man. The freeing of the Jews from slavery was a historical necessity at that moment for the Jewish people. But more than this, the redemption was G-d revealing Himself to man, thus making possible the full fruition of man’s relationship to his Creator. The

Jew is destined and required to have this full relationship with G-d. It is for this reason that every Jew must actually experience the redemption.

But there is a problem. We weren't all present in Egypt to experience the miracles and wonders and the destruction of the Egyptians at the Sea of Reeds. So, how can we fully encounter G-d? How can we establish this full relationship with our Creator?

A human mind has a unique ability, it can imagine! We must, therefore, deeply imagine ourselves as living through the redemption from Egypt. We need to focus our energies on, not only studying and recounting the details of the miracles and wonders of the redemption, but on imagining ourselves living through these events. In this way, we too, to the extent of our abilities to imagine it, can also 'come forth from Egypt,' to fully establish our relationship with G-d.

The fulfillment of this requirement of 'experiencing' the redemption through the process of סיפור at the Seder, can be used to explain a number of elements of the Halachic structure of the Pesach Seder.

(1) *The obligation of pursuing in-depth study of the redemption.* The Rav explains inclusion of in-depth learning in the Mitzvah of סיפור as the explanation why even the greatest scholar is obligated in this Mitzvah. From the perspective of reliving the redemption at the Seder, this in-depth study can take on new meaning. We can unite the concepts of סיפור, and תלמוד תורה in this way: The in-depth study and understanding of an area is a path towards the imagining of the experience. When a scholar studies an area lightly, he learns the facts about the subject and some interesting detail. But, an in-depth study of the area allows for a deeper, more personal relationship with an event. The great scholar of any area can reach a point of intimacy with the information where the subject 'comes alive,' and is re-experienced by him or her. We can understand, in this way, how the in-depth לימוד of the redemption from Egypt can effectively lead a person to the re-experiencing of the redemption, which we are posing now as a goal of the סיפור. The study here is not a purely intellectual pursuit, but instead is done to accomplish a "fulfillment of the heart [קיום שבלב]," of personally experiencing the redemption from Egypt. So, it now becomes clear why the in-depth learning of the foundations, laws and events of the redemption are part of the Mitzvah of סיפור. This in-depth learning is an effective method of transforming the recounting of the story of the Exodus into a re-experiencing of the redemption.

(2) *The eating of the Matzoh and Marror.* The statement of: “In every generation one is obligated to look upon himself as if he personally went forth from Egypt,” is stated in the Haggadah immediately after the fulfillment of the Mitzvot of eating the Matzoh and the bitter herb (Marror). The eating of these foods is truly an unusual Mitzvah. Why do we need to eat Matzoh to remember the bread of affliction and why do we need to eat Marror to recall the bitterness of our enslavement in Egypt? The inclusion of the senses of sight, taste and smell in the סיפור serves to transform the recounting of the redemption from the purely abstract, reflective realm and vitalize it into an *aid to the imagination* in helping us to relive the redemption experience. It brings our senses and feelings into the retelling of the story and creates something of a re-enactment. Immediately after these Mitzvot and the eating of the Korach-sandwich, we are enjoined to envision ourselves as personally being redeemed from Egypt. These eating Mitzvot assist us in this process.

(3) *The drinking of the 4 cups of wine.* The drinking of four cups of wine is an obligation in סיפור. It is considered to be a sign of our freedom (חירות). But, why does the expression of freedom take the form of 4 cups of wine specifically? Perhaps an important benefit of this fairly large amount of wine at the Seder is that alcohol assists a person in freeing their imaginative faculty and dulls the dividing point between rationality and imagination to some extent. The mild intoxication experienced at the Seder can also serve as a useful tool in freeing the mind and assisting the person in imagining him or herself as actually participating in the redemption from Egypt on the night of the Seder. One does not usually drink wine while learning. Wine, especially 4 cups of wine, is not conducive to a usual form of in-depth learning. However, when we place as a purpose for the סיפור the stimulation of a person’s ability to imagine him or herself as being taken out of Egypt that night, the wine can be a definite aid in this process. The סיפור is certainly a form of learning. But, it is a specific type of learning in which one must partake in bold imaginative mental activity that has an almost dreamlike quality, in order to re-experience the redemption. For this task, 4 cups of wine can be a significant help.

(4) *The involvement of the children.* We have not yet discussed the central role of children in the Seder. There is a specific directive in the Torah of telling the story over to your children (והגדת לבנך). What is the special place of the child in this Mitzvah of יציאת מצרים?

If we maintain our focus on the obligation to re-experience the redemption, we can easily see how children play a major role. Children have the most active imagination, as we see in their games and play. They have little trouble imagining themselves in different roles they read about or create in their fantasies. As their rational faculty and reality testing are still weak, their imagination is less encumbered and is easily capable of dominating their thoughts. Children are therefore the ideal candidates to re-experience the redemption on the Seder night. For them, it is a much easier task to place themselves back in Egypt, viewing and hearing the miracles and experiencing the joy and exhilaration of the redemption. We, as their parents, must do all we can to draw them into the סיפור and assist them in living the experience of redemption. Perhaps, in helping our children experience the redemption at the Seder, we can invigorate our own imaginations and fulfill the Mitzvah to: “view ourselves as if we ourselves went out of Egypt.”

חֵיב אָדָם לְרֵאוֹת אֶת עַצְמוֹ כְּאִלּוּ הוּא יָצָא מִמִּצְרַיִם



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“...AND AFTERWARDS THEY WILL LEAVE WITH SUBSTANTIAL WEALTH.”

By: Dr. David Wiseman

I. The Promise to Avraham

The Mitzvos of the Seder, like a Seder plate itself, revolve around the requirements to retell the Exodus from Egypt. Reliving and experiencing, to some extent, the events of that first Pesach, when *B'nai Yisrael* became a People, and took their sheep to sacrifice their first *Korban Pesach*, should be our goal Pesach night. This Mitzvah is so important that *Chazal* heap praise on those who spend extended time in the retelling. “The more one tells about the Exodus, the more he is praiseworthy.”

Yet, one event from that first Pesach doesn't seem to occupy a significant part of the Haggadah, but was one event foretold to Avraham at the *Bris Bein Habissarim* (Covenant Between the Pieces), in Parshas Lech Lecha. “And He said to Avram, You should know that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs. They will enslave them and oppress them, for four hundred years. I will also pronounce judgment on the nation they will serve and afterwards they will leave with *rechush gadol* [substantial wealth].”¹ Understanding the reasons for, and the ways in which, the Jews left Egypt with tremendous wealth, is the purpose of this essay.

In addition to the promise to Avraham that his children would leave with great wealth, three references to wealth are made in Shemos. The first mention of *rechush gadol* is found in Parshas Shemos, Chapter 3 verses 21 and 22, when Hashem spoke to Moshe from the Burning Bush.

- I shall grant this people favor in the eyes of the Egyptians [*chein ha'am hazeh bi'einei Mitzrayim*], so that when you leave, you will not leave empty handed [*reykam*]. Each woman shall request [*v'shaalah*] from her neighbor and from those living in her house, silver and gold objects and clothing [*klei kessefu u'klei zahav u'semalos*]. You shall put them on your sons and on your daughters and you shall empty [*v'netzaltem*] Egypt [of its wealth].

¹ Genesis 15:13-14.

The second mention is after the completion of nine of the *Maccos*, as it states:

- Please speak [*daber na*] in the ears of the people and tell each man to request [*v'yishalu*] from his friend, and each woman from her friend, silver and golden vessels. Hashem granted the people favor in the eyes of the Egyptians [*chein ha'am b'einei Mitzrayim*]. Moshe was also a highly respected person in the eyes of Pharaoh's servants and in the eyes of the people.²

The third reference is after the Plague of the Firstborn and describes the actual exchange between the Israelites and the terrified Egyptians.

- The Children of Israel followed the order of Moshe, and they requested [*vayishalu*] from the Egyptians silver objects, golden objects, and robes. Hashem granted the people favor [*chein ha'am*] in the eyes of the Egyptians and they granted their request [*vayasheelum*]. They emptied out [*vayenatzlu*] Egypt.³

II. Chein HaAm

Having referenced the important sources from the Torah that discuss the *rechush gadol* (great wealth), we can begin an analysis of the textual similarities and differences found within these verses to gain a deeper understanding of the events as they unfolded. My interest in this topic stems from a question that bothered me while studying the *Parshiyos* this year. In all three references in Shemos, mention is made of *chein ha'am*, that Hashem granted *B'nai Yisrael* favor in the eyes of the Egyptians. What puzzled me is that after the Plague of the Firstborn, one could easily imagine the Egyptians being terrified of the Jews. The *B'nai Yisrael* should have easily been able to walk into the Egyptians' homes and demanded anything they wanted. It was the Jews' G-d that demonstrated His power, and de-facto should have empowered the Jews to take what they wanted. Why such a continued stress on *chein ha'am*, "finding favor in the Egyptians' eyes?"

We will bring the views and approaches of many of the classic commentaries shortly, but first I will endeavor to present an answer based on a Gemara in Baba Basra 47b.⁴ "If they hung him up [tortured him] and he sold an

² Exodus 11:2-3.

³ Exodus 12:35-36.

⁴ Similar *sugya* in Tr. Baba Kamma 62a.

object [apparently against his will], the sale is good. Once he takes money for the sold object he accepts his fate and commits to the transaction.” Rashi explains that this only works with a sale. But a gift is not considered a present or *matanah* when coercion or force is involved, since the one giving the gift receives nothing, and therefore does not complete the transaction, and the gift still belongs to the giver. The person bestowing the gift must be able to feel in his heart that, *rotzeh ani*, I truly want the other person to have this. This idea is echoed in the Rambam’s Mishneh Torah, where he contrasts coerced sale of items to *matanah* or gift. “We only follow the givers expressed *da’as* [intent or knowledge] when it comes to gifts. That if he does not want with all his heart to bestow this gift, the receiver has not acquired it.”⁵

We could then take this idea and apply it to the *B’nai Yisrael* as they requested the valuables from the Egyptians. Had they used force and coercion; at best, the possessions would still belong to the original owners; at worst, they could have been accused of robbery. But now that the People found favor in the Egyptians’ eyes, they gave the *B’nai Yisrael* of their own free-will with an open heart, giving even more than was requested of them.

III. Better to Give than to Lend

An interesting Gemara in Sanhedrin describes just this accusation of robbery made against the Jews during the times of Alexander the Great, but for a different reason. If we review our three scriptural references to wealth, we will find another common word: the concept of *vayishalu* or *shealah*. In everyday usage this means to borrow, implying it was lent to someone requiring it be returned. However, we previously translated *vayishalu*—‘and they requested.’ Most commentaries including: Rashbam, Rabbeinu Bachya, Rabbeinu Chananel, R’ Saadya Gaon and R’ Samson Raphael Hirsch, all understand the word *vayishalu* in these verses to mean a *bakasha* or request, providing many textual proofs to strengthen their opinion.

The Egyptians, in Alexander’s time, utilizing the translation that: “the Egyptians lent their valuables to the Jews,” are now requesting their gold and silver back, plus penalties and interest.

Said Gaviha ben Pasisa to the Sages, “permit me to go and argue with them in front of Alexander. If they vanquish me, say:

⁵ Rambam, Hilchos Mechirah 10:3.

‘You but vanquished our most ignorant one.’ But, if I vanquish them, tell them, “The Torah of Moshe our teacher vanquished you.” They gave him permission and he went and argued the case with them.... ‘He said to them it is stated: “Now the time that the children of Israel dwelt in Egypt was four hundred and thirty years.”⁶ Return me the wages of the six hundred thousand you enslaved in Egypt....’ Whereupon Alexander the Great said to them: ‘Answer him.’ They replied: ‘Give us three days respite.’ He gave them time: they searched but could find no answer.’⁷

We referenced the commentaries who understand that the Jews requested permanent gifts from the Egyptians and a number of reasons are given for why this was appropriate. The implication in Gemara Sanhedrin is that the Jews deserve some sort of compensation from the Egyptians for all the years of slavery. The *Mitzriyim* genuinely had remorse for the way in which they treated the Jews. Rav Hirsch explains that the *chein ha’am* allowed the Egyptians’ hatred for the Jews to lessen because the hatred was artificially spurned on and fostered by the Pharaoh and his government.

Another possible reason is found in Rabbeinu Bachya who explains that the *rechush gadol*, was not necessarily compensation for the work, but a present given to a slave after the completion of servitude; as is described concerning Jewish slaves. In the Torah, this gift is called, *hanakah*. “And if you send him free from you, don’t send him empty handed [*reykam*]. You shall give him many gifts [*haanik taanik*] from your flock ... Remember that you were slaves in the land of Egypt, and that Hashem, your Hashem redeemed you.”⁸

Malbim and Chizkuni on the one hand, describe *vayishalu* to mean a true gift in exchange for the homes and assorted properties and possessions the Jews would leave in Egypt when they left. That is why in Shemos 3:22 the verse says, “each woman should request from her neighbor.” The neighbor is the one who will take possession of their Jewish neighbor’s home as soon as it is vacated. On the other hand, they also take the approach that *B’nai Yisrael* really borrowed the gold and silver, either as the S’forno elaborates **in order** for the Egyptians to chase after *Am Yisrael* so that the completion of the *Geulah* would occur at the Yam Suf. Or, the Malbim’s approach that the valuables were really lent/borrowed with the intention to be used to serve Hashem during the

⁶ Citing, Exodus 12:40.

⁷ Tr. Sanhedrin 91a.

⁸ Deuteronomy 15:13-15.

planned three day journey, and that *B'nei Yisrael's* intention was to return the possessions back to *Mitzrayim*. After the Plague of the Firstborn, when the Egyptians forcefully released the Jews from bondage, they in essence abandoned hope of getting their wealth back.

IV. Women First

The Midrash Chemdas Hayamim on the *pasuk*: “And each woman shall request from her neighbor,”⁹ explains that the *B'nos Yisrael* (daughters of Israel) bribed the taskmasters and officials not to kill their newborns. Some gave them jewelry to look the other way. These righteous women (*nashim tzidkaniyos*) were able to save some of the newborn boys and Hashem now gives instructions that every woman shall ask her neighbor back for what had been taken in bribes; there was no deception, only restitution.

The *Sefer Ozneyim LaTorah*, authored by Rabbi Zalmen Sorotzkin, also references these *nashim tzidkaniyos* or righteous women, in questioning why in Exodus 3:22 the command is made only of the women to request of their neighbors' possessions, in contrast to Shemos 11:2, where both men and women were commanded. Rabbi Sorotzkin explains that the women in Egypt always had more faith than the men. Their minds could accept and believe that even with the suffering getting worse, a time will come when their people will leave Egypt; they never lost faith in Hashem's promise to Avraham. The men were so wrapped-up in their day-to-day hardships, they couldn't even fathom the details of a pending redemption. They were only spoken to concerning the request of the Egyptians' valuables after the ninth *Maccah*, at which point even the men could appreciate their imminent redemption. It is an appropriate point to mention a well known saying from *Chazal* that because of the *nashim tzidkaniyos* we were redeemed from Egypt and because of the *nashim tzidkaniyos* we will once again, someday be redeemed.¹⁰ (Speedily in our days!)

If Hashem wanted, He could have provided us wealth through other means than going to our neighbor to ask for some pots and clothes. But, it seems specifically that Hashem wanted the promise to Avraham to be carried out in just this way. It is well known that one of the reasons for the Plague of Darkness was to allow the Jews an opportunity to search their neighbors' homes for the locations of all the valuables. Thus, when the time arrived to leave

⁹ Exodus 3:22.

¹⁰ Tr. Sotah 11b.

Egypt, the *Mitzriyim* would be unable to successfully deny having any of the requested items. Imagine how awed the Egyptians must have been that the Jews had every opportunity to not only search out the possessions but to take them as well; and yet they waited to actually allow the *Mitzriyim* to give them to the *B'nai Yisrael* in the open, without deception. Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch explains that this proved their sterling moral quality. “This recognition of the moral nobility of the Jews at last overcame the Egyptians’ antipathy to the Jews. This moral greatness on the part of his [Moshe’s] people more than all the miracles he performed made Moshe Great in the eyes of the Egyptians.”¹¹

Ramban explains that the Egyptians were forced to admit that, “We are the wicked ones. There is violence in our hands and you merit that Hashem be gracious to you.” Perhaps the *chein ha’am*, the favor the Egyptians felt, was not a reflection of their personal feelings towards the Israelites, but rather a perception of Hashem showering His Grace (*chein*) on His Chosen People.

V. A Big Small Word

The second of our three references begins with a unique modifier. The verse in Shemos 11:2 begins, “*Daber na* (please speak).” Hashem is asking Moshe to kindly make the request of the *B'nai Yisrael* to ask the Egyptians for their wealth. Rashi quotes part of the Gemara in Brachos 9a that deals with our topic and hints at the Jews’ reticence to ask their former taskmasters and enemies for the *recush gadol*. “*Na* [please] in this context is an expression of request. Please keep on reminding them so that that the righteous man (Avraham) should not say: ‘and they shall serve them and they shall afflict them.’¹² He did fulfill through them, ‘and afterward they shall come out with great substance,’ He did not.” What is the source of their reticence? Why does Hashem say “*Na*—please,” almost coaxing the People to get something they most definitely deserve? Interestingly the *please* is preceded by *daber*—speak, which is understood as a harsh *Lashon*; implying, that as much as they may not want to go to their neighbor, it is a command from Hashem and must be carried-out. Still, why would *B'nai Yisrael* be hesitant and reticent? The Gemara in Brachos continues with a parable about a man in prison who is told, “We are releasing you tomorrow and giving you a lot of money.” The man responds, “release me today and I won’t ask for anything.” The *B'nai Yisrael* after all they have been through just want to leave.

¹¹ Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, Exodus 11:13

¹² Exodus 11:2.

Rabbi Soretzkin in *Oznayim LaTorah* asks along the same line, “Did the *B’nai Yisrael* find silver and gold so disgusting and distasteful that they had to be urged to ask for it?” Did Hashem really have to make a special request of them to search it out and request it? The poignancy of his answer will strike a chord for most of us. Rabbi Sorotzkin explains that many Rabbis have asked the question and the answer eluded them. After the Holocaust, the answer should be clear to all of us. After the unspeakable acts of horror our people endured, and after the incomprehensible price of six million Jews was extracted from us, an additional indignity was thrust upon the survivors. After the Germans lost, the discussion turned to the handling of reparations. Some may have felt the Germans should pay whatever they could and more. Yet, for other survivors, the thought of receiving any “blood money” turned their stomachs. Many emphatically refused to even enter into discussions concerning reparations of any kind. How could we ever let the *Goyim* think we took anything as compensation for all that we lost?

With these feelings still vivid, we can reevaluate our forefathers’ feelings when leaving *Mitzrayim*. The Egyptians killed our sons, threw them into the sea and tortured us, and now we will take some money as compensation?! Better, they felt, we take nothing at all. Hashem made the request in order to fulfill his promise to Avraham, not so much for those who would prefer not to take even a small coin from Egypt.

The reticence of the *B’nai Yisrael* was used as a defense by Moshe after the sin of the golden-calf. In *Brachos 32a* Moshe tells Hashem: “you forced the Jews to take the vessels of gold and silver,” hoping to mitigate the punishment to the people. The lesson from the *rechush gadol* is that we have decisions to make in how we spend the money we earn. The *B’nai Yisrael* had a choice how to use their massive wealth. Many made the right choice in dedicating it for the construction of the *Mishkan*. Others threw their money away making a golden-calf.

VI. Olam Chesed Yebaneh

Rav Shimon Schwab in his *Sefer, Ma’Ayan Bais Ha-Sho’eva*, helps us to complete our analysis of the Jews’ need to leave with this massive wealth. Rabbi Schwab’s commentary is related to the last part of our third reference. Exodus 12:36 concludes, “*v’yenatzlu es Mitzrayim—and they emptied out Mitzrayim.*” Rav Schwab quotes from the *sugya* in *Brachos 9b* that, “*Mitzrayim* was emptied like a trap without grain or like a pond without fish.” A lot more was at stake

than the gold and silver being requested. In explanation, Rav Schwab says, that when a wicked person actually has a good *Middah*, if he meets a *tzaddik*/righteous person and utilizes this good trait with the righteous person, and if by miracle the wicked one uses this *Middah* to its ultimate actualization (its *Shleimusah*), for the *tzaddik's* benefit, the wicked person loses this *Madraigah* forever. It actually comes into the possession of the righteous one.

So, when Hashem commanded that the men and women request from their “friends,” a miracle occurred that the Egyptians could look at the Jews within the context of friendship. And the Egyptians gave even more than what was asked of them even against the Jews’ will. There was a spirit of *Hakaras Hatov*, recognition and appreciation, for the servitude of the Jews. The *Middos* of *Hakaras Hatov*, *Chesed*, *Chein* and friendship are what the *B’nai Yisrael* took from the *Mitzriyim*, not just gold and silver. That is the meaning of *vayinatzlu*—they were divested of the one redeeming quality they had. They were now like a pond without fish. The *Mitzriyim* thought there was great personal gain in enslaving the Jews. In the end, Egypt was financially and morally bankrupt. They thought they were ensnaring the Jews in the trap and they were left empty handed; the trap was empty. All their value was gone and missing; it was taken from them.

Rav Schwab concludes, that the ‘what’ and the ‘why’ of *rechush gadol* are only as important as to the ‘how’ the *B’nai Yisrael* acquired the wealth. The only way to fulfill His promise to that *Tzaddik*, i.e., to Avraham, that they would leave with a *rechush gadol*, is only if Avraham’s descendents would acquire this vast wealth through his overreaching essence; what made him that *Tzaddik*, was *Chesed*.

VII. The Promise Continues

The focus of the Seder is a reflection of our historic Exodus from Egypt, but with a stark contrasting shade of our continued struggles in our own exile. We sit and lean like kings and yet again we sing bitter sweetly at the end of our Seder, “*L’shanah haba’ah bi’Yerushalayim* [next year in Jerusalem].” This dichotomy is found throughout the Seder night and yet we should be uplifted when we think about our past redemption.

The Solonomer Rebbe in his *Sefer*, *Nesivos Shalom*, describes the Exile in Egypt and ultimate redemption as the template for our continued exile and ultimate *Geulah*. Some say our *Galus* is our payback for leaving Egypt 190 years early. Either way, we know the promise to Avraham to redeem his children is

eternal. This promise is how we know Hashem will save us in every generation (*v'hee she'amdah*). If we study the way the Jews left Egypt with Hashem providing for their sustenance, then as we rapidly approach the time of our future redemption, *Z'man Geulasenu*, we can more effectively reflect on our history to grasp the faith we need to deal with the uncertainties of the future.





THE TIME OF OUR FREEDOM— THE POWER OF FREE WILL

By: Rabbi Dr. David N. Lifschutz

The Holiday of Passover is known and referred to ubiquitously as “the time of our freedom.”¹ “G-d heard their moaning, and G-d remembered the covenant with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob;”² and through great miracles and overtly manifest Divine providence, G-d freed the children of Israel from a two hundred-year plus bondage in the land of Egypt. But, when we refer to the holiday commemorating these events as “the time of our freedom,” are we simply recognizing a freedom from a physical slavery; it would appear that there is more depth to this declaration, “the time of our freedom.”

To further understand the meaning and significance of this new found “freedom,” let us look at some of the significant events in the story of the Exodus. One of the intriguing and captivating subplots in the Exodus story relates to the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart. Prior to the beginning of the ten plagues, G-d tells Moses that: “I will harden Pharaoh’s heart and I will thus increase the number of My signs and wonders in the land of Egypt.”³

Even when Moses encounters G-d while still in Midian, he is told the following:

The Lord said to Moses, “When you go to return to Egypt, see all the signs that I have placed in your hand and perform them before Pharaoh, but I will strengthen his heart, and he will not send out the people. And you shall say to Pharaoh, ‘So said the Lord, “My firstborn son is Israel.”’ So I say to you, ‘Send out My son so that he will worship Me, but if you refuse to send him out, behold, I am going to slay your firstborn son.’”⁴

If we follow the narrative, however, G-d does not intervene to harden Pharaoh’s heart until after the sixth plague—boils. After each of the first five plagues, the narrative tells us that “the heart of Pharaoh remained firm,” or

¹ See *For Example*, Shemoneh Esrei and Kiddush for the festivals.

² Exodus 2:24.

³ Exodus 7:3.

⁴ Exodus 4:21-23.

“Pharaoh hardened his heart.”⁵ Only after the plague of boils does the Torah state: “the sorcerers could not stand before Moses because of the rash, since the rash had attacked the sorcerers and all Egypt. G-d hardened Pharaoh’s heart, and he did not listen to them [the sorcerers], just as G-d had said to Moses.”⁶ Then, before the seventh plague, G-d makes the following declaration:

Because this time, I am sending all My plagues into your heart and into your servants and into your people, in order that you know that there is none like Me in the entire earth. For if now I had stretched forth My hand, and I had smitten you and your people with pestilence, you would have been annihilated from the earth. But, for this [reason] I have allowed you to stand, in order to show you My strength and in order to declare My name all over the earth.⁷

This narrative suggests that G-d did not destroy Pharaoh and the Egyptians in order to merely complete the cycle of the ten plagues and in so doing, demonstrate His might so that His “name might be discussed in all the world.” This narrative instead suggests that in order for the mission to be completed according to plan, it was necessary to harden Pharaoh’s heart in order to prevent Pharaoh from the ability to free the Jewish people at any point in the midst of the cycle of the ten plagues.

According to Maimonides, “Free Will” is not only an imperative belief on its own accord but is an essential belief underlying the very foundations of reward and punishment and G-d’s system of justice.

One has a free choice to follow either the good ways and to be righteous, or to follow the bad ways and be wicked. The Torah says, “Behold, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil...” ... this matter [of there being a free will] is a very important principle, and is a support of the Torah and meritorious deeds, as it is written, “See, I have set before you on this day life and good, and death and evil...” This is to say that one has the free will to do what one wants, whether it is good or bad. It is for this reason that it is written, “O that there were such a heart in them”, i.e. the Creator does not force or decree upon anybody to do good or bad, but lets them choose. ... If the Almighty did decree upon everybody to be

⁵ See for example, Exodus 7:22; 8:11; 8:15; 8:28; 9:7.

⁶ Exodus 9:11-12.

⁷ Exodus 9:14-16.

righteous or wicked, or if there was something which guided one from birth to one of the many ways, knowledges, temperaments or ways of acting, like the stupid astrologers think, then how could we have been commanded by the Prophets to do one thing and not the other, to improve our ways and not to follow the wicked people?! Has one's destiny been decreed upon one at birth, or does the time of one's birth govern one's destiny irrevocably? ... Therefore, one is judged according to one's actions, whether they are good or bad. The Prophets have said, "...this has been your own doing," and, "For they have chosen their own ways" ... one has the potential to do what one wants, but that one will be judged accordingly."⁸

From a purely philosophic perspective, why would G-d then interfere with Pharaoh's free will? And if G-d did harden Pharaoh's heart at the very moment he was ready to capitulate to Moses' demands, why would Pharaoh deserve to be punished for his continuing refusal to free the Jewish nation? Furthermore, if Pharaoh was so inclined to free the Jewish nation after the first six plagues then what was the practical purpose of hardening Pharaoh's heart; why was it important to complete the cycle of the ten plagues and thus "increase the number of My signs and wonders in the land of Egypt."⁹ More fundamentally, what was the purpose of the ten plagues to begin with; G-d could have simply freed the Jewish nation from their bondage in one fell swoop. As G-d Himself declared: "For if now I had stretched forth My hand, and I had smitten you and your people with pestilence, you would have been annihilated from the earth;" namely, with one plague (e.g., the epidemic killing the Egyptians' animals), rather than ten, G-d could have simply destroyed the Egyptians and freed the Jewish nation.

In order to begin to understand the answers to these questions, I think a deeper understanding of the concept of free will is in order. In the history of ideas, the topic of determinism and free will is vast and encompasses many disciplines. The question of free will is whether, and in what sense, rational agents exercise control over their actions and decisions. Determinism is the philosophical proposition that every event, including human cognition and behavior, decision and action, is causally determined by an unbroken chain of prior occurrences.¹⁰

⁸ Maimonides, *Laws of Repentance* 1:1-4.

⁹ Exodus 7:3.

¹⁰ Van Inwagen, Peter, *An Essay on Free Will* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983).

Rabbi Aryeh Carmel¹¹ summarizes the problem as the following: “Is man nothing but a bio-chemical mechanism, his existence the product of blind evolutionary forces, his actions wholly determined by his past? Or is he a free being, created in the image of G-d, responsible to his Maker for his actions, and possessing a potential and a destiny that vastly transcend the material realm?”¹² Rabbi Carmel defends the Torah’s position of free will at great length against both philosophical and scientific arguments in favor of determinism.

With the advent of new technologies, however, researchers can now study the brain’s decision-making processes at work. Various scientific experiments suggest that decisions made by a subject are first being made on an unconscious level and only afterward are translated into a “conscious decision,” and that the subject’s belief that the decision was the result of their free will was only due to a retrospective perspective on the events.¹³ Other experiments show that neurostimulation can affect people’s decisions, even though the experience of free will was intact; despite the external influence on their decision-making, subjects continued to report that they believed their choice had been made freely.¹⁴

The philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer wrote over 150 years ago:

Everyone believes himself *a priori* to be perfectly free, even in his individual actions, and thinks that at every moment he can commence another manner of life. ...But *a posteriori*, through experience, he finds to his astonishment that he is not free, but

¹¹ Aryeh Carmel, main redactor of “Michtav Ma’Eliyahu” embodied in the English version “Strive for Truth.”

¹² Carmel, Aryeh, *Freedom, providence, and the scientific outlook*. (In Challenge, ed. A. Carmell and C. Domb, Feldheim Publishers, New York, 1972; pgs. 306-342).

¹³ Libet, B., Gleason, C.A., Wright, E.W., Pearl, D.K. (1983), *Time of conscious intention to act in relation to onset of cerebral activity (readiness-potential)*. The unconscious initiation of a freely voluntary act. *Brain*. 106 (3):623–642. *And see*, Libet, B. (1985) Unconscious cerebral initiative and the role of conscious will in voluntary action. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 8: 529–566. *See also*, Haggard, P. and Eimer, M. (1999), on the relation between brain potentials and the awareness of voluntary movements. *Experimental Brain Research* 126, 128–133.

¹⁴ Ammon, K. and Gandevia, S.C. (1990) Transcranial magnetic stimulation can influence the selection of motor programmes. *Journal of Neurology, Neurosurgery and Psychiatry* 53:705–707.

subjected to necessity, that in spite of all his resolutions and reflections he does not change his conduct, and that from the beginning of his life to the end of it, he must carry out the very character which he himself condemns....¹⁵

In more recent times, philosophy of cognitive sciences and evolutionary psychology argue that deterministic processes leads to a generation of behavior patterns so computationally complex, it creates the illusion of their unpredictability, and the perception of free will¹⁶

Regardless of the ultimate validity and success of the scientific communities' endeavors to demonstrate that man does not have free will—only the illusion of personal choice—if we could allow the realm of natural law and science to maintain the possibility of determinism with no threat to the validity of free will in the moral and metaphysical realm, I would argue we would be better off to begin with; we would no longer need to feel threatened by the endeavors of science in this regard and we could embrace the advances of the cognitive sciences to appreciate the wisdom of G-d's creation in all its facets.

It is interesting and important to note, that when these neuro-cognitive experiments investigate the question of “Free Will” they all dissect mental processes of meaningless and rote activities (such as the decision to lift the right hand or the left hand), as opposed to moral decisions. In this light, it is important to observe that Maimonides' discussion of free will is only in the context of moral decisions.¹⁷ Maimonides never argues that all decisions are under the influence of free will.

¹⁵ Schopenhauer, Arthur, *The Wisdom of Life*, p 147.

¹⁶ Kenrick, D. T., Li, N. P., & Butner, J. (2003). “Dynamical evolutionary psychology: Individual decision rules and emergent social norms.” *Psychological Review*, 2003 Jan; 110(1):3–28. *See also*, Epstein J.M. and Axtell R. (1996) *Growing Artificial Societies—Social Science from the Bottom*. Cambridge MA, MIT Press.

¹⁷ See above quote from Maimonides, *supra* fn.#8.

Compatibilism is the view that the existence of free will and the truth of determinism are compatible with each other.¹⁸ The S'forno,¹⁹ in my opinion, presents a view of compatibilism that beautifully allows the scientific community to establish a deterministic reality in the realm of natural law with no threat to the metaphysical existence of free will in the realm of morality. It is worth a careful reading of the S'forno on the verse: “[And as for] the garment that has the lesion of *tzara'ath* upon it, on a woolen garment, or on a linen garment.” S'forno's comments read as follows:

In truth, the Torah is attesting that at times this wonder [phenomena] will occur in garments and in houses so as to awaken [open] the ear of the owners to their transgressions ... All this is because of G-d's compassion for His people ... This is so, for in truth the human species represents the ultimate purpose intended [by the Creator] in all existence, particularly among mortal beings, for he alone among all [creatures] is predisposed to be like the Creator in intellect and deed, as He, the Blessed One, testifies saying, “In our image after our likeness.”²⁰ Now this is justly so regarding all humans [who possess] human reason, which is called ‘the image of G-d,’ and [who possess] the power of **free will** which is called ‘G-d's likeness,’ for among all creation man alone possesses **free will**. When [man] is aroused to reflect upon the existence of his Creator, His greatness and goodness, in Whom there is abundant kindness and truth, through [which] He performs righteousness and justice; after perceiving and recognizing [all] this he will walk in His ways, making His will as his own [will]. Behold, in this manner he becomes, without a doubt, like unto his Creator more so than all other creatures, and this is the ultimate purpose intended from the Creator who brought [all] into

¹⁸Many different theories are proposed regarding the compatibility of determinism with free will. See for example: Hobbes, T. (1651) *Leviathan* (1968 edition). London: Penguin Books; and see, Hume, D. (1740). *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1967 edition). Oxford University Press, Oxford; see also, James, W. (1907) *Pragmatism* (1979 edition). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

¹⁹Obadiah ben Jacob Sforno, was an Italian rabbi, Biblical commentator, philosopher and physician. He was born at Cesena about 1475 and died at Bologna in 1550. One of the characteristic features of his exegetical work is respect for the literal meaning of the text and a reluctance to entertain mystical interpretations.

²⁰Genesis 1:26.

existence as it says, “And the righteous one is the foundation of the world.”²¹ [But], when a deceived heart turned man aside from his [path] for he listened [instead] to the power of physical temptations in all, or some, of his actions, [causing him] to be lax in [fulfilling] the will of his Maker to rebel against Him, then his punishment was everlasting or transitory according to Divine judgment as it says, “For I will not justify the wicked.”²² Now when this occurs to man, who sins in error, he will suffer pain [or loss] in his possessions or physical being, according to divine wisdom to alert his ear, as it says, “He opens also their ear to discipline.”²³ However, those who slumber and are not awoken at all to know any of these things, these being the gentiles and the majority of the Israelite nation save an elite few, [hence] they, without a doubt are under the control [lit., conduct] of nature and the heavenly forces, which are superior to these human beings, similar to other living creatures who are not subject to G-d’s providence individually but only in terms of their species, for through them [i.e., the species as a whole] the intent of their Creator, Blessed is He, is fulfilled....²⁴

S’forno therefore equates the power of free will to G-d’s likeness as a unique metaphysical event—bestowed on man alone—elevating man to ‘G-d’s likeness;’ it is a power rarely exercised by not only the majority of the non-Jewish world but by a majority of the Israelite nation as well, “save an elite few.”

My Rosh Yeshiva, Rabbi Israel Chait (*shlita*), explained that for most people, free will is in fact an illusion; the day-to-day mundane decisions that people make are no more than the product of a deterministic reality guided by a string of causally related unconscious motivations. Even seemingly moral decisions made by people are usually the result of an outside or unconscious influence rather than a true free will gesture. According to Rabbi Chait, the potential for the free will gesture, while dormant is always viable, and at any moment in one’s life, a person can be jostled and shaken; and in the words of the S’forno be “aroused” to exercise their power of free will.

²¹ Proverbs 10:25.

²² Exodus 23:7.

²³ Job 36:10.

²⁴ S’forno’s understanding of Divine providence and free will, echoes Maimonides’ presentation regarding providence, discussed in *The Guide to the Perplexed* (III:17-18).

It is for this reason that Maimonides speaks of free will in terms of only lofty moral decisions: “One has a free choice to follow either the good ways and to be righteous, or to follow the bad ways and be wicked.” The free will gesture is a unique event that occurs at a crossroads for man; a possible once in a lifetime confrontation with good and evil where a clear and rational choice is made based on a deep understanding of the situation at hand.

The Torah states:

Now Joseph died, as well as all his brothers and all that generation. The children of Israel were fruitful and swarmed and increased and became very very strong, and the land became filled with them. A new king arose over Egypt, who did not know about Joseph. He [Pharaoh] said to his people, “Behold, the people of the children of Israel are more numerous and stronger than we are. Get ready, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they increase, and a war befall us, and they join our enemies and depart from the land.”²⁵

Regardless of whether this “new king” was in fact a new king or the same king with a new disposition, I propose the following thesis, namely, that this was the very moment in time when Pharaoh was confronted with a true free will gesture/opportunity, and his free will choice was to “follow the bad ways and be wicked.” With the death of Joseph, Pharaoh was at a political and philosophical crossroads. Joseph not only saved Egypt from famine and destruction, he did so wearing the mantle of G-d’s prophetic visions; his rise to power in a land with ideas antithetical to the ideals of Abraham and monotheism was itself a demonstration of his positive influence over Egyptian culture at that time.

Pharaoh said to his servants, “Can another one like this be found, a man who has God’s spirit in him? Pharaoh said to Joseph ‘After God has informed you of all this, there is no one so understanding and wise as you. You shall be over my house, and by your word shall all my people be fed... behold, I have placed you in charge of the entire Egypt.’ Pharaoh then took off his ring from his hand, and placed it on Joseph’s hand...”²⁶

With the death of Joseph and the generation that witnessed G-d’s providence first hand, Pharaoh had a choice to make. Pharaoh could choose to

²⁵ Exodus 1:6-10.

²⁶ Genesis 41:38-42.

remember Joseph and what he stood for and govern the nation according to those moral ideals; or, Pharaoh could choose to forget Joseph and his philosophy and rule Egypt with his base and primitive emotions, looking only to his self aggrandizement, threatened by the “very, very numerous” children of Israel, whose very existence was a threat to Pharaoh’s own god complex.

While intellectually Pharaoh knew the truth, he had an opportunity, at this very moment in time, to take back his ring that he had previously “placed on Joseph’s hand,” and become a god in his own right. So, at this moment, Pharaoh chose to ignore the true Divine influence in the world, no matter what miracles might jolt him; he already knew the truth and decided to reject it; what good would further miracles do to change his mind. However, Pharaoh was still human and the same primitive emotions that led him to seek power would ultimately lead him to try and preserve whatever power he may have had a chance to sustain, even if that meant freeing the children of Israel.

Nevertheless, that decision to eventually free the Jewish nation does not mean that it was a free will gesture. On the contrary, when Pharaoh was ready to succumb to Moses’ demands after the sixth plague, it was only to preserve what power and assets he had left in Egypt; he was worn down, his people were probably beginning to lose faith in his leadership and even his close advisers, the sorcerers and astrologers, could no longer “stand before Moses.” Hence, the Divine intervention to harden Pharaoh’s heart was not at all an interference with Pharaoh’s power of free will but rather it was simply to intervene in the realm of deterministic processes already in control of Pharaoh’s actions. G-d’s intervention was to simply strengthen Pharaoh’s resolve; G-d did not want Pharaoh to free the Jewish nation based on pressure. As we will see later, the S’forno argues that had Pharaoh wished to free the children of Israel based on a true free will decision, G-d would never have intervened with his free will. For this reason, even the terminology, ‘the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart,’ is with reference to the organ commonly used regarding man’s passions and desires (e.g., the heart); rather than the organ associated with the intellectual faculties of man (e.g., the brain).

Nachmanides argues this very point concerning what is written: “But I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, and I will increase My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt,”²⁷ and delivers the following commentary:

²⁷Exodus 7:3.

...half of the plagues came upon him because of his transgressions, for in connection with them it is only said: "And Pharaoh's heart was hardened;" And Pharaoh hardened his heart." Thus Pharaoh refused to let the children of Israel go for the glory of G-d. But when the plagues began bearing down upon him and he became weary to suffer them, his heart softened and he bethought himself to send them out on account of the onslaught of the plagues, not in order to do the will of his Creator. Then "G-d hardened his spirit and made his heart obstinate," so that His name may be declared [throughout all the earth]... .. this then is the meaning of the verse [before us], "And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and multiply My signs." That is to say, "I will harden his heart so that My wonders may be multiplied in the land of Egypt," since in the last five plagues, as well as at the drowning in the sea, it is said, "And the Eternal hardened the heart of Pharaoh, for the king's heart is in the hand of the Eternal; He turneth it whithersoever He will."²⁸

The S'forno is even clearer regarding these matters and argues that had Pharaoh truly wished to exercise his metaphysical "power of free will," G-d would never have intervened: "And I will harden."²⁹ S'forno writes:

...without a doubt, were it not for the hardening of Pharaoh's heart he would have sent forth Israel, not because of repentance or submission to G-d, the Blessed One, (nor because) he regretted his rebellion, recognizing G-d's greatness and goodness—but because he could no longer abide the anguish of the plagues, as his (own) servants said, "Do you not know that Egypt is lost."³⁰ Now this would not have been repentance. However, if Pharaoh would have (truly) wished to submit to G-d, the Blessed One, and return to Him in full repentance, there would have been no (Divine) deterrent at all. Now, G-d states, "and I will harden Pharaoh's heart," granting him the strength to withstand the plagues, hence he will not send forth Israel because he fears the plagues."

The question however remains, why was it so important for G-d to complete the cycle of the ten plagues and what was the purpose of the ten plagues? This same S'forno addresses this question as well, commenting:

²⁸ Nachmanides, Exodus 7:3.

²⁹ S'Forno, Exodus 7:3.

³⁰ Exodus 10:7.

... the signs and wonders will be increased for the purpose of bringing the Egyptians to repentance, by demonstrating to them His greatness and kindness, through the signs and wonders, as it says, "For this cause I have made you to stand to show you My power."³¹ [Another reason was] so Israel would see and [be brought to] reverence, as it says, "That I might show My signs in their midst... that you may tell...."³² Now, G-d states, "and I will harden Pharaoh's heart, granting him the strength to withstand the plagues, hence he will not send forth Israel because he fears the plagues, "but that I might show My signs in their midst," through which they will perceive My greatness and goodness and repent to a degree, in sincerity. [And also] that "you may tell," i.e., "you" Israel who see their anguish, [may tell] "in the ears of your son," to tell [everyone] that all these things does G-d work with man,³³ so as to bring [man] to repentance, which will occur if they examine their deeds when misfortune befalls them.

Tradition has it that the Jewish people at the time of the Exodus were steeped in sin and idolatry. Thus, they were living under a deterministic system guided by the general laws of nature and causality. According to the S'forno, they were generally considered to be likened, to what he previously commented: "those who slumber and are not awoken at all to know any of these things... are the majority of the Israelite nation save an elite few, [hence] they, without a doubt are under the control [lit., conduct] of nature and the heavenly forces, which are superior to these human beings," and thus control man in a deterministic realm. But G-d is compassionate, and when man follows the "power of physical temptations in all, or some, of his actions, [causing him] to be lax in [fulfilling] the will of his Maker or to rebel against Him," G-d calls to man and alerts "his ear," as it says, "He opens also their ear to discipline."³⁴ The ten plagues are in fact this calling, not only for the generation of the time, but for all generations.

The ten plagues were designed by G-d to demonstrate His omnipotence in a revealed, carefully fashioned and unique way, never before so apparent to man. The plagues were a grand display of G-dly intervention into the affairs of

³¹Exodus 9:16.

³²Exodus 10:1-2.

³³Based on, Job 33:29.

³⁴Job 36:10.

man never duplicated since. In the Haggadah we are introduced to the famous acronym which was inscribed on Moses' staff: DeTZaKh (blood, frogs, lice); ADaSh (beasts, plague, boils); and BeAChaB (hail, locust, darkness, death to the first born). According to Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch,³⁵ the first three plagues, DeTZaKh (blood, frogs, lice), is the revelation of G-d's power over the water and land. The next three plagues, ADaSh (beasts, plague, boils), is the revelation of G-d's power over the living inhabitants of the land, and the next three plagues, BeAChaB (hail, locust, darkness), is the revelation of G-d's power over the atmosphere. Rabbi Hirsch explains that the last plague, death to the first born, finally brought the process to a climax and accomplished the redemption.

In my opinion, the last plague demonstrates G-d's control over all decisions of life and death. I would suggest that the splitting of the Sea of Reeds, finally accomplishes the redemption. Furthermore, the splitting of the Sea of Reeds is a testimonial of G-d, that the purpose of the ten plagues was not simply the demonstration of G-d's mastery over all things, but that G-d specifically intervened for the purpose of the ultimate redemption of the Jewish people as demonstrated by the splitting of the sea to save the Jewish nation and lead them to Mount Sinai where they would ultimately receive the Torah.

The Torah commands us to remember the Exodus from Egypt every day, as it states: "You shall not eat leavened bread with it, for seven days you shall eat Matzot because of it, bread of affliction, for you departed from the land of Egypt in haste—so that you will remember the day of your departure from the land of Egypt all the days of your life."³⁶ Chazal instituted that this Mitzvah be fulfilled through the daily recitation of an appropriate scriptural passage in the third paragraph of the Shema: "I am Hashem, your G-d, Who has removed you from the land of Egypt to be a G-d unto you; I am Hashem your G-d."³⁷

Why do we have to remember the Exodus from Egypt daily and why did Chazal determine that the appropriate place for the fulfillment of this commandment was in the Shema, more specifically in the third paragraph after the commandment of the Tzitzit.

³⁵ Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, Exodus 7:13.

³⁶ Deuteronomy 16:3.

³⁷ Numbers 15:41.

In the recitation of the Shema, after the declaration of G-d's oneness, we recite the commandment, "you shall love Hashem, your G-d, with all your heart..." But how does one fulfill this obligation? Maimonides writes:

It is a commandment to love and fear the venerable and feared Almighty, for it is written, "And you shall love the Lord your God," and it is also written, "You shall fear the Lord your God." What is the way to love and fear God? Whenever one contemplates the great wonders of God's works and creations, and one sees that they are a product of a wisdom that has no bounds or limits, one will immediately love, laud and glorify [God] with an immense passion to know the Great Name....³⁸

As my Rosh Yeshiva, Rabbi Israel Chait, explains:

Love of God is defined by the Sages not as the love of an object in the ordinary sense but rather as an inner yearning and longing for the source of all knowledge and perfection...It is an awesome experience which carries with it both fear or reverence, and love. It consists in being drawn towards a being whom one knows only through his manifestations. This experience, the Sages maintained, is one which ensues naturally when the human mind contemplates nature.³⁹

The love of G-d, however, would appear to only be possible by an elite few; if as the S'forno writes, "the majority of the Israelite nation save an elite few... are under the control (lit., conduct) of nature and the heavenly forces, which are superior to these human beings." How can we be expected to fulfill this fundamental commandment? Furthermore, if most people do not exercise their power of free will and are guided by deterministic forces of nature, can the average man truly be held accountable for any of his shortcomings?

The second blessing of the Shema: "expresses man's appreciation of G-d. via the Sinai Revelation... His specific providence, i.e., His intervention with natural law to teach man the true way of life."⁴⁰

³⁸ Maimonides, Laws of the Foundation of the Torah 2:1-2.

³⁹ Rabbi Israel Chait, 'On the Love of G-d.'

(<http://www.ybt.org/essays/rchait/love.html>).

⁴⁰ Id.

G-d, through his intervention with natural law gave the world and the children of Israel the Torah and a system of commandments to help us achieve our ultimate purpose, “the love of G-d.” In the Torah there are constant reminders and motivational activities to inspire man so that he may be “aroused to reflect upon the existence of his Creator.” And so, the Shema, after we recite the difficult commandment to love G-d, gives us but one example of a remedy to help those that slumber, namely, the commandment of the Tzitzit.

Rabbi Mordechai Willig in an essay on defying nature, making reference to an amazing story recounted in the Talmud, and explains this very idea in a beautiful manner:

A man was about to sin with a beautiful woman. At the last minute his tzitzis flapped into his face, and he overcame his desire to sin. The woman was so impressed by this miracle that she found the man’s rebbi and beis medrash, converted to Judaism and married him. Tzitzis empowers a man to defy his nature by not straying after his eyes. Like the image of Yaakov Avinu, the techeiles of tzitzis resembles the sea, the sky, and the kisei hakavod, Hashem’s throne of glory. The eight strings of tzitzis, like the eight days of mila, represent the ability to overcome nature. The eight strings of tzitzis correspond to the eight days leading up to krias yam suf. Although the sea split at the seventh day of Pesach, we count eight from erev Pesach. This unusual starting point is used to link the supernatural miracle of krias Yam Suf with the number eight and the ability of tzitzis to inspire us to overcome nature. [All internal citations omitted.]⁴¹

And if the commandment of Tzitzit is not enough to inspire us, G-d commands us to remember the Exodus from Egypt daily, and thus *Chazal* appropriately instituted the fulfillment of this Mitzvah through the daily recitation in the third paragraph of the Shema, following the commandment of Tzitzit, “I am Hashem, your G-d, Who has removed you from the land of Egypt to be a G-d unto you; I am Hashem your G-d.”⁴² We are thus forced to reflect on the Exodus, the ten plagues and the ten great demonstrations of G-d’s mastery over all things and be moved to exercise “the power of free will which is

⁴¹ Tr. Menachos 44a, cited in,

(http://torahweb.org/torah/2007/parsha/rwil_beshalach.html)

⁴² Numbers 15:41.

called 'G-d's likeness.' This is what is meant when we refer to the Passover Holiday as the "the time of our freedom;" it was and will always be a time to reflect on these great events which occurred and be stimulated and provoked to truly be free and be drawn to the Source of all reality.

When one contemplates these great events, "the great wonders of God's works and creations, and one sees that they are a product of a wisdom that has no bounds or limits, one will immediately love, laud and glorify [G-d] with an immense passion to know the Great Name."⁴³



⁴³Maimonides, The Laws of the Foundation of the Torah 2:1-2.

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