

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI MORDECHAI WEISS

Going in the Same Direction

We are at the threshold of the time of Geulah-redemption. It was during the month of Nissan that the Jewish people- after two hundred and ten years of slavery-left the land of their persecution-the land of Egypt-and began their dramatic story which was to become the spectacular story of the formation of the Jewish people as a people. This journey has lasted even until the present day as still today we are found in different stages of our redemption and we are asked to react and overcome challenges that we face daily as a people. What was strange about the leaving Egypt was that though we all left as one people we comprised twelve unique and different tribes-each with their special flag and no doubt each with their special customs and each with their separate views.

The Midrash relates that when the Jews crossed the sea, the sea split in twelve parts giving each of the tribes a special path to follow. One would expect that Almighty G-d would have provided or at least preferred that all of the tribes would proceed in unison --that there would be only one lane for everyone-as a sign of harmony and agreement-"achdut"- as Rashi states when the Jews received the Torah "keish echad b'lev echad" as one person with one heart. Yet each tribe, according to this Midrash, was provided with a special path-a special direction. Perhaps the message at this time of redemption was that the Jewish people needn't be all alike. We can be different! But the most important characteristic, however, is that we are all pointing and going in the same direction. How we get there is of little concern. What is important is that we all have our sights on the same goal.

A remarkable occurrence is happening in the state of Israel Today. The vast majority of the people living there-whether observant or non observant-ultra religious or not-a very high percentage observe the holidays as national or religious events in their lives. Well into the eighty or ninety percent of Israeli citizens celebrate Yom Kippur, Rosh Hashanah, Purim Succoth and Pesach. Whether their reasoning is based on Torah law, or on nationalistic pride-the bottom line is that these holidays are being observed! And the results are truly amazing. To me it is a sign that we are

experiencing the Messianic era. There is no doubt in my mind that over the ensuing years those who observe these holidays because of nationalistic reason will realize the historic one as well and the religious aspect will also be their drive for observance.

The difference in living in Israel verses outside of Israel is that in Israel Judaism is the basis of the country's daily operations. On the radio on Friday they will wish you a Shabbat Shalom. On Pesach they will tell you Chag Kasher V'sameach. On Purim everyone gets dressed up in a costume and on Succoth all the stores sell decorations for your Succah and people wish each other a Chag Sameach. The entire nation is moving in one direction-which is heartwarming.

Out side of Israel our Jewish lives are very often in direct opposite of our daily and business lives. There is tension. We need to make an effort often to swim against the tide to retain our Jewishness-and it is in this environment that some of us-our children-lose direction and mix-up goals and get lost in this society.

There is no question in my mind that the future of the Jewish people is in Israel. May this time of redemption bring us all to that ultimate goal. © 2012 **Rabbi M. Weiss.** Rabbi Mordechai Weiss is the Principal of the Bess and Paul Sigel Hebrew Academy. Comments are welcome at rvmordechai@aol.com

CHIEF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

The story of Pesach, of the Exodus from Egypt, is one of the oldest and greatest in the world. It tells of how one people, long ago, experienced oppression and were led to liberty through a long and arduous journey across the desert. It is the most dramatic story of slavery to freedom ever told, one that has become the West's most influential source-book of liberty. "Since the Exodus," said Heinrich Heine, the 19th century German poet, "Freedom has always spoken with a Hebrew accent".

We read in the maggid section of the Haggadah of Rabbi Gamliel who said that one who did not discuss the Pesach lamb, the maztah and the bitter herbs had not fulfilled their obligation of the Seder. Why these three things are clear: The Pesach lamb, a food of luxury, symbolises freedom. The bitter herbs represent slavery due to their sharp taste. The matzah combines both. It was the bread the Israelites ate in Egypt as

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slaves. It was also the bread they left when leaving Egypt as free people.

It is not just the symbolism, but also the order these items are spoken about in the Haggadah that is interesting. First we speak of the Pesach lamb, then the matzah and finally the bitter herbs. But this seems strange. Why do the symbols of freedom precede those of slavery? Surely slavery preceded freedom so it would be more logical to talk of the bitter herbs first? The answer, according to the Chassidic teachers, is that only to a free human people does slavery taste bitter. Had the Israelites forgotten freedom they would have grown used to slavery. The worst exile is to forget that you are in exile.

To truly be free, we must understand what it means to not be free. Yet 'freedom' itself has different dimensions, a point reflected in the two Hebrew words used to describe it, chofesh and cherut. Chofesh is 'freedom from', cherut is 'freedom to'. Chofesh is what a slave acquires when released from slavery. He or she is free from being subject to someone else's will. But this kind of liberty is not enough to create a free society. A world in which everyone is free to do what they like begins in anarchy and ends in tyranny. That is why chofesh is only the beginning of freedom, not its ultimate destination.

Cherut is collective freedom, a society in which my freedom respects yours. A free society is always a moral achievement. It rests on self-restraint and regard for others. The ultimate aim of Torah is to fashion a society on the foundations of justice and compassion, both of which depend on recognising the sovereignty of G-d and the integrity of creation. Thus we say, 'Next year may we all be bnei chorin,' invoking cherut not chofesh. It means, 'May we be free in a way that honours the freedom of all'.

The Pesach story, more than any other, remains the inexhaustible source of inspiration to all those who long for freedom. It taught that right was sovereign over might; that freedom and justice must belong to all, not some; that, under G-d, all human beings are equal; and that over all earthly power, the King of Kings, who hears the cry of the oppressed and who intervenes in history to liberate slaves. It took many centuries for this vision to become the shared property of liberal democracies of the West and beyond; and there is no guarantee that it will remain so. Freedom is

a moral achievement, and without a constant effort of education it atrophies and must be fought for again. Nowhere more than on Pesach, though, do we see how the story of one people can become the inspiration of many; how, loyal to its faith across the centuries, the Jewish people became the guardians of a vision through which, ultimately, 'all the peoples of the earth will be blessed'.

I wish you and all your family a Chag Kasher v'Sameach. © 2012 Chief Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and torah.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

The Festival of Passover is called by our sages "the time of our freedom," the celebration of our exodus from Egypt. It is also Biblically known as the "Festival of Matzot," the Holiday of Unleavened Bread.

The flat, rather tasteless dough which was never given a chance to ferment and rise was the "bread of affliction" which our ancestors ate in Egypt. After a long day of servitude, they prepared the simplest fare possible and this was the same "bread" that our ancestors hurriedly prepared for their journey to freedom. Is it not strange that our liberty from enslavement by a mighty, totalitarian regime is symbolized by a half-baked pumpnickel flour and water interrupted from rising in its earliest stage of development?!

Furthermore, the Bible teaches us that "You shall count for yourselves - from the morrow of the Festival day, from the day when you bring the Omer of the waving - seven weeks, they shall be complete... you shall offer a new meal offering baked leavened loaves of bread" (Lev 23: 15-17) to celebrate the Festival of the First Fruits, the Festival of Weeks (Shavuot)."

Why, after all manner of leavening has been forbidden during Passover, do we celebrate this connected holiday (through the counting of each day from the second day of Passover continuing for a full seven weeks) with an offering of leavened, risen loaves of bread? And, why is this culminating festival called "Weeks" (Shavuot), which connotes a period of counting, rather than an achievement worthy of a significant holiday?

One final question; on Passover we read the magnificent Song of Songs, the love song between Shlomo and Shulamit, the shepherd and the shepherdess, G-d and Historic Israel. But this is not a poem of the lover seeking his beloved, a passionate chase culminating in conquest of the prize. It is rather a search, a hide-and-seek quest for love and unity which is constantly elusive. At the moment that the beloved finally opens the door, the lover has slipped away and gone. The very final verse cries out, "Flee, my beloved, and appear to be like a gazelle or a young hart as you upon the mountains of spices."

The answer to all three of our questions lies in the distinction between the western mentality and the Jewish mindset. Western culture measures everything by the bottom line, the result of the game: "Did you win or did you lose?" The ancient world, and especially Jewish teaching, is more interested in the method, the search for meaning, how you played the game. Indeed, the Chinese religion is called Tao, the Way; Judaism speaks of "halakha," the walking or progressing on the road.

Hence, Passover is only the beginning of the process, the road to redemption, which takes us out of Egyptian enslavement, but only brings us as far as the arid desert. We count seven weeks, paralleling the seven sabbatical years leading up to the Jubilee, but the actual festival itself - replete with the vision of Israel rooted on her land, bringing first fruits to the Holy Temple, welcoming even the Moabite Ruth into the Jewish fold as the ultimate achievement of universal redemption - is called the Festival of Weeks after the process which will get us there, overseeing the development from half-baked dough to the fully risen loaves of bread. During the last five thousand years, the endgame, the actual redemption, has eluded us - but that is hardly the real point. It is the weeks of preparation, the arduous expectation and the paving of the way, which makes the Festival of Weeks the significant piece.

That is the true meaning behind the Song of Songs. Love is not the act of conquest, the achievement of unity; it is the search for unity, and the closeness between the two which it engenders, not the obliteration of the one into the other which absolute unity suggests.

And so the truest commandment is not to effectuate the Messianic Age, but rather that we await its arrival and prepare the road for its coming. This preparation for the Messiah was the most important aspect of the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, ztz"l. He taught the necessity of preparing ourselves for the coming of the Messiah rather than the identification of who it may be. The State of Israel is not redemption realized, not even to the most ardent religious Zionist; it is merely the "beginning of the sprouting of the redemption," a work-in-progress which will hopefully pave the way toward our worthiness to be redeemed.

Talmid Hakham, the Hebrew phrase for a Talmudic Scholar, does not mean "wise individual," rather it means "a student of the wise," a good Jew who aspires to the goal of wisdom. The greater a person's wisdom, the greater is their understanding that they have not yet achieved complete wisdom. What counts is their aspiration - the achievement is beyond the grasp of mortal humans.

Hence, especially during the Passover Seder, the questions are more important than the answers; indeed, the author of the Haggadah "types" the four children by the quality - and music - of their questions.

"When the one Great Scorer will place a grade next to your name, He will mark not whether you won or whether you lost, but how you played the game." © 2012 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

Many of us are aware that there is a detailed discussion amongst the commentators to the Seder night Hagadah regarding the possibility of a fifth cup of wine as part of the Seder service. Some are of the opinion that the cup of wine that is designated as the Cup of Eliyahu serves as this fifth cup. Be that as it may, I wish to discuss another foursome that in our time may have developed into a fivesome.

We are taught in the Hagadah that there are four categories of children in the Jewish world. They are: the wise son, the wicked son, the naive and simple son and the son who knows nothing and cannot even begin to ask anything intelligently.

We are all acquainted with the wise son. He has had a thorough Jewish education and is intelligently loyal to the Torah and its values system and traditional way of life. We unfortunately are able to clearly identify the evil child amongst us-the apostate, the self-hater, the one who is addicted to anti-Jewish ideologies and practices.

The simple son is also known to us. He has no real animus towards G-d and Torah though he certainly may be repelled by the behavior and statements of those of us who arrogantly claim to represent Him and His Torah. He only asks: "What is this all about?" It is a legitimate if somewhat depressing question. After all, after 3500 years of Jewish life and history, that son should, by now, have an inkling of what it is all about. Nevertheless there is still hope for this son-life and its events and the non-Jewish world will eventually help explain the matter to him.

And finally the son who knows nothing, not even what to ask can also be salvaged by education, warmth, direction, role models and proper mentoring. Even the evil son can be corrected and redeemed but apparently not without pain and discomfort. After all it was Stalin that basically cured the Jewish communists of their malignant Marxist disease and made them Jews once again.

But there is a fifth child that sits at the Jewish Seder table in our time. He has no qualms about marrying a non-Jew, he is probably liberally pro-Palestinian, he has never visited Israel, though he knows it to be a racist and apartheid place, he considers himself to be part of the intellectual elite, he has no real knowledge of Torah or Judaism and yet considers himself an expert on these matters.

He knows the best policy for Jews and Israel to follow and he is so convinced of his rectitude and astuteness that he is willing, nay even demanding, to

use all types of force to coerce the Jewish people and its small national state to adopt his will. He is out to fix the world and is willing to sacrifice Israel, Judaism and Jews in the process. He sits on boards of Jewish organizations, he chooses rabbis and proclaims himself to be a faithful Jew. Yet he will contribute generously to general non-Jewish charities but gives only a pittance towards Jewish educational projects. He is not an evil son nor is he a wise one.

He certainly will deny that he is somehow simple or naive and he certainly claims that he knows what questions to pose. Yet he may be the most tragic of all of the sons, for though he is able to pose the questions he is unwilling to hear the answers. In the words of the prophet Isaiah "the heart of the people is overlaid with fat and their ears are stopped up."

It is this hedonistic, intelligent, but very deaf son that troubles us so deeply. For we have developed no plan or method to deal with him-either to exclude him from the Jewish society completely or to somehow redeem him and bring him closer to Jewish reality and positive participation in Jewish life. It is certainly not clear to us how to accomplish this second option.

So perhaps we will have to rely on the inspiration represented by the fifth cup of wine-on the miraculous powers of the prophet Eliyahu and on his unfailing faith in the restoration of Jews and the Jewish people generally. Pesach teaches us never to say never. It is the holiday of rebirth and constant renewal. So will it be for all of our different children all of whom we gather and embrace around our Pesach Seder table. © 2012 Rabbi Berel Wein - Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

No matter one's Jewish background, it is known that afikomen refers to that time in the Passover seder when we break the matzah, setting aside half for the children to find. This, as a process to keep the youngsters awake. Many of us have memories of looking for the afikomen-a sweet family tradition which evokes memories of our connection to our parents and grandparents. In truth however, afikomen has deeper meaning. On its simplest level it reminds us that we were slaves in Egypt. There we were given little to eat. Similarly, the matzah is split symbolizing that the food given us was never a full morsel-only a half.

On a deeper level, the broken matzah teaches that the seder has two parts. In the first, the portion before the meal, we re-enact the story of the exodus from Egypt. Hence, half the matzah remains on the seder table symbolizing that exodus. In the latter half, the part which comes after the meal, the seder speaks of future redemption. That story begins with the eating

of the half of the matzah that had been set aside as a segue to direct our thoughts forward.

Note that the word mitzrayim, commonly translated as Egypt, really means straits or suffering. It not only deals with a past event but with events in the here and now. As we were redeemed then, we offer hope for redemption in the future. There is another idea that deserves mention. We break the matzah to recall all those who are on an individual basis experiencing brokenness in their lives, whether it be family pressure, health or business challenges. In truth, is there anyone who is not experiencing some form of mitzrayim?

The challenge is to feel that pain and make our lives whole. In the words of the Kabbalah, "to fix the broken vessels."

As Rav Nahman of Bratslav once said: "In this world which is not yet redeemed, who is a whole person? The one who has a broken heart." © 2012 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and President of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah Rabbinical School - the Modern and Open Orthodox Rabbinical School. He is Senior Rabbi at the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale, a Modern and Open Orthodox congregation of 850 families. He is also National President of AMCHA - the Coalition for Jewish Concerns

RABBI YISROEL CINER

Parsha Insights

This week we celebrate the holiday of Pesach. We've mentioned a number of times that our holidays are not mere commemorations of events which transpired long ago. Rather, they serve as the tools which enable us to access that very same spiritual potential which was maximized then and is available, once again, now.

It's interesting to note that even amongst those whose level of commitment to other mitzvos and holidays might not be so strong, the commitment to some degree of a Pesach celebration has remained very firm.

Pesach, the Exodus from Egypt, marked our beginning as a nation. Not just a nation like the myriad others, but a nation whose course and destiny would be guided by Hashem to bring this world to its ultimate purpose. That connection to Hashem which Avrohom Avinu {Abraham the Patriarch} began on a personal, individual level, which was continued by Yitzchok and then by Yaakov and his twelve sons, the tribes of Israel, became the fortune and destiny of the nation at large at the time of the exodus. As Hashem revealed Himself to us at Sinai and revealed to us His holy will in the form of the Torah, it is the majestic responsibility of Bnei Yisroel {the children of Israel} to reveal His existence and involvement in this world to the rest of the nations.

As I was reviewing the Haggadah with some boys from my shiur {class} we came to the following passage. The Haggadah states that the Torah, in commanding us to relate the exodus to our children,

speaks of four sons: echod chacham {one, wise}; echod rasha {one, evil}; echod tom {one, simple}; v'echod she'aino yodaiah lish'ol {and one, that doesn't know how to ask}.

One of the boys asked why it was necessary to write the word 'one' before each of these types of sons. We offered a possible explanation that the Haggadah is teaching us that every person is an individual with his gifts and abilities (sometimes still latent) and must be respected as such. Additionally, as the Haggadah then delineates, each must be treated and answered in an appropriate manner in order for the answers to hit home. There must be different approaches for different people-there is no 'one' method or answer which will be universally effective.

The rasha asks: What is this service that you do? He is clearly excluding himself from the whole business. Why do you bother with all of this outdated, silly ritual? The answer he is given is cutting and to the point. This is why Hashem took me out of Mitzrayim {Egypt}. Me. Had you been there with such an attitude, you would not have been redeemed.

This is why Hashem took us out of Mitzrayim. We, through the observance of the Torah and its commandments, bring the presence of Hashem into this world. Taking that presence which is hidden and allowing it to be revealed. A process, a chain stretching from the time of the exodus throughout the generations, throughout thousands of years until the time of the moshiach {messiah}. Ultimately reaching to the point in time when the whole world will recognize and accept Hashem as the Master of the universe.

Imagine the dedication, love and gratitude that those who left Mitzrayim felt toward Hashem. Imagine their resolve to follow each and every iota of ritual that the Creator commanded, knowing that it's an integral piece of the puzzle, building the world toward that state. "In each and every generation a person is obligated to view himself as if he himself left Mitzrayim.[Haggadah]" Only then does a person feel a true obligation to continue the chain that was started then.

Imagine a chain that is painstakingly being formed, link by link, stretching across a great canyon. The other side has almost been reached. The work of thousands is on the verge of completion. Then, with only two or three links remaining, the people entrusted with those links get careless! They just don't bother to make sure they are attached. As others look on in horror, they see that chain slip from their grip, falling back, back across the great divide, until it's hanging limply from its starting point. All of the effort and work, sweat and tears, erased in a moment of indifference...

Every generation, every person, another link in the chain. We are the final links of the chain that stretches from the exodus to the moshiach, from the beginning of our nationhood to the end of time. Incredible pain and determination have been endured to produce this chain. I doubt there's a single Jew alive

today who doesn't have ancestors who gave up their life for their Judaism, who sacrificed all that they had to guarantee that they would continue that chain. (Every convert is considered a direct descendant of Avrohom Avinu himself, the one who was willing to sacrifice that which was most dear to him.) How can we be careless and indifferent? How can we, the final, critical links of this chain, break that which was built from the blood of our great grandparents?

Perhaps that is one of the feelings which come around and is 'felt in the air' every year at this time. It is absorbed even by those who might not be as observant other times of the year. The feeling and realization that we are part of something much bigger than ourselves and that we have responsibilities to others who came long before us.

As we, during this z'man geulasainu {time of our redemption} attempt to feel as if we ourselves left Mitzrayim, let that be followed by our running to greet the moshiach, heralding the final and ultimate redemption, proudly presenting ourselves as those final, strong links in the chain of our nation. © 2012 Rabbi Y. Ciner & torah.org

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Mordechai Greenberg

Rosh Yeshiva, Kerem B'Yavne

“**A**nd you shall say, it is the Pesach sacrifice for G-d, since He passed over the houses of Bnei Yisrael, when He struck Egypt and saved our houses" [Shemot 12:27]. The accepted interpretation of the act of passing over is that the Holy One, Blessed be He, on His way to kill the firstborn sons of Egypt skipped over the houses of Bnei Yisrael and did not kill the firstborn sons there. The holiday is called Pesach in memory of this miracle, meaning to "pass over"-noting that G-d did not go into their houses, for if He had done so, the plague would have harmed them too. This implies that the main reason for thanks is that G-d did not kill the firstborns of Bnei Yisrael.

However, there is a problem with this idea. If the Holy One, Blessed be He, skipped over the houses Himself, as is written, "I and not an angel" [Pesach Hagadda], how can we explain the verse, "He will not allow the destructive angel to come to your houses to strike" [12:23]? After all, G-d Himself killed the firstborns and not an angel!

Rav Avraham Yitzchak Kook proposed a novel and remarkable explanation for this in his Torah insights. When Eliyahu argued against the prophets of Baal, he cried out, "How long will you hesitate between two concepts?" [Melachim I 18:21]. The verb used is "poschim" but in this case it does not mean to pass over either idea, rather it means that the prophets supported two contradictory ideas, one after the other. This is the same as the verse, "He skips over the mountains, he

jumps over the hills" [Shir Hashirim 2:8]. This does not mean that he jumps over the mountains but that he stands at the top of one hill and from there skips over to another one. The same is true of the Plague of the Firstborns. G-d did not jump over the houses, rather He stopped at one house and from there skipped to the next one. This is an unusual occurrence, since in general the Almighty does not send the Shechina, the holy presence, to a place of impurity. For example, when Moshe wanted to pray, he said, "When I leave the city, I will spread out my hands to G-d" [Shemot 9:29]. But in this case the Holy One, Blessed be He, made a very special gesture, and He allowed the Shechina to rest on all the houses of Bnei Yisrael in spite of the surrounding impurity. That is what is meant by the phrase that He "passed over the houses of Bnei Yisrael." He sent the Shechina to each house and from there it skipped to another one, so that each of the houses was sanctified as an altar and the Pesach sacrifice could be brought.

The salvation of Bnei Yisrael was the result of the revelation of the Shechina in each of the houses, and the Shechina is what did not allow the angel, the messenger of destruction, to go into the houses and kill the firstborns.

This means that the comment in the Hagadda on the phrase "I will go through the Land of Egypt" [Shemot 12:12] -- "I and not an angel"-does refer to the appearance of the Shechina in the houses of Bnei Yisrael, but that the plague itself was indeed performed by a destructive angel. The thanksgiving is not only for saving the children of Yisrael but also for the revelation of the Shechina in every house. This, then, is the meaning of the comment in the Hagadda, "with great awe" [Yirmiyahu 32:21] -- "this is the revelation of the Shechina." The Targum translates this as "a great vision," and not an act leading to fear. It refers to the great vision of the revelation of the Shechina that took place that night in the houses of Bnei Yisrael, when the Holy One, Blessed be He, passed over the houses, skipping from one to the next, and caused the Shechina to appear in each one. ©2012 Rabbi A. Bazak and Machon Zomet

RABBI LABEL LAM

Dvar Torah

Here's a new definition that certainly sheds light on an older than old subject. Why is Pesach called "Pesach"? The Sefas Emes quoting a generic source cites that Pesach is actually a contraction of two words: "Peh"- mouth and "Sach"-speaks. How does that enhance our Seder or observance of Pesach? He explains that through the exodus from Egypt our mouths were opened and we were able to sing to and praise HASHEM out loud, as by the splitting of the sea. Prior to that we were not only enslaved to Pharaoh's forces bodily but we were blocked and unable to

express our true spiritual nature. Only later, through the leaving of Egypt did we discover our authentic voices. Our mouths, so to speak, were in Exile! How can a mouth be in exile?

In the spirit the verse, "In order that you should remember the day you left Egypt all the days of your life" I will recall days in High School, in public school when there were those occasional events they called, "dances"! I have to admit I didn't understand the screaming "hard rock" music and my feet did not feel much like dancing. I remember not feeling entirely comfortable doing what everyone else was doing but under duress, the pressure of social coercion I did try. The memory of the feeling of incongruity, that I was missing something and there was perhaps something wrong with me remains with me till today.

Years later at a Jewish event, in Yeshiva, after overcoming the initial aversion to holding men's hands I found out, much to my surprise, just how natural and genuinely fun it is to dance in circles, to music that matched the temperament of my soul. It was certainly more akin to how my feet felt comfortable expressing themselves. No, I have not become a professional dancer since nor do I have any plans to do so but I do feel better about myself looking back at the old days understanding it was a good thing or at least it wasn't a bad thing that I didn't "get it", what that music was all about. It just wasn't me! This is now is me!

The same principle applies to patterns of speech as well. We just may find ourselves hemmed in and feeling woefully confined by the acceptable limits of the society around us. We are publicly apologetic and privately ashamed to mention anything "too Jewish" or to speak of any matter that places the status of the Jewish People on any differing plain higher or lower. We may begin to realize that we are so afraid to offend and we should be that we fail to inspire even ourselves.

There's an old Chinese proverb I saw in a poetry book that says, "Read a 100 poems and write like a 100 poets. Read a1000 poems and write like yourself!" How true! It's hard for the poet "to find his voice", but there is something to be said for finding the voice that best approximates your own to help you until you find the key to your own heart and the master key to others.

Along comes Pesach and the Seder and with the experience of the Haggada we are lead (A Naggid is a leader) by words to the point where, with the help of four cups of wine, we are singing and crying with hearts full of endless joy as little children sitting on the lap of our Father. It's quite a profound change from that sober and measured awkwardness that immediately preceded the Seder before we found our voices and our mouths were liberated once again as never before. Understanding that Pesach is "Peh"-mouth "Sach"-speaks teaches us-this is the real us! ©2012 Rabbi L. Lam & torah.org

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“Raban Gamliel would say, 'whomever does not say these three things has not fulfilled his requirement: pesach, matzoh and marror.'

There is much discussion regarding which religious obligation is not met if these three items/concepts aren't discussed at the Seder table. A closer look at the context in which Raban Gamliel made his statement, as well as where it is quoted in the Mishnah (Pesachim 116a) and in the Hagada, may help us understand how it was meant-as well as how it was understood and applied.

The previous Mishnah told us that "we start with disgrace and end with praise." The Talmud (ibid) discusses whether the "disgrace" refers to our ancestors having worshipped idols, or if it refers to our having been slaves in Egypt. [Interestingly, even though most of the Children of Israel worshipped Egypt's deities-which is one of the reasons we were commanded to slaughter a sheep for the Pesach offering (to counter the remnant of our idolatrous thoughts)-it was our "ancestors" who worshipped idols (with Avraham's father being referenced), and "we" who were slaves in Egypt. Since we are supposed to envision ourselves as if we, ourselves, were redeemed from Egypt, when discussing the slavery-and being freed from it-it is "we." When it comes to worshipping idols, on the other hand, it would be inappropriate to consider it as if we had done such a thing, so it is our "ancestors" who are referenced, not us.] The Hagada includes both aspects, first saying that "we were slaves in Egypt, and G-d took us out from there" and then that "our ancestors worshipped idols, and G-d brought us closer to His service." However, the bulk of the Hagada discusses the former (the transition from slavery to freedom), without spending any time elaborating on the latter (being able to serve G-d properly). Even the minimal "discussion" about our transition from worshipping idols to serving G-d is limited to quoting verses (Y'hoshua 24:2-4), verses that end with our descending to Egypt, without including our transition to being G-d fearing after we left Egypt. Why does the Hagada mention both aspects of "beginning with disgrace and ending with praise" if only one of them is really addressed?

After the first aspect (being slaves to Paro and then being redeemed) is mentioned, the Hagada tells us about the Seder that occurred in B'nay B'rak, where the sages discussed the exodus story all night long. The Tosefta (P'sachim 10:8) describes another Seder, one that occurred in Lod during the same time period (perhaps even the same year) which also lasted all night. The topic of discussion, however, was slightly different. Rather than talking about the story of the exodus, the sages in Lod were up all night discussing

the laws of Pesach. Since the "service of G-d" that He "brought us closer to" refers to keeping the Torah and its commandments, the proper way to "discuss" this aspect was to learn the laws relevant to Passover and the exodus from Egypt. Both aspects are important, but the details of the laws, and an extensive, all-night discussion about them, is really only appropriate for those with a strong background in Jewish law. It is for this reason that the answer to the wise son's question is about the law; we teach him about the laws of the Seder, up to and including not being able to eat after the Afikomen (see Vilna Gaon). Even though the less scholarly also need to know the laws pertaining to the Seder, if they are not yet ready for such an extensive, complex "Beis Midrash" style symposium, more can be gained through a discussion of the miracles G-d performed in Egypt, and perhaps the theological implications of the exodus experience, than expounding on the laws of Pesach. The Hagada provides the guidelines for the latter, and is therefore its focus. The more learned, who benefit more by spending time delving into the intricacies of Jewish law than the less-learned do, are already aware of this aspect of the Seder, and do not need to be pointed towards it by the Hagada. After all, there are too many areas of Jewish law that stem from the exodus experience to limit it to an official guide, whereas there is but one exodus narrative that can be used as the starting point.

Rabbi Akiva, at the Seder he led in B'nay B'rak, focused on the exodus story, perhaps because he felt it was especially relevant after the recent destruction of the Temple. Nevertheless, the discussion was not limited to talking about G-d's redemption; Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya, one of the participants in the Seder, is quoted regarding the requirement to mention the exodus the rest of the year too. [Several versions of the Hagada (see also the Yerushalmi's version of the Mishna, Berachos 1:6) have Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya speaking "to them" (emphasis added), i.e. to Rabbi Akiva, Rabbi Eliezer, Rabbi Yehoshua and Rabbi Tarfon-with whom he was having the Seder-about whether the exodus must be mentioned every single night (and day) of the year.] They may have used the exodus narrative as the starting point, and/or as the framework within which they discussed related laws, but their Seder discussion was not limited to the exodus story.

What about Raban Gamliel's Seder in Lod? Did they only discuss the laws that pertained to the Seder, or to Pesach in general? Does focusing on the transition from worshipping idols to serving G-d by staying up all night to talk about the laws of the Torah we serve G-d through mean that the exodus story was ignored? Even though their Seder took place before the Hagada took the form we have today, it would seem difficult to imagine that they didn't talk about the miracles of the exodus, and how G-d saved us from such a horrific slavery. Can someone fulfill their Biblical obligation to

"tell it over to your son" by just discussing the laws of Pesach (even if he is a really, really wise son)?

"Raban Gamliel would say, 'whomever did not say these three things on Pesach (by the Seder) did not fulfill his obligation.'" By mentioning the Pesach offering-including its laws, we refer to G-d passing over our houses to smite the firstborn. By mentioning matzoh, we refer to our having been redeemed. [Notice how the matzoh is said to explicitly refer to what happened after we were redeemed, not to the Seder we had right before we were redeemed (which included matzoh) or to the "bread of affliction" we were forced to eat while we were slaves.] And by mentioning the bitter herbs we refer to how bitter the Egyptians made our lives. Raban Gamliel was telling us that even those who focus on the laws of Pesach have to discuss things that will include the basic exodus narrative; the bitter experience of slavery, the miraculous way G-d saved us, and that we were redeemed. Since Raban Gamliel's Seder focused on the laws of Pesach, he had to make sure we knew that the story of the exodus had to be included too.

After the Hagada focuses on the story of the exodus, before we start thanking G-d for saving us and praising Him for doing so, Raban Gamliel's statement is quoted not just to put a bow on the narrative, but to teach those that have spent most of the night discussing the intricacies of Jewish law that they are also required to discuss the story as well. © 2012 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

Down and Dirty

Of all the complex and esoteric services done throughout the day by the kohanim who serve in the Bais HaMikdash, the one that starts the day is perhaps the most mundane. It is called *terumas hadeshen*, removal of the ash and tidying the altar. At first it was a volunteer job-anyone who wanted to participate in this seemingly meaningful task could do so-but as the requests grew, a lottery was formed, each of the kohanim vying for the coveted task. In fact, according to the Tosefot (Yoma 20a) even the Kohen Gadol, the High Priest, would sweep the ashes at midnight of Yom Kippur. Why does the foremost mitzvah for the kohanim entail sweeping ash? Why shouldn't the day begin with a holier act? Why can't sweeping ashes take place at the end of the day?

Reb Aryeh Levin, whose compassion for Jews was as passionate as his piety, was concerned with a merchant whose store was open on Shabbos. One Friday, Reb Aryeh went to the man and was about to tell him about the beauty of Shabbos and its sanctity, but as he neared the store, he hesitated. He decided to come back on Shabbos itself. The next day, immediately following the morning prayers and a quick meal, Reb Aryeh went to the store but did not step inside. Instead, he sat outside the store the entire day and just watched

the customers come in and out. He stood inconspicuously until closing, when suddenly the owner realized that the famous Tzadik of Jerusalem had been observing his business for almost seven hours.

"Rabbi," cried the man, "why do you stand here? Perhaps I can get you something to eat. Anyway, why would you come near my store on Shabbos? You know I keep it open on Shabbos." Reb Aryeh stood with the man and just kept quiet. After a few moments he spoke.

"Honestly, I came yesterday to implore you about the sanctity of Shabbos. Then I realized that it would not be fair for me to talk to you about the Shabbos unless I understood how much business you conduct on Shabbos. All day I am involved in Torah and mitzvos. I don't deal in business, and in order for me to tell you about the Shabbos I had to relate to you, the difficulties you endure during your business day, and the price you would be paying to become a *Shomer Shabbos*. Only after I watched the myriad customers enter and exit your store over the past Shabbos did I realize how difficult it is for you to keep the Shabbos.

"Now that I understand your difficulty, now that I experienced your doubts, I will begin to explain why Shabbos observance is so important. Coming from your perspective, I will now explain how much more valuable is the observance of Shabbos than the work you do on that day."

With that introduction, Rav Aryeh's ensuing words made an amazing impact on the man. He was so impressed with Reb Aryeh's sincerity that he committed himself to close his store on Shabbos.

Rav Simcha Bunim of P'shischa explains that the first order of the kohen's day is to depart from the assumed holy rituals of the Bais HaMikdash and delve into the ash. In order to raise the level of the nation they were meant to serve, the kohanim had to stoop to the level of the simplest worker and clean the altar, a seemingly menial task, that encompassed a variety of spiritual ramifications. Because in order to reach the level of high and holy, one must start out down and dirty. © 2001 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & torah.org

