

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

CHIEF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

The Passover season is well and truly on us. We're preparing our homes for the festival of freedom, with its special foods and elaborate rituals, one of the oldest religious rituals in the world, and one of Judaism's most sacred moments. What's special is that it's observed not in the synagogue but at home, around the table, as a family. The starring part is always taken by the youngest child, and their role is to ask questions.

And if there's one element of Judaism I'd love to share with everyone it's this: If you want to survive and thrive as a people, a culture, a civilization, celebrate the family. Hold it sacred. Eat together. Tell the story of what most matters to you across the generations. Make children the most important people. Put them centre stage. Encourage them to ask questions, the more the better. That's what Moses said thirty three centuries ago and Judaism is still here to tell the tale having survived some of the most brutal persecutions in human history, yet as a religious faith were still young and full of energy.

Forty-five years ago there was a moment that was a turning point in my life. I was in my first year at university and I happened to be listening to the radio, to some talks called the Reith lectures. The speaker was a famous anthropologist and in the course of the lectures he said: "Far from being the basis of the good society, the family with its narrow privacy and tawdry secrets, is the source of all our discontents." I thought then, and I think now, that those were some of the most irresponsible words I ever heard from a public intellectual. And today two generations later we can count the cost of devaluing the family.

A report published this week into last summer's riots puts at least some of the blame on what it calls poor parenting, which has left some young people without the social skills they need to have a stake in society. How could it have been otherwise, if for fifty years marriage, the family, and parenthood have been treated as harmful relics of a bygone age; and if in every contest between individual rights and social responsibilities, individual rights have won?

Alexis de Tocqueville said: "As long as family feeling is kept alive, the opponent of oppression is never alone." That's what Moses taught us. Freedom

begins by consecrating the family and putting children first. © 2012 Chief Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and torah.org

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“To the One Who tears the Yam Suf into sections" (T'hilim 136:13). Rashi tells us that this refers to G-d having created 12 distinct paths (see Mechilta, B'shalach 4), one for each Tribe. Even though G-d usually minimizes His miracles, making them seem as "natural" as possible—which is why He caused a "strong wind to blow all night" (see Sh'mos 14:21)—rather than the Children of Israel crossing the sea through one path (a path that could have been 12 times wider to allow for the same crossing time), each Tribe had their own path. Although every water in the world splitting (see the end of that section of the Mechilta) indicates that G-d was not trying to minimize this miracle, there still must be a reason why He created multiple paths through the sea rather than maintaining national unity by having everyone cross together along the same path. S'fas Emes suggest that each Tribe having their own path showed that each one, on their own, was worthy of having the sea split for them. (Which "path" the Eirev Rav took, as well as whether the Tribe of Levi had their own path or took one-or more-of the others, is a matter for a different time, perhaps next year; suggestions can be emailed to RabbiDMK at yahoo.com.) The context of what seems to be competing narratives in the Talmud (Sotah 36b-37a) may lead us to another possibility.

"Rabbi Mayer used to say, 'when Israel was standing by the sea, the Tribes were competing with each other, each one saying they will enter the sea first. The Tribe of Binyamin [didn't wait], and entered the sea first, as it says (T'hilim 68:28), 'there Binyamin, the youngest one, ruled over them.' The Talmud then discusses the reward the Tribe of Binyamin received for having gone first, before Rabbi Yehuda tells him that this wasn't the way it happened. Rather, 'each Tribe said that they will not enter the sea first, until Nachshon ben Aminadav [didn't wait until a Tribe stepped up] and entered the sea first.' Textual support is then brought for this, including the prayers said while the waters of the sea swirled around whomever had entered the sea before it split. The Talmud continues by relating the conversation between G-d and Moshe: 'At that time, Moshe was engaged in lengthy prayer. The Holy One,

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blessed is He, said to him, 'my beloved ones are drowning in the sea and you are praying a lengthy prayer before Me?' [Moshe] said before Him, 'Master of the universe, what [else] can I do?' He said to him, 'speak to the Children of Israel that they should travel, and you (Moshe) should lift up your stick and spread your hand [over the sea and split it]' (Sh'mos 14:15-16). The Talmud then discusses the reward the Tribe of Yehuda received for Nachshon ben Aminadav entering the sea first.

[It should be noted that Moshe was not taken to task for praying, but for being engaged in a lengthy prayer. He already knew that G-d would save His nation, and that Egypt would not be around anymore afterwards, information that Moshe had related to the nation (14:13). Therefore, although prayer was important (and necessary), only a short prayer was appropriate, not a long, involved one, so that G-d's plan can be put into action right away. Should a surgeon spend 15 minutes beseeching G-d to help him operate successfully after he's been scrubbed and is ready to start the procedure? Or should he (or she) just ask G-d, briefly, to please help him be successful? When Miriam, was afflicted with tzora'as, did Moshe spend a long time praying on her behalf, or did he offer a really short prayer (Bamidbar 12:13)? With the Children of Israel panicking, Moshe shouldn't have offered such a lengthy prayer now either.]

Several questions can be asked about the competing narratives related in the Talmud. First of all, with the sea in front of them, why would there be a "competition" about which Tribe should enter first? The sea hadn't split yet-if it had, what would be so praiseworthy about going first? Besides, since Rabbi Yehuda disagreed with Rabbi Mayer, insisting that no one wanted to go in until Nachshon took the initiative, obviously Rabbi Mayer meant that everyone wanted to go first despite the fact that there was no dry land in the middle of the sea yet. Whomever was willing to go in, trusting Moshe's telling them that they could cross the sea safely, could just go! Additionally, why, in Rabbi Yehudah's version, did G-d say that His "beloved ones" (plural) were drowning in the sea if only one person (Nachshon) had the courage to jump in before it split?

The words Rabbi Yehuda used to begin his version are not the way opposing positions are usually stated. Rather than Rabbi Mayer saying "every Tribe

wanted to go first" followed by Rabbi Yehuda saying "no Tribe wanted to go in first," Rabbi Yehuda says "that wasn't the way it happened." The implication is that he is not disagreeing with Rabbi Mayer about the facts, just about the context. By combining the two narratives, a fuller picture emerges.

The nation was told that they would be able to cross the sea safely, but were still afraid to go in. At the same time, the leaders of the Tribes, confident that they could cross, were discussing who should go first. Was it appropriate to all go in together, at the same time (see Radak on T'hilim 136:13), or should there be a procedure for entering in an orderly fashion? Each Tribe, represented by their leaders (see T'hilim 68:28, where it was the leaders of Yehuda, Z'vulun and Naftali that protested Binyamin going first), made the case as to why their Tribe deserved to go first. This leaves the impression that the nation was eager to enter the water, which wasn't the case, so Rabbi Yehuda interjects that Rabbi Mayer is not presenting the full picture. Rather, while the leaders discussed which Tribe should go first, the people were afraid to go in, saying they wouldn't go first. Then Nachshon went in, giving others the courage to do the same. Now that others were willing to enter, the "competition" between the leaders regarding which Tribe should go first was relevant. However, before it was resolved, and before even Nachshon's Tribe (Yehuda) went in, Binyamin did. The sea had not yet split, as Moshe was still praying. G-d told him to stop praying and start splitting the sea, as "His beloved ones," plural (as Nachshon, the Tribe of Binyamin, and perhaps the rest of Nachshon's Tribe, had already entered the sea) were drowning. Moshe lifted his staff, stretched out his arm, and the sea split.

Where did the sea split? Wherever those who were "drowning" were in the water. And since each Tribe was at a different point along the shore, it split where Binyamin had entered and split where Nachshon (and perhaps the rest of his Tribe) had entered. Seeing the sea split for those already in the water gave everyone else enough courage to enter the water too, and G-d split the sea where they were as well. In the end, since each Tribe entered the water at a different point along the shore, G-d created a separate path for each of them. For His kindness is forever. © 2012 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“**T**he Lord will do battle for you and you shall be silent” (Exodus 14:14). The last day of the festival of Passover is dedicated to the splitting of the Reeds Sea, one of the most dramatic and cataclysmic events in Biblical history. The Israelites have left Egypt and believe they are "home-free"; however, the Egyptian hordes change their mind and begin to chase after the newly formed free men. The

Israelites, faced by the Egyptians behind them and the Reed Sea in front of them, panic-and in their fear they cry out to Moses, "Are there then no graves in Egypt that you have taken us out to die in the desert?!" (Exodus 14:11). Moses attempts to comfort his people, exhorting them not to fear but rather to watch for Divine salvation "The Lord will do battle for you and you shall be silent" (Exodus 14:14).

But is this indeed the religious message of the Exodus? Does the Almighty expect us to stand quietly by in times of danger and challenge, simply waiting for the Almighty to emerge as a *deus ex machina* plucking us out from the fires of our enemies? Is such silence on our part consistent with Jewish History, and especially with these last six decades following the Holocaust? Where would the Jewish people be today had we not attempted to take our destiny into our own hands and fought battle after battle for the Jewish State?

Indeed, the classical Hassidic interpreters have turned the verse we've just cited on its head by providing an alternate literal interpretation: "The Lord will provide you with bread (the Hebrew *yilakhem* can mean to do battle but can also mean to provide bread from the Hebrew *lekhem*; most wars are after all fought after bread or material gain) but you must plow (the Hebrew *heresh* can either mean to be silent or to plow)." (Exodus 14:14) And although this reading of the verse would seem to be the very antithesis of its meaning in context, it is nevertheless the true meaning of this most dramatic miracle. Yes, Moses expected G-d to act and counsel the Israelites to silently await G-d's miracle. But that is not the message that G-d conveys to Moses in the very next verse of the text: "And G-d said to Moses, 'Why are you crying out to me? Speak to the children of Israel and let them move forward.'" (Exodus 14:15). G-d is ready to effectuate a miracle, but not before the Israelites prove themselves by putting their lives on the line. Before G-d does anything, the Israelites must jump into the raging sea and attempt as best as possible to get away from the Egyptians. It is only after the children of Israel have entered into the midst of the sea-despite its inherent dangers-that the waters will miraculously part and the Israelites will find themselves "on dry land." (Exodus 14:16). Rashi even goes as far as saying in G-d's name, "This is not the time to engage in lengthy prayer when the Israelites are in such deep trouble." When the going gets tough, tough people get going; from G-d's point of view, prayer must be coupled with action. From this perspective, the Hassidim may be literally wrong but conceptually right.

I believe there is yet a second interpretation of Moses' statement to the Israelites that G-d will do battle and they remain silent. Perhaps Moses understood very well that although the ultimate victor in Israel's battles is the Almighty Himself-"The Lord is a Being of battle, the Lord is His name" (Exodus 15:3) -- nevertheless, G-d does not fight alone. He battles alongside of the

Israelites, but the Israelites themselves must wage the war. They were frightened to take on the seven indigenous nations inhabiting Canaan during their first forty years in the desert, so G-d did not make war either. It was only in the case of Amalek and then later in the time of Joshua that Israel fought-and then G-d fought with them and led them to victory.

However, every war is a tragedy because the fallout of every war is the cruel and untimely death of the best and brightest of our people. Yes, we won the wars against Amalek, just as we won the wars in conquest of Israel four thousand years ago; we also won our recent wars of self defense enabling us to come home after 2,000 years of exile and establish Jewish Sovereignty in Jerusalem. But despite these miraculous victories, we suffered unspeakable losses of so many of our best and brightest and bravest and most committed.

In 1952 I was privileged to pray in the Beth Moses hospital, which had been taken over by the Klopenberger Hassidim who had survived the European Holocaust. That particular Sabbath was the first Sabbath circumcision the Hassidim had experienced since leaving Europe. The Rebbe, who himself suffered the loss of his wife and 13 children, rose to speak-"And I see that you are rooted in your blood (*damayikh*) and I say to you, by your blood shall you live, by your blood shall you live." This verse of the Prophet Ezekiel is intoned at every Jewish circumcision, explaining to us that the price for our eternity is the necessity that we shed blood on behalf of our G-d, our faith and our ideals. However, I would give the verse an alternate interpretation. The Hebrew word *dam* is usually translated as blood; but the root *d-m* can also mean silence, as in "*vayidom Aharon*," and Aaron was silent, when his two righteous sons died a tragic and untimely death. I believe the prophet Ezekiel was telling us that when Jews suffer, and even seem to suffer needlessly, tragically and absurdly, but still remain silent and refuse to cry out against G-d, we express with that silence the profound inner strength which justifies our eternal life. "I see that you are rooted in your silence and I say to you that because of that silence do you live." Perhaps this is what Moses was saying to the Jewish people: yes, the Lord will wage battle for you, and some very good Israelites will tragically die in battle, but you must still remain silent in terms of your relationship to G-d. It is by the faith of that silence that you will live eternally and ultimately redeem the world. © 2005 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI MAYER TWERSKY

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The yom tov of Pesach has two foci: *emunah* and *masorah*. The belief and knowledge of Hakadosh Baruch Hu is predicated upon our experience of *yetzias Mitzrayim*. "I am Hashem, your G-d, who has

taken you out of the land of Mitzrayim, from the house of slavery" (Shemos 20:2). "The basic principle of all principles and the pillar of all sciences is to realize that there is a First Being who brought every existing thing into being... To know this truth is a mitzvas aseh, as it is said, 'I am Hashem your G-d,...'" (Rambam Yesodei HaTorah 1:1,6.) In Mitzrayim, we witnessed Hashem's providence over the world, and were taught about reward and punishment.

When we fulfill the daily mitzvah of zechiras yetzias Mitzrayim we remind ourselves of the lessons of faith, and re-affirm our faith (Vide Ramban, end of parshas Bo). And on Pesach when we re-experience yetzias Mitzrayim, we relive these vivid lessons of faith. Thus we are privileged to have the mitzvah of achilas matzah, in the oft quoted words of the Zohar Hakadosh, bread of faith. As such, the yom tov of Pesach is a time especially conducive to cultivating and deepening our emunah in Hashem.

The second focus of Pesach is masorah, transmitting and teaching our emunah. "And you shall tell your son on that day saying, 'it is because of this that Hashem acted on my behalf when I left Mitzrayim'" (Shemos 13:8). "The Torah speaks with reference to four sons..."

In truth, these two foci are inextricably linked; shteyayim she'hein achas. The symbiotic relationship between emunah and masroah can and should be understood on different levels. The most basic level is this. Parents (and educators) want to give their children the absolute best. They want to equip their children for the future, for life. They want to give their children what is most important, most precious. Accordingly, a genuine ma'amin strives to transmit his emunah to his children/disciples. Emunah is the lens through which life should be viewed, understood and experienced. Emunah provides an unfailing guide to how life should be lived.

But the symbiotic relationship between emunah and masroah, anochi and v'higadeta l'bincha reaches deeper. Emunah provides an all-encompassing vision of the past, present, and future. The world was created for Torah, for the Jewish people who accepted and live Torah. Life does not merely muddle along. Life-existence-is purposeful, and the ultimate purpose is "I'sakein olam b'malchus shakai".

For this reason masorah is a pivotal, indispensable component of emunah. In transmitting our faith to future generations, we sow the seeds of geulah, "I'sakein olam b'malchus shakai". One who experiences "anochi Hashem Elokecha" must translate and channel that experience into "v'higadeta l'bincha".

Ramban, in his hasagosto Rambam's Sefer HaMitzvos, emphasizes this link between emunah and masorah. It is, writes the Ramban, a mitzvas lo sa'aseh to never forget ma'amad Har Sinai which is the basis of our emunah in Torah. This mitzvah, according to Ramban, also entails transmitting that memory and

concomitant belief to future generations. Emunah and masorah are inseparable.

Avraham Avinu was a paragon, and hence is a paradigm, of faith. He triumphed, Chazal teach us, over ten nisyonos. His life was an odyssey of emunah. And yet, the Torah chooses one particular moment to describe him as a ma'amin. The Torah records Avraham Avinu's reaction to Hashem's promise that he, despite being barren and already at an advanced age, will yet father a child who will inherit his legacy. Avraham Avinu's reaction: "V'he'emin b'Hashem- and he believed in Hashem". It is only at this juncture when Hashem promises him a child that Avraham Avinu is given the opportunity to manifest complete emunah-emunah with a vision for the future.

A Jew is called upon to live a life of emunah, anchored in the past of "asher hotzeiticha mai'Eretz Mitzrayim" and confident of a future of "I'sakein olam b'malchus shakai". © 2005 Rabbi M. Twersky & TorahWeb.org

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Gael Grunewald, World Secretary of Bnei Akiva

Shirat Hayam, the epic poem on the shores of the Red Sea, opens with the words, "Then Moshe and Bnei Yisrael will sing..." [Shemot 15:1]. Rabbi Zevin, in his book "On the Torah and the Holidays," discusses the meaning of the word "az"-then. Moshe seemed to fail after his first meeting with Pharaoh, when the king commanded, "Do not give the nation any more straw in order to make bricks as you did yesterday and the day before" [Shemot 5:7]. It is not hard to imagine the crisis felt by the leader of the nation in view of the tragic results of his mission and in light of the reaction by the people. Therefore, he turned to G-d, saying, "U'mei'az-From the time I came to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he made things worse for this nation" [5:23].

The Midrash compares the two uses of the word "az," when Moshe began his mission and later on at the Red Sea. It would seem that Moshe was wrong not to take the long range view, and that he found it difficult to internalize the fact that the process of redemption included suffering and oppression. The epic poem of Shirat Hayam serves as a way to mend the fault of Moshe's inability to bridge the two periods, the oppression and the redemption.

The Talmud notes, "It is not written 'he sang' but 'he will sing'-this is a proof of resurrection in the Torah" [Sanhedrin 91b]. Anybody who has a complete vision of history as a single unified process ("Haro'eh"-see the last chapter of Berachot, currently studied in the Daf Yomi) should be able to link the different links in the process into a single chain.

The obligation to give thanks to G-d in our generation stems not only from the anticipation of what

will happen in the future, as is written, "the people lost in the land of Ashur and the downtrodden in the land of Egypt will come and bow down to G-d on the holy mountain, in Jerusalem" [Yeshayahu 27:13]. Rather, our appreciation is related to the good that we have received in our generation, in spite of the accompanying difficulties, both internal and external. The process of the return to Zion has brought tens of thousands of Jews back to our land and to our traditions, and it is hard to imagine what the spiritual situation of the nation would be if not for the return of the people to the promised land. As one example, the tragedy of assimilation that is so widespread-almost as if "there is no house that does not have a dead person" [Shemot 12:30] -- would be much more serious if not for the existence of the State of Israel.

Let us hope and pray that we will be privileged to adopt the words of Rabbi A.Y. Kook, "There is no reason to be sorry at all or to despair because of the spirit of nationalism which is steadily growing. Even the faults that it causes along its path will eventually become part of renewed construction and mending of the path." [Orot Hatechiya].

RABBI NOSSON CHAYIM LEFF

Sfas Emes

The Sfas Emes on Pesach is very rich: 69 double-columned pages in small Rashi script. The Sfas Emes has so much to say on Pesach that my best effort to transmit here is like taking a spoonful of water from the ocean.

Why do I mention how much more Sfas Emes is available? Because being aware of how much more Sfas Emes is out there, some members of this Chabura may realize that the time has come to purchase their own set of Sfas Emes. I suggest that you view this purchase as an investment in mind-stretching Divrei Torah- an afikoman present for the entire family. Owning your own copy of the Sfas Emes will increase your access to his ideas. And better access to the ideas of the Sfas Emes will help you (and your family) avoid a malady to which observant Jews are all too susceptible-religious stagnation.

Before we begin this ma'amar, it helps to have an idea of what to expect. The ma'amar is crafted along three themes: past and present; the individual and the klal (the collectivity); emes (provable truth) and emuna (unprovable truth). These three themes weave in and out of the ma'amar, giving it a rare beauty. Finally, toward the end of the ma'amar, expect an extraordinary khap- intellectual coup-such that only the Sfas Emes could deliver.

In his very first ma'amar on Pesach, the Sfas Emes quotes a text from the Haggada: "Bechol dor vador chayav (!) ahdam lir'os es atzmo ke'ilu HU yatza miMitzrayim." That is, in each generation, a person must (!) view himself as having personally experienced

the Redemption from Egypt. The Sfas Emes takes this mandate seriously., This leads to a basic question: what should a person do to reach this esired-more accurately: mandated-goal? The Sfas Emes answers that a two-step process is involved. The first step is to realize that, in reality, every generation experiences its own version of the Redemption from Egypt. With that belief under our belt., the Sfas Emes tells us, we can in fact relive the original, prototypical ge'ula as a personal experience.

The Sfas Emes now elaborates on this idea: i.e., that we are enjoined to relive the experience of our Liberation from Egypt. That Liberation involved much more than escape from physical and political subordination to the Egyptians. Redemption also included escape from the tum'a of Egyptian culture and intellectual life.

Continuing with this theme of experiencing Redemption, the Sfas Emes quotes a statement of the Maharal. The Maharal tells us that "bevadai" ("certainly") we all participated in the experience of the Redemption from Egypt as a klal (i.e., the Jewish People as a collectivity). But the Haggada is telling us more than the fact that we experienced Redemption as a collectivity. In mandating: "ke'ilu HU yatzami Mitzrayim", the Haggada is telling us that we must also experience Liberation on an individual, personal level.

How does a person achieve that much more difficult goal of reliving the Redemption from Egypt at an individual, personal level? The Sfas Emes answers: by joining the collectivity. (Note: The idea that an individual can achieve personal religious fulfillment by joining the collectivity is a startling paradox. Anyone but the Sfas Emes would steer clear of such an apparent internal contradiction. By contrast, the Sfas Emes explicitly recognizes the seeming inconsistencies that HaShem built into the world. In fact, he gives them center stage.)

How does an individual become part of the collectivity? With emuna! by truly believing that we were redeemed from the galus of Mitzrayim, we can re-live the actual experience. Once we affirm our membership in the collectivity, we can access this experience on an individual basis. A fair question here is: how does this process work (in the real world)? That is, how does having emuna enable an individual to become part of a collectivity?

I suggest the following explanation. By definition, emuna involves affirmation of ideas that cannot be proven. Hence, choosing to accept a given set of ideas sets a person apart from people who do not give credence to those ideas. By the same token, choosing to accept those ideas puts the person together with people who affirm the same thoughts as he. Thus, affirming a set of unprovable ideas-i.e., emuna-enables an individual to join the collectivity of klal Yisroel. (Notice how commonsensical are these ideas of the Sfas Emes once we make the effort to take them seriously.)

The Sfas Emes has articulated two conditions for experiencing personal liberation. He makes it clear that both conditions involve emuna; i.e. affirmation of an unprovable truth. Note that mesora (father to offspring tradition) is not enough for the Sfas Emes. As he sees the world, emuna is necessary to arrive at the emes. What are the two conditions for which- in this context-emuna is required? A person must view himself as having participated (past tense) in the Redemption. And he/she must have the emuna to recognize that, were it not for the Redemption, he/she would not have a relationship with HaShem. With these two emuna conditions satisfied, a person will realize that indeed he is (present tense) being liberated.

We can now sum up on this line of analysis. The Sfas Emes has told us that every generation has its 'Yetzi'as Mitzrayim' (Exodus from Egypt). The Redemption varies with the specific situation and needs of the generation. (Note: Redemption implies prior enslavement. What do you see as the nature of enslavement of the present generation?) Further, the Sfas Emes has told us that, to the degree that a person has emuna that he experienced (past tense) the Liberation from Egypt, so too, can he feel (present tense) the Redemption of his own generation. And so, too, can each individual experience Liberation from his own personal constraints.

"Constraints"? How did "constraints" get into this discussion? The answer stretches one's mind, for it is a typical Sfas Emes chidush. To understand the answer, we must go back to basics. The word "Mitzrayim:" is usually translated as "Egypt." But with ko'ach ha'chidush such as only the Sfas Emes can deploy, he reads the word "Mitzrayim" in a totally innovative way. The Hebrew word "meitzar" means "constraint" or "limit". The Sfas Emes is reading "Mitzrayim" as being the plural of the word "metizar". Thus, "yetzi'as mitzrayim" has become: "liberation from one's constraints". The Sfas Emes does not spell out what he has specifically in mind when he refers to personal constraints that Pesach teaches us can be overcome. I suggest that he is referring to long-standing attitudes, ingrained assumptions, and habits that too often constrain a person's growth.

A final question. Viewing Pesach as a time for Liberation from one's personal constraints is fine and good if the constraints are in fact loosened. But does it make sense to talk of "Liberation" in a case where the constraints are NOT loosened? For example, consider a case in which the constraint derives- cholilo (G-d forbid) -- from an incurable medical handicap. Does the Sfas Emes's perspective on Pesach as a time for Liberation from a person's individual constraints apply there too?

I believe the answer is: yes! How so? A major theme in the Sfas Emes's Torah is the need to pierce the Hester with which HaShem cloaks Himself. Piercing the Hester enables a person to view reality

accurately. A prominent case in which the Sfas Emes applies this insight is in the context of seeing the hand of HaShem where an untutored eye would see only Nature (teva).

This observation implies that the Sfas Emes's perspective certainly does apply to the case of the person afflicted with an incurable handicap. Knowledge that his condition comes from HaShem (rather than from mindless Nature) implies that his condition is purposeful. This awareness gives meaning to what the person is undergoing. It transforms his experience, and makes it a wholly different condition. Thus, getting the metaphysics of the situation right provides Liberation in its own special way.

This Sfas Emes is rich-in fact, so rich that one cannot hold on to it. One way to handle this situation of overflowing insights is to focus on some thoughts that speak to one with special force. Tastes, interests, and background vary, so there is no single list of Sfas Emes thoughts that will serve for everyone. But to stimulate your own thinking about "take home" Sfas Emes thoughts, here are two suggestions. One unique and powerful Sfas Emes idea is the notion that every generation experiences its own enslavement and Redemption. Another powerful new idea is the thought that Pesach is a time for individuals to break out of their personal constraints and grow. © 2005 Rabbi N. C. Leff & torah.org

RABBI PESACH LERNER

National Council of Young Israel

The Talmud (Tractate Sanhedrin 91A) 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. It is written in the Torah, they declared, that when the Israelites left Egypt they borrowed gold and silver vessels from our ancestors; so far these items have not been returned. We now demand that this debt be repaid.

One of the Sages of Israel, Gabiha ben Pessissa, undertook the defense of its countrymen before 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 430 years (Exodus 12:40-41). 600,000 Jews worked for the Egyptians for 430 years and received no wages. Settle this account, said Gabiha ben Pessissa, 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 the 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 Ideles (often referred to as the MaHarsha) poses a difficult question. How could Gabiha ben Pessissa suggest that the Jewish People were entitled to the wages of 600,000 workers for a period of 430 years? In truth, the Jews did not remain in Egypt for more than 210 years and the actual period of slave labor was only for 86 years. Was Gabiha ben Pessissa not concerned to be challenged and have his counter-claim dismissed?

Rabbi Dr. Marcus Lehmann of Mainz, Germany (circa 1850) answers the MaHarshas question as follows: The Torah tells us (Exodus 13:18), and the Children of Israel went up 'Chamushim- armed- out of the land of Egypt. The great commentator, Rashi, provides another explanation to the word 'Chamushim- a fifth. Only a fifth, 20%, of the Jewish people left Egypt whereas four-fifth of them died and were buried, in Egypt, during the three days of darkness. Therefore, since the number of the Jewish people that left Egypt included 600,000 working males, there must have been five times that amount- 3 million- during the years of Egyptian bondage. Thus 3 million Jewish male workers served the Egyptian nation for the 86 years of actual servitude. It all equals out; whether 600,000 worked for 430 years or 3 million worked for 86 years, Gabiha ben Pessissa had no reason to fear a challenge by the Egyptians. Had they countered his claim by contending that the Jews had labored for only 86 years, his reply would have been obvious.

Rabbi Dr. Lehmann adds a beautiful addition to his answer of the MaHarshas 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...(Exodus 6:6-7).

Another reason for four cups of wine, explains Rabbi Dr. Lehmann, is as follows: The servitude of the Jewish people was originally intended to last 430 years, five times the actual 86 years. There were four periods of 86 years that we did not work. We raise our cups of wine once for each one of those periods of 86 years. We praise the Al-Mighty for His deliverance of four sets of 86 years each time with a Kos, a cup of wine. The Gematria, the numerical value of the word Kos is 86. With our Kos of 86 we thank Hashem for His deliverance of an 86 year period.

The Wise Son- what does he say? When your son asks you on the morrow, saying, what are the testimonies, statutes and ordinances that HaShem, our G-d, has commanded you. (Deuteronomy 6:20)

The Wicked Son- what does he say? What is this service for you? (Exodus 12:26)

What is the difference between the Wise Son and the Wicked Son? Both address the question- what

are the testimonies, this service- using the second person pronoun you, seemingly excluding themselves.

The answer commonly given is that the difference is not indicated by the second person pronoun but by the fact that the Wise Son said HaShem, our G-d. The Wise Son clearly accepts that HaShem is his G-d. The Wicked Son, on the other hand, leaves G-d out of his discussion. Another interpretation, perhaps, lies in not only how the question is asked but also when the question is asked.

It is the Wise Son who inquires into the nature of the various commandments. The Wise Son participates in the Pesach Seder. He has joined in the eating of Matzoh and Maror. He was part of the discussion of the Hagada and the miracles that occurred to the Jewish People. His inquiry into the reasons of the Commandments follows his involvement- when your son asks you on the morrow... Please explain to me that which we have already performed. The Wise Son believes in the Torah and our traditions. The Wise Sons lack of understanding does not prevent him from his performance of the Mitzvot. The Wicked Son, on the other hand, poses his challenge to this service before the Pesach Seder has even begun. To the Wicked Son, our traditions are foreign unless he fully understands and agrees with their importance and relevance to his lifestyle. For the Wicked Son, there is no acceptance or trust; to him the Torah responds had he been in Egypt he would not have been redeemed.

In Judaism, we are taught to question and challenge- but only once we have accepted the premise. We say at the end of davening every Shabbos and Yom Tov, Ain Kelokainu, ain Kadoneinu- there is none like our G-d, there is none like our Master. It would be more logical to first ask Me KeloKainu, me Kadoneinu- who is like our G-d? Who is like our Master?- and then respond. However, in Judaism, we must first accept G-ds sovereignty as our foundation and then, as the Wise Son did, ask all our questions.

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RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

The reading of Shir Ha-Shirim (The Song of Songs) at the end of Passover points to an interesting phenomena. The seder actually has many beginnings and also many endings. In fact, its final conclusion may not be reached until days later in the reading of the Shir Ha-Shirim. Let me explain.

The seder is fundamentally made up of eating, telling the Exodus story and praising G-d. In each section there are many starts. We wash our hands but do not fully do so as we recite no blessing. We break the matzah but alas do not follow through with eating. We partake of the karpas, a kind of hors d'oeuvre but do not continue eating the meal.

The same holds true in the story telling section of the seder. We hear the Four Questions only to break before another set of questions are asked by the four children. We begin to tell the story of the Exodus with the paragraph, "we were slaves in Egypt" (avadim hayinu) only to halt by beginning a second telling of the story with "in the beginning, we were idol worshippers" (mi-tehillah). Similarly, we begin praising G-d by reciting the first two paragraphs of Hallel. The end of the Hallel, however, is not recited until after the actual seder meal.

Rabbi Dr. Samuel Belkin, former president of Yeshiva University, whose 25th Yahrzeit is being celebrated this year (*this dvar torah is from 2001-ed.*), once observed that the famous phrase "all beginnings are difficult" (kol hathalot kashot) is in the plural. He notes that the statement may refer to one single venture that may require many different beginnings in order to succeed. So, the great rabbi told me, when I expressed to him my struggles in the beginning of my rabbinic career. "Have patience," he said, "when beginning any enterprise there are invariably stumbling blocks, but this should be no cause for undue pessimism."

As there are many starts in the seder, so are there many conclusions. It is difficult to say goodbye to an experience of great meaning. Thus, the seder comes to its official conclusion after we complete the Great Hallel. But, in subsequent centuries, prayers and songs were added. In fact, some recite the Shir Ha-Shirim after the Haggadah is completed. Reading this love letter between G-d and the Jewish people is yet another example of our hesitant feeling in parting after the intense experience of the seder. This resistance to separation is expressed even stronger in the fact that the reading of Shir Ha-Shirim is most commonly recited days after the seder night. Its recitation finally completes the seder experience.

As there are many beginnings in life experiences, so too are there many ends. It is also so difficult to say goodbye. Like the individual I spoke to recently who told me of the great difficulty sitting down for the seder during this, the first year of mourning for a parent. Truth be told, that first year includes many goodbyes; the ending of Shivah, the first Shabbat or the first Passover night without ones beloved. The process of goodbye continues into future years as we say goodbye over and over when reciting Yizkor or on the anniversary of death (Yahrzeit).

It reminds me of the deep struggle my family faced many years ago when we lost an infant child. I'll never forget the empathy of Dr. Belkin, and the deep meaning of his seemingly simple words: "I know, saying goodbye is difficult." For me, Dr. Belkin was a rebbe displaying deep feeling for his student. His words keep resonating as I grow older. When a child is lost, one doesn't only mourn what was, but every day one mourns what could have been.

For the good and for the bad, that's the way it is in life. Beginnings and ends don't always come in neat,

clean packages. Often we start only to start all over and sometimes we end, only to end again and again.
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RABBI ARI WEISS

Where's Moshe?

This year, like every year, as we read through the Hagaddah, we wonder why Moshe is not mentioned. One would think that Moshe, through whom all of the plagues were brought, and whom Hashem commanded to lead us out of Egypt would be the central character at our seder. Wasn't it through him that our redemption occurred? Yet, we find no trace of Moshe's name anywhere.

In order to understand why Moshe is in the background during our seder, we must examine the content of maggid. Maggid outlines the story of our redemption and actually retells the story of every exile we've gone through and will go through. In maggid we read of the prototypical exile and redemption that generalizes all of our exiles and redemptions. The Baal Hagadah presents this in the form of four P'sukim which are expounded upon during maggid. The first verse describes our descent into exile, and how it was intended for but a short time. The second verse describes how the Egyptians oppressed and afflicted us. The third verse describes how we finally called out to Hashem to help us, and the final verse describes our redemption.

These four verses can therefore be seen as the outline of golus and geula. We first go into exile, are oppressed, cry out to Hashem for help, and he answers by saving us. This is the model for all redemptions, including our final one (Y"YH). But what happened to Moshe - the Mashiach? The Gemara at the end of Sanhedrin underscores the importance and requirement of Mashiach in our redemption. Yet the Baal Hagadah neglects to mention Mashiach as one of the elements of Golus and Geula.

It is very possible, then, that the Baal Hagadah is focusing on our role in the Geula and how we can help to bring it about. We read, therefore, in the maggid how Hashem listened to our calls, saw our afflictions, our toils, and our troubles. It wasn't until we cried out to Hashem in tefillah that we were saved. We finally realized that we couldn't do it ourselves and could only be saved through Hashem's intervention. But the Baal Hagadah goes on to explain that the Passuk also refers to the children. Hashem came to redeem us because of our tefillos and because of the Jewish identity instilled in the children.

So why isn't Moshe mentioned? Because Mashiach is Hashem's "job." Ours, as is recalled in the Hagaddah, is Tefillah and the home. When we uphold our end, Hashem will bring about the Geula in whatever way He sees fit.