

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI DOV KRAMER**

### Taking a Closer Look

**"T**en miracles were done for our ancestors by the sea" (Avos 5:4). One of the ten miracles that occurred when G-d split the Red Sea so that the Children of Israel could cross on dry land was that it split into 12 separate paths, one for each of the 12 Tribes (Bartenura, Rabbeinu Yonah and Rambam; see also M'chilta B'shalch 4, Tanchuma B'shalach 10, Rashi on T'hilim 136:13 and Rabbeinu Bachye on Sh'mos 14:21). Which leaves us wondering how those who didn't belong to a specific Tribe, such as the "Eirev Rav," the "mixed multitude" of foreigners who left Egypt with the Children of Israel (see Rashi on Sh'mos 12:38), crossed. It also opens up the question of how the Tribes were configured. Did the Levi'im get to one of the paths first, forcing M'nashe and Efrayim to cross together as one Tribe? Did they count how many paths there were and realized that the Levi'im must be getting their own path so we (M'nashe and Efrayim) must be reconfigured as "Yosef" until they get to the other side?

[In Appendix 86 of "B'tzaysi MiMitzrayim," several Midrashim (e.g. Tanchuma, Bamidbar 12, Sh'mos Rabbah 20:5, Midrash Rabbah on Shir HaShirim 4:12, and Midrash Lekach Tov on Sh'mos 12:51) are quoted that seem to say that the D'galim were arranged right after we left Egypt. The travel-formation was already well-known from Yaakov's instructions for carrying his casket from Egypt to Canaan (see Rashi on Bamidbar 2:2), so once the nation started their own journey from Egypt to Canaan, they moved into this previously-known arrangement. Although these Midrashim can be (and are) explained in ways that allow the point of the Midrashim to be made even if the D'galim weren't set up until the second year in the desert, a simple reading of at least some of them has the D'galim in operation right after the exodus, and there are commentators (e.g. Panim Yafos on Sh'mos 14:22; see also Chizkuni on Vayikra 24:10) who understand them this way. Which means that

M'nashe and Efrayim were already separate and distinct Tribes when they got to the sea. Did they recombine just for the crossing and then split up again on the other side?]

As far as the "Eirev Rav" goes, there is an easy way around (pardon the pun) the issue, as some (e.g. Rambam on Avos 5:4 and Tosfos on Arachin 15a) are of the opinion that we came out on the same side of the sea that we entered, traveling in a semi-circle. If so, there was no need for the "Eirev Rav" to have crossed; they could have just waited on the same side until the Children of Israel re-emerged after their semicircular trip.

I discussed this opinion, including possible issues with it, several years ago (<http://tinyurl.com/hyt7hbb>). I also explained why I thought that although they did cross the sea from end to end, they didn't have to, and in fact had been on the other side (the eastern side) before doubling back to the western side in order to confuse Pharaoh. The bottom line, though, is that there is no need to cross the Red Sea in order to get from Egypt to the Sinai Peninsula. Therefore, even if there were only enough paths for the 12 Tribes, the "Eirev Rav" could have gone around the northern tip of the Gulf of Suez and met up with the Children of Israel on the other side. Or, since the Children of Israel had already been on the Sinai Peninsula before crossing the sea (See Bamidbar 33:6), and returned there after crossing it (33:8), only going back to the western side to confuse Pharaoh into thinking they were lost (thereby convincing him to follow them into the sea when they crossed back to the eastern side), the "Eirev Rav" likely decided not to go back towards Egypt, and stayed on the eastern side to see how things developed. This not only helps explain why only the Children of Israel collected the "spoils by the sea" (as the "Eirev Rav" weren't there), but since the "Eirev Rav" was already on the other side waiting to see what happened, they didn't need any path to cross the sea.

Although this works for the "Eirev Rav," it is unlikely that the Tribe of Levi didn't cross with the rest of the Children of Israel, and a bit unusual (both logistically and conceptually) for M'nashe and Efrayim to have to have recombined into one Tribe just so that the number of paths could be kept at the magical number of "twelve." (It is also unlikely that the number 12 isn't meant literally, but euphemistically, meaning



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"one per Tribe," and that there were really 13 paths through the sea.)

When the nation was camped by the sea (on the eastern side) before they crossed, there was a lot going on. There was a "rebellion by the sea" (T'hilim 106:7), with four different "groups" clamoring for a specific type of action (Mechilta B'shalach 2, Targum Yonasan 14:13); one said we should toss ourselves into the sea (either giving up, or putting ourselves in G-d's hands rather than the Egyptians,' although Moshe responding to each of these groups indicates that this was not an act of faith), one said we should return to Egypt, one said we should fight them (the Egyptians) and one said we should scream (I guess to scare them away). Although Sefer Hayashar (which is quoted as a source in the traditional literature, such as Me'am Lo'eiz) lists which Tribes belonged to each group, with three Tribes in each, and Yosef was considered one Tribe and Levi another, this would seem to be an instance where the author of this book embellished a Midrash, as which Tribe was in which group is not mentioned in the original Midrash. [It should be noted that there are indications that M'nashe and Efrayim didn't become fully separate Tribes until later, see the 7th paragraph of (<http://tinyurl.com/hs5rkyr>), so Levi would still be one of the 12 Tribes, which corresponds to the number of paths in the sea. Nevertheless, we are working with the opinion that the travel formation was already in place, so M'nashe and Efrayim were already fully separate Tribes.] If the Tribe of Levi was not part of any of these groups, they likely would have been working to calm the rebellion down, with different L'vi'im working with each of the four groups.

At the same time, there was another dispute between the Tribes, as each one wanted to be the first into the water (Soteh 36b-37a). [That some should be rebelling against Moshe (and G-d) while others were prepared to put their lives on the line is not surprising; Ramban (Sh'mos 14:10-12) also describes different "groups," with some being righteous and others not so much.] In order to reconcile each Tribe wanting to jump into the sea before it split, including Binyamin not waiting until there was a resolution and going in first, with Nachshon ben Aminadav, from the Tribe of Yehudah, being the first one in (and several other

issues), I have suggested (<http://tinyurl.com/zb258nq>) that Nachshon jumped in first, after which G-d caused the sea to split for him in the spot where he was. Seeing that the sea split for Nachshon (and before the rest of Nachshon's Tribe followed him through the path created when the sea split for him), the Tribe of Binyamin jumped in, doing so at the point on the seashore where they were, causing the sea to split there for them as well. The other Tribes then followed suit, jumping into the water where they were on the shore (as opposed to moving to where the sea had already split), with the end result being 12 paths, one for each Tribe. The desire by [some in] each Tribe to go into the water first led to each Tribe getting their own path through the sea.

Although it is possible that after this occurred the "Eirev Rav" saw the paths and followed one of them to the other side (or some took one while others took others), which is less of an issue if the point was creating a path for each Tribe as opposed to having one for each (as the latter would mean that the path meant for a specific Tribe was being used by others, while the former just means that they used a path whose separate creation was meant to show appreciation for each Tribe's willingness to go into the sea, and their desire to do so first), I still think that the "Eirev Rav" never went through the sea, but stayed on the eastern side when the Children of Israel went back to the western side. As far as the Tribe of Levi, though, I think it is possible that once paths were created for each of the Tribes, and the rebellion that the L'vi'im were trying to calm went away, each Levi crossed the sea through the path created for the Tribe they had been working with. The L'vi'im were too busy trying to end the rebellion to consider jumping in first, so did not get their own path, but were able to cross via the paths already created for the other 12 Tribes. ©2016 Rabbi D. Kramer

**RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

## Shabbat Shalom

**Y**ou shall observe the month of the springtime and perform the Passover offering for the Lord your G-d, for in the month of springtime the Lord your G-d took you out of Egypt at night. (Deut. 16: 1)

On the eighth day of Passover we read a passage from the Book of Deuteronomy which lists the festivals of the Jewish calendar. What does it tell us about how we spend our time and our relationship to the people around us?

Every ancient people held certain places and objects sacred. The Jewish people, however, attached the most importance to sanctifying time. The Torah reserves sanctification not for the physical objects of creation but for the Sabbath: "And G-d blessed the Sabbath day and sanctified it" (Gen. 2:3) — it became an oasis of holy time.

Two Hassidic rabbis, the Kotzker Rebbe and the Vorker Rebbe once discussed the relative holiness of certain commandments. The Vorker observed that on Sukkot one chooses the four species after painstaking care to ensure their perfection and beauty. They are admired and waved, but finally they are laid aside, the commandment concerning them having been fulfilled. This is the way it is with most mitzvot: as long as we hold them we encompass the holy; the moment we release them their holiness departs. But when the Jew sits in the sukkah, he is surrounded by the commandment. The holy literally encompasses the Jew. Thus, sukkah is the greatest mitzvah. The Kotzker replied that the commandment concerning the Sabbath is even greater. The Jew can walk out of the sukkah, but he cannot walk out of the Sabbath. In other words, the sanctification of time is the ultimate sanctity, and since life is measured in time, holiness of time means holiness of life. It is thus characteristic that the first commandment G-d gave the people of Israel as a nation — while yet in Egypt — was a mitzvah dealing with an aspect of time: “This month shall be to you the first of the months” (Ex. 12:1).

The Torah clearly emphasizes our role in transforming and ennobling the time we are granted by the Almighty. As Jews, we must view time not merely as objective, disparate units, such as minutes, days, etc., but rather as subjective, interconnected moments which we are empowered to fill with content and to sanctify with meaning. This idea is halakhically manifested in the institution of sanctifying the new moon (*kiddush ha-hodesh*), which is the process whereby we declare a certain day to be the beginning of the month. Originally, after hearing testimony from witnesses concerning the new moon, the Great Sanhedrin would proclaim the onset of a new month by the formula “the month is holy, the month is holy”. The court’s decision determined on what day the festivals would occur. In contrast to the Sabbath, which occurs every seven days regardless of the calendar, the festivals depend on the determination of the month, which in turn is fixed by the Jewish people. As Rabbi Ovadiah Sforno (ca. 1475-1550) observes in his Bible commentary, it is no coincidence that this commandment to sanctify time was given at the moment of freedom from Egypt. Slaves have no clear notion of time since it is not theirs to dispose of. Only free men, who have at least limited control over their time, can fill it with significant matters — and sanctify it. Thus, the concept of freedom and the sanctification of time are bound up with each other.

The first month in the Jewish calendar is the month of Nisan, the time of the emergence of the Jewish people. The seventh month is the month of Tishrei, the anniversary of the creation of man. The major Jewish holidays occur in or near these two major periods: Passover and Shavuot in the former; Rosh

Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and Sukkot in the latter. The first group of holidays is characterized by its emphasis on the particular — on historical events of relevance only to the Jewish people, namely emancipation from Egyptian bondage and the revelation at Mount Sinai. The holidays of the second group, however, contain universal themes and occur appropriately in the month when man was created. Despite the fact that there is tension between particularism and universalism, between chauvinism and cosmopolitanism, both are part of the Jew’s life-cycle. That they can be reconciled is an important motif of the Kiddush. By making reference in this blessing to both the creation of the world and the Exodus from Egypt, we affirm that there is no conflict between the two. The Bible opens with the Lord of the universe creating a world designed for all humanity and with instructions applicable to every individual. After the major Divine disappointments, first in Adam, then in Noah, the Almighty decides, as it were, to create a family out of which would be forged a “holy nation and kingdom of priests.” This nation would by its example inspire the world to accept G-d’s teachings. Hence at the very moment of his election, Abraham is promised by G-d that “all the families of the earth shall be blessed” through him. From the elevation of a particular people will follow the elevation of an entire peoplehood. ©2016 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

#### **RABBI KALMAN PACKOUZ**

### **Shabbat Shalom Weekly**

**T**he Torah states: “And you shall rejoice before the Lord, your G-d, you and your son, and your daughter and your servant and your maid, and the Levite that is within your gates, and the convert, and the orphan and the widow that are in your midst” (Deut. 16:11).

Rashi cites the Sifre which points out that in this verse we have a list of four members of a person’s household: his son, his daughter, servant and maid. We also have four that are needy: the Levite, convert, orphan and widow. The Almighty says, “If you take care of My four, I will take care of your four.” We learn from here that by helping the needy we merit that our needs are taken care of as well; the Almighty responds to us measure for measure. *Dvar Torah based on Love Your Neighbor by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin ©2016 Rabbi K. Packouz & aish.com*

#### **RABBI ARI WEISS**

### **Where's Moshe?**

**T**his 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 (IY"H). But what happened to Moshe - the Moshiach? The Gemara at the end of Sanhedrin underscores the importance and requirement of Moshiach in our redemption. Yet the Baal Hagadah neglects to mention Moshiach 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 Moshiach is Hashem's "job." Ours, as is recalled in the Hagadah, is Tefillah and the home. When we uphold our end, Hashem will bring about the Geula in whatever way He sees fit. © 1999 Rabbi A. Weiss

#### **RABBI TZVI KLUGERMAN**

### **Baruch Hamakom**

**A**s we enter deeper into the recitation of the Passover saga, we recite Baruch Hamakom, Baruch Hu, Blessed is the Omnipresent. This paragraph concludes with Baruch Shenatan Torah L'Amo Yisrael, Blessed be the One who gave Torah to His nation Israel. This blessing is unique, as it is said without Shem u' Malchut, the Divine Name and Royal Appellation. A blessing usually signifies the liturgical division of a prayer service. This blessing, albeit without the Divine Name, sanctifies what may be the actual

start of the Passover seder, the commandment to relate the Exodus from Egypt.

This possible beginning of the seder, is marked by the section of the four sons. Why would the seder begin with the four sons? Why not begin immediately with the passage from the Midrash Mechilta "Yachol M'Rosh Chodesh, You might suppose that we should begin from the beginning of the month"?

If the motif of the seder is Chinuch Hayeladim, instruction of the children, then we have to establish pedagogical guidelines. We bring the example of the wise son, the Chacham, to reaffirm our obligation. Even if our children are more learned than us, we still have an obligation to transmit our heritage. The Rasha, evil son, reminds us not to discount the rebellious child without trying. The harsh response offered to this son is another attempt to show him the folly of his attitude. As we learn in the Torah, the Ben Sorer u'Moreh, rebellious son, was declared rebellious only after repeated attempts were made to teach him. The Tam, simple son, receives the simple answer. We are encouraged to be persistent in our attempts to teach him, even if he doesn't understand after the first time. The Sh'eino Yodea Lish'ol, one who doesn't even know to ask, reminds us not to disregard the quiet student, and not to assume that everyone present understands what is being said and done.

Yet, perhaps there is another meaning behind the placement of the four sons at this juncture. The saga of the Redemption of the Israelites as G-d's people, was an epic event that had many different facets. Witnessing the Otot u'Mo'ot, G-d's wonders and signs that were visited upon the Egyptians and retelling the Exodus can have profound reactions in the same person.

After learning about the Exodus, we should be able to see The Divine and search out G-d in the events. This spiritual revelation may overwhelm us, even inspire us to new heights, but even the sky is a limit. We must remember the seemingly inappropriate answer given to the Chacham, "Ein Maftirim Achar Hapesach Afikoman, nothing is to be eaten after the Afikomen". Regardless of the spiritual revelation achieved, the primacy of Halacha remains supreme.

Similarly, we may at times deny the Divine in the events of the Redemption saga. Like the Rasha, we might try not to see the hand of G-d in the events. The answer given to the wicked son makes us aware that had we denied the Divine during the actual plagues and not heeded Moshe's warnings to place the blood upon the doorposts, we would not have been saved.

However, there are times that we look at G-d's divine providence with some hesitation. Did He have to do it that way?, we might ask. The answer given to the Tam instructs us to look at the wonders and signs of The Almighty with Temimut, full acceptance. This is the approach of Nachum Ish Gamzu, who regularly stated "

Gamzu L'Tova, this too is for the best". That is the approach of the Tam. Acceptance of G-d's will with Emunah She'leimah - complete belief.

Yet, there may be events of the Redemption that overpower us and our response is one of silence. We are too overwhelmed to respond. "At Petach Lo, you open for him", is the response to the Sheino Yodea Lish'ol. The learning process must never cease.

At the beginning of our Kiyum Hamitzvah, the discharge of the commandment, of telling the Exodus saga, we need to be aware of others' and our own reactions. © 1999 Rabbi T. Klugerman

### RABBI MORDECHAI WEISS

## Going in the Same Direction

**W**e 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 former Principal of the Bess and Paul Sigal Hebrew Academy of Greater Hartford and the Hebrew Academy of Atlantic County where together he served for over forty years. He and his wife D'vorah recently made Aliya and are living in Allon Shvut. All comments are welcome at [ravmordechai@aol.com](mailto:ravmordechai@aol.com)

### YITZ WEISS

## Generations

**W**hat is the lesson of the four sons? My grandfather, Rabbi Moshe Weiss z"l, explained the lesson with a story: Once there was a scholarly gentleman, with a long white beard and black cloak. He was a deeply righteous man who grew up in very religious surroundings. The man married and moved to America to seek his fortune. He arrived with hopes and dreams, and a commitment to his heritage. Time passed, and the man had a son. His son was a rasha, a wicked son. He only concerned himself with the here and now. He discounted his heritage as archaic and wanted to completely assimilate himself in his secular surroundings.

Years later, the rasha marries, and he, too, has a son. His son learns very little of his Judaism from his father. But once a year he sits at his grandfather's seder and asks questions. The rasha's son is a tam, a simple son. He asks his questions at the seder and hears the answers.

As time progresses, the grandfather passes away and the tam grows older and marries. His son is now a she-eino yodaiya lishol, one who can't even ask

a question. He can't ask his father - he is only a tam. He can't ask his grandfather - he's a rasha. His questions not only remain unanswered, they also remain unasked. He doesn't even understand enough to be able to ask questions.

So what happens when all the Jewish people eventually become she-eino yodaiya lishol's?

Now we can understand why the Jewish people are compared to the moon. The moon starts out bright and large, and slowly diminishes over the course of a month - almost until it seems that it would disappear forever. But then, like a spark in the night, it becomes whole again, and the process repeats. So too the Jewish people may seem to dwindle. What will happen when the Jewish people become totally assimilated? Impossible. For when things seem at their worst, suddenly there is a spark and we are great once again.

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### **RABBI AVI WEISS**

## **Shabbat Forshpeis**

**T**he 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 YAAKOV HABER**

## **Shabbat Shalom Weekly**

**B**efore we say Yizkor, I want to share a thought with you that I read in the journal, "Dos Yiddische Vort". It was an article by Rabbi Moshe Sherer, the head of the Agudas Yisrael in America. He describes how he was travelling by plane, together with Rabbi Yaacov Kaminetzky of blessed memory, to New York, back from a world gathering of Agudas Yisrael in Jerusalem. The seating arrangement was such that R. Sherer was sitting in the row behind R. Kaminetzky, and, as it happened, next to R. Kaminetzky was sitting Yeruham Meshel, the General Secretary of the Histadrut, the Israeli Labor Federation.

Mr. Meshel and R. Kaminetzky had a conversation during the trip, which R. Sherer could overhear. Mr. Meshel, who is far from a religious Jew, was asking R. Kaminetzky many questions about Judaism, all of which R. Kaminetzky answered.

Finally, as the plane landed in New York, R. Kaminetzky asked Mr. Meshel: "Is there anything I have said to you in the course of our whole conversation which might cause you to change your way of life to be an observant Jew?"

"No," Mr. Meshel answered, "there is nothing in what you said that might cause me to change my lifestyle. However there is something you did not say which might make me change my mind—explain how it is that your son behaves as he does!"

Indeed, for most of the trip, R. Kaminetzky's son, R. Shmuel Kaminetzky, instead of sitting down in his own seat, had been standing in the aisle next to his father, making sure he was comfortable, rearranging his cushions, bringing him something to drink, and so on. "I wouldn't dream of asking my children to do anything for me. What is there in Judaism that gets your son to behave in this way?"

"It's very simple", replied the Rabbi, "and I can explain it to you briefly. In your outlook, the emphasis is on human progress, human improvement. This means that you look on your grandparents as primitive, as living in the dark ages, and your parents also, to a lesser extent. But it also means that your children, in turn, look on you as backward. So why should they show you honor? In our outlook, it is the opposite. Each generation that is born is one step further removed from the Revelation at Sinai, and so the light of Revelation gets progressively dimmer. This means that each person honors his parents as being one generation closer to Sinai."

The article does not record how this changed Mr. Meshel's outlook or lifestyle, if at all.

This is an important point for all of us to ponder, as those of us who have lost parents say Yizkor. The value of honoring one's parents, or their memories, is not simply a matter of nostalgia for the past, for quaint traditions and customs. Nor is it a matter of reckoning: "They paid for my food and education, so now I must pay for their needs." It is a matter of realizing that one's parents are one generation closer to Sinai, closer to the truth. © 1995 Rabbi Y. Haber

**RABBI PESACH LERNER**

## National Council of Young Israel

**T**he 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.

Not Just How, But When

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 SHLOMO RESSLER**

## Weekly Dvar

The literal approach to the Haggadah's four children is straightforward. On four different occasions, the Torah describes questions asked by children about Passover. Based on the language of the question, the author of the Haggadah labels each of them. One questioner is described as wise, the second rebellious, the third simple, and the fourth not even knowing how to ask. And the Haggadah, basing itself on the Torah text, offers answers to suit the specific educational needs of each child. But if we go beyond the literal approach, hidden messages emerge.

While this section of the Haggadah is associated with youngsters, is it not possible that the children referred to here include adults of all ages? After all, no matter how old we are, we are all children-children of our parents and children of G-d. From this perspective, the message of the four children is that every Jew has his or her place in Judaism. The challenge is to have different types of Jews seated around the Seder table in open respectful dialogue, each contributing to the Seder discussion, each exhibiting love for the other. It also reminds us that we have much to learn from everyone -- this realization is what truly makes us wise. In the words of Ben Zoma, who is mentioned just before this section in the Hagaddah: Who is wise? One who learns from each person." (Pirkei Avot 4:1) ©2011 Rabbi S. Ressler and LeLamed, Inc.



חג שמח וכשר!