

Food for Thought

Appreciate the small things too!

The amount of *karpas* we eat is very small. However, following a day in which we did not eat much at all, even such a small amount is significant, and one is able to appreciate even this small amount!

The prophet Elisha (II Kings 4) was asked to help the wife of one of the prophets (who, our Sages say, was the wife of the prophet Obadiah) whose husband had died, and who was unable to pay her debts to her creditor (who, according to our Sages, was Yehoram ben Ahab), who now wanted to seize her two children as slaves:

1. Now a woman, of the wives of the disciples of the prophets, cried out to Elisha, saying, "Your servant, my husband, has died, and you know that your servant did fear the Lord; and the creditor has come to take my two children for himself as slaves."

2. And Elisha said to her, "What shall I do for you? Tell me what you have in the house." And she said, "Your maidservant has nothing at all in the house except a jug of oil."

Elisha asks the woman what she has in her house. Why is that important? Why does he not help her immediately? Furthermore, the *Zohar* states that if the woman had said that she had nothing at home, the miracle would not have happened. Why?

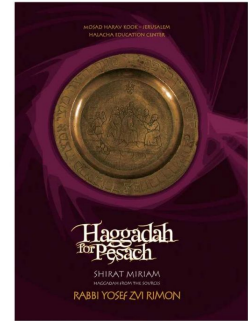
The *Zohar* explains that the prophet required a small amount of oil, because a miracle cannot take place in the absence of anything. If there is nothing here, through what will the miracle take place? What is the significance of this idea? We can say that the Holy One, Blessed be He, does not want to perform miracles by producing something from nothing, and He prefers to maintain, to the greatest

extent possible, the normal course of the world. That is why miracles only take place through objects that already exist. Alternatively, we can explain that God demands that a person must exert at least a small amount of effort, and only afterwards does He add His blessing.

We can offer yet another explanation. In order for God to extend His blessing, a person must recognize **the good things that he already has**. A person needs a jug of oil, small as it may be, for which he can be thankful. If a person does not succeed in seeing the good that he has, it is impossible to grant him an additional blessing, as he is unable to appreciate it.

We live in a world of great wealth and abundance, thank God. However, sometimes even the most lavish meals are not enough to satisfy us. The seder night is one of education. Each participant is challenged: do you want to be a free man? Know that there is absolutely nothing to which you are entitled. You need to work for everything, not just receive gifts, and, as a result, you will appreciate everything you receive! One who is unable to appreciate and be thankful for small things will not be entitled to receive anything, and certainly not big things.

The *seder* night begins with the eating of *karpas* – a simple bit of vegetable. As is our custom today, this is a piece that is even smaller than the size of an olive. However, after a full day of eating little and preparing a great deal, even such a small bit of vegetable has significance. We must learn to appreciate *karpas*, even though it is so small a piece. Nothing we receive in the world is self-evident – we have to be thankful for everything!



Questions: Where is הכרת הטוב at the Seder? Why is this such a major theme?

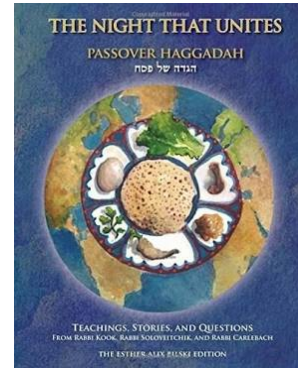
I. BREAKING THE MATZAH AS A SYMBOL OF SHARING

We break the matzah as a symbol of the poor man's bread that the Jewish slaves ate in Egypt. One way of understanding this is that a poor person, who can never know where his next meal is coming from, breaks off a piece and saves it for later.

Rabbi Soloveitchik offered a different interpretation of the "poor man's bread" that was eaten by the Jews in Egypt.

Although when we think of the enslavement of the Jewish people in Egypt, we usually think that all the Jews must have been equally burdened by it, but in truth that was not so. There were various degrees of slavery. Some Jews lived under better conditions, some worse. According to our Sages, one of the tribes, the tribe of Levi, was never enslaved. What this means is that some had access to food and some did not.

Those that did, claims Rabbi Soloveitchik, broke their bread and shared it with other Jews who had less. The Jews who were enslaved in Egypt would split their piece of matzah and share it with the poor who needed it; hence the term "poor man's bread." This is symbolized by the act of breaking the matzah in half: *Yachatz*. When we break the matzah as our forefathers did, it is a symbol of the *hesed*, the



Questions: What else does *Yachatz* represent? How could bread be both poor man's bread and the symbol of freedom?

loving-kindness, and the solidarity of Jews toward their fellow Jews, their brothers and sisters, even under the harshest conditions.

This is the bread of affliction

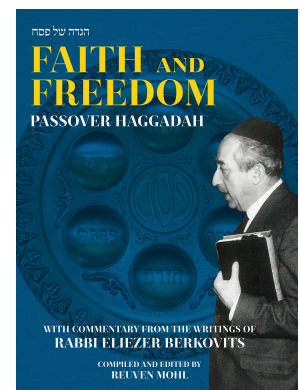
הַא לַחֲמַת עֲנִיָּא

From the Kaldiz labor camp, which was a branch of Buchenwald, comes a typical story about the camp atmosphere at the approach of the Pesach festival. It was in the spring of 1945. The German armies were being beaten on all fronts and there was hope in the hearts of the

prisoners. Hope and fear: would they be able to hold out to the end that seemed so near? But the immediate challenge that loomed especially large before a group of hasidim was how to get through eight days of Pesach without eating any bread. Since matza was, of course, not to be had, their idea was to exchange their daily bread ration for soup. There were always prisoners who were willing to enter into such a transaction.

However, when Pesach came, the law of supply and demand became operative and the price of the soup rose out of all proportion to its actual value. Those Jews who were resolved to observe the Pesach festival, even beyond the requirements of the Halakha, paid the exorbitant price for some thin soup. For the eight days of the festival they gave up their bread ration. Their already weakened physical condition declined further, but at the same time their spiritual alertness and energy reached unexpected heights. They prayed; they sang the traditional festival melodies; they rejoiced with the mitzva of celebration. Without paying any attention to the guards, they arranged daily communal services in the camp. They recited the *Hallel*, the hymns of praise, and sang hasidic melodies together. One of the survivors makes the comment: "It may well be that their determination not to partake of bread, notwithstanding the starvation, equipped them with strength beyond that of other camp inmates."

With God in Hell, pages 32–33



Maggidim have a beautiful interpretation to this paragraph. They say this refers to the *Pesah* that preceded the outbreak of the insurrection on the part of Bar Kokhba against Rome. "They would talk of *Yezi'at Mizrayim*," but it was not only the story of the past, what happened to Pharaoh and us so many thousand years ago; it was the story of the present and what was going to happen tomorrow. The study of the Exodus was supposed to guide them in their revolt. "They would talk of *Yezi'at Mizrayim* all the night." It was a long night, and the Bar Kokhba revolt was planned at that *Seder* night. They studied *Yezi'at Mizrayim* not only as an event of the past, but also as a clue and a key to the future.

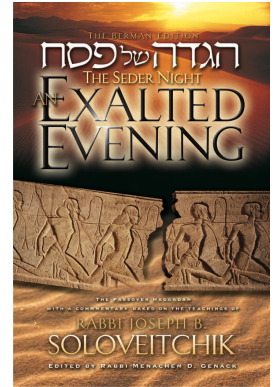
These great rabbis did not belong to the same generation. Rabbi Akiva was much younger than Rabbi Tarfon, and Rabbi Eleazar ben Azariah was younger than Rabbi Akiva. The passage tells us how the Sages of Israel were concerned with just one problem: how to transmit the Torah from generation to generation. They were a community of old and young scholars, but they were all united. They knew that the story of the Exodus is the great story of the Torah. They spoke of the Exodus "the whole night" – not only the night of Passover, but also the great night of the *Galut*, of Jewish exile. It was a very long night during which they had to face Roman detectives, investigators, and executioners.

It was not only these five named Sages who participated in this dialogue. After Rabbi Akiva was executed, after Rabbi Eleazar and Rabbi Joshua died, another generation assumed leadership. They kept on teaching and preaching and propagating Torah, without any interruption, in spite of all opposition and religious persecution and torture.

The tale of the rabbis in Bene-Berak was not just an isolated historical event, but rather a perennial drama that has been enacted since antiquity hundreds, indeed thousands, of times. The people who acted out this drama with tears and blood were not five or ten scholars, but countless individuals in each generation, anonymous fathers, unknown mothers, forgotten teachers, nursemaids, servants, lonely souls, and tragic people. All of them were involved in one task, dedicated to one goal: "They were talking of *Yezi'at Mizrayim* all night."

This is the central story of our destiny. We have survived; we are now building the Land of Israel. The key to the riddle of how we survived, the solution to this enigma of how we are able to read the Haggadah for thousands of years, lies with the teachers and parents who told the story of the Exodus throughout the whole night, throughout their lifespan. We mention here only one day, one generation, but it continued generation after generation. We are continuing it now, too. While waiting impatiently for daybreak, we shall continue to narrate the story of the Exodus, the tale of all tales, the *sipur* which never becomes obsolete, which is always replete with fervor, always powerful and fascinating.

(*Kol ha-Rav*)



Questions:

Why do we tell this story?

What do we learn from these

Rabbis?

What do we learn from R' Akiva?

מעשה ברבי אליעזר – AN INCIDENT OCCURRED WITH REBBI ELIEZER. The *Haggadah* enumerates two *halachos* with regard to the *mitzvah* of *sippur yetzi'as Mitzrayim*: First, even great *talmidei chachamim* are obligated in the *mitzvah*, and second, whoever speaks about *yetzi'as Mitzrayim* at length is praiseworthy. The *Haggadah* then brings this anecdote in order to prove these halachic points.

The *Tanna'im* in this story gathered together and discussed *yetzi'as Mitzrayim* all night long. These great *talmidei chachamim* would not have wasted their time, talking about *yetzi'as Mitzrayim* all night, if a mere passing mention of *yetzi'as Mitzrayim* suffices to fulfill the *mitzvah*. Obviously, it is praiseworthy to tell about *yetzi'as Mitzrayim* with as much elaboration as possible, and even if one is a Torah scholar.

In this context, Rav Soloveitchik pointed out the difference that exists between *ge'onei Yisrael* and men of renown of the nations of the world. We cannot necessarily learn a proper way of life from the actions of judges or professors, Presidents or congressmen. There are no grounds to assume that they definitely abide by the law. Their high positions do not always reflect refinement of character or correct practice in their private lives.

For us, in contrast, a *ga'on* must be a *tzaddik* as well. That is why we can learn *halachos* from stories about *talmidei chachamim* – because their *limud haTorah* brings them to *zehirus* (heedfulness), then to *zerizus* (diligence), and then to *yiras cheit* and *kedushah* (*Avodah Zarah* 20b).

Our ability to study the practices

of *talmidei chachamim* is based on the assumption that they are not only great scholars, but also *tzaddikim* who are punctilious in *mitzvah* observance. Therefore, all of their actions are relevant *halachah lema'aseh*. Indeed, if a *rav* is known to violate *mitzvos* of the Torah, he forfeits his status as one of the *chachmei haMasorah*. The *Gemara* says that even if a *rav* violates a *din derabbanan* such as *pas akum* (bread baked by non-Jews), one is not allowed to repeat *halachos* in his name (*Avodah Zarah* 35b).

Because we assume that our scholars also act in a manner worth emulating, the *Gemara* advances the principle of *מעשה רב* – “Practice is greater [proof than a formal ruling]” (*Shabbos* 21a). In order to prove what the *din* is, the *Gemara* may cite that a certain *Tanna* or *Amora* *paskened* accordingly, but it is even more compelling if it can be demonstrated that the *talmid chacham* himself acted that way. *מעשה רב* – what a *talmid chacham* does in practice – is the best proof.

In our context, we tell the story about the *Tanna'im* who discussed *yetzi'as Mitzrayim* the entire night in order to infer the *halachah* of *כל המרבה לספר כל המרבה לומר*. ביציאת מצרים הרי זה משובח. [See *MiPninei HaRav*, 2001 ed., *Hakdamah*, p. 9.]

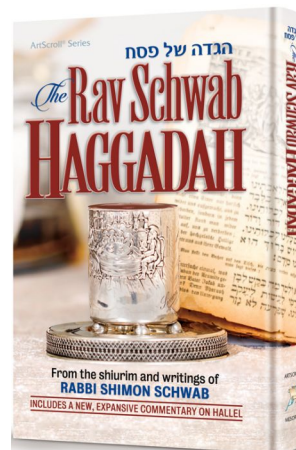


ברוך המקום / Baruch HaMakom

Following the general outline of the order of the Haggadah (as explained in our introduction), we now proceed to the והגדת לבנך, *And you shall tell your son*, section of the Haggadah. In this section, we detail the methods that a father is to use in dealing with the ארבעה בנים, *four sons*, the four different types of children as delineated by the Torah.

However, before beginning this section, the *Baal Haggadah* introduces it with: ברוך המקום ברוך הוא ברוך שנתן תורה לעמו ישראל ברוך הוא, *Blessed is HaMakom [Hashem], blessed is He; blessed is the One Who gave the Torah to His nation Israel, blessed is He*. It is important for us to understand the significance of this introduction.

The Name used here for Hakadosh Baruch Hu is מקום, which actually means *place*. This Name is usually reserved for sad occasions, as in המקום ינחם אתכם, *May HaMakom comfort you*, or המקום ירחם עליהם, *may HaMakom have mercy on them*, where it is meant to



convey the thought that in times of trouble and difficulties it may appear to those affected by such difficulties that Hakadosh Baruch Hu is absent. So we give them encouragement and hope by reaffirming our faith in the Omnipresence of Hakadosh Baruch Hu and tell them that there is no empty place: Hakadosh Baruch Hu is the מקומו של עולם, *the "Place" of the world*. He is המקום, *the Place*. He is with us here, בקל מקום, even in times of difficulty and sadness, just as surely as *place* is here with us.

Before beginning the section dealing with the *arbaah banim*, the *Baal Haggadah*, too, envisions people who may be sitting at their Seder tables in circumstances that are less than joyous. This may be because Hakadosh Baruch Hu has not blessed them with children, and there is no child present to ask מה נשתנה, and no one with whom to be *mekayelim* the mitzvah of והגדת לבנך. In such circumstances, one is to be מצדיק עליו את הדין, *accepting of God's judgment*, when he says the words ברוך המקום ברוך הוא, *Blessed is HaMakom, blessed is He*, with which he accepts the will of Hakadosh Baruch Hu in not yet granting him children.

Or, one may have children, but either one or more have not followed in the parents' path, and ridicule their parents as "old-fashioned" or superstitious in their "rigid" observance of *Torah u'mitzvos*. For this situation, the *Baal Haggadah* prescribes the words: ברוך שנתן תורה לעמו ישראל ברוך הוא, *Blessed is the One Who gave the Torah to His nation Israel, blessed is He*. God gave the Torah for *all of Yisrael*; it has an answer even for the *rasha*, and a method that can bring him back on the proper path.

The Torah has answers for any person, regardless of whether he is a *chacham*, *rasha*, *tam*, or *she'eino yodei'a lishol*. Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch translates the verse, ותורת ה' תמימה משכיבת נפש, *as, The Torah of Hashem is all-encompassing; it answers the questions asked by the soul (Tehillim 19:8)*. משכיבת נפש here is used in the sense of *she'eilah u'leshuvah*, questions and answers. If questions of religion torment one's soul, it will be satisfied and refreshed by the answers found in a proper understanding of the Torah, which directs man in every aspect of his existence.

Questions:

How are these 4 children part of every person?

How are they represented in different ages?

• יכול מראש חודש •

**R'Elimelech
Biderman**
הגדה
באר חיים



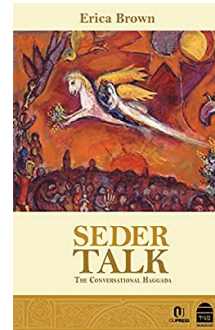
התחדשות וגוטע זמנים' צריך לעבוד את הקב"ה, לזאת אמרה תורה "ביום ההוא", שבכל יום ויום ימלא חובתו בעולמו, אך אכתי ישנם החושבים דרק כאשר הכל מאיר לפניהם בבחינת "ביום ההוא" אז יעבדו את בוראם, וזה הסלקא דעתא של "יכול מבעוד יום" כאשר הכל מאיר כאור היום, אך האמת אינה כן אלא "בשעה שיש מצה ומרור מונחים לפניך", בין בעת שמחה ובין בעת צר ומצוק כפי שמרמזים המצה [שהיא לחם עוני] והמרור, גם אז חובת כל אדם לעשות נחת רוח לבורא ית"ש.

סיפר החסיד רבי מרדכי מיירנץ שליט"א, שבלייל הסדר בשנה הראשונה אחר המלחמה זכה להיות סמוך על שלחנו של הרה"ק בעל ה'בית ישראל' מגור זי"ע, ואמר לדרוש בדרך רמז את מאמרם (מכילתא פרשת בא סימן יז) "והגדת לבנך ביום ההוא לאמר - שומע אני מראש חדש, תלמוד לומר 'ביום ההוא', אי ביום ההוא יכול מבעוד יום, תלמוד לומר 'בעבור זה' בשעה שיש מצה ומרור מונחים לפניך על שולחנך", דהנה ישנם אנשים הסוברים שרק "מראש חודש", דהיינו זמן של

THIS REFERS TO THE SWORD

In these passages, we move from the sword to the staff, two objects of authority that communicate opposing messages. One is the language of

obedience through violence and coercion; the other inanimate object speaks the language of obedience through influence. One is the tool of the soldier, the other the tool of the shepherd. The staff was a remarkable gift to Moses, given after he confessed the inadequacies of his speech. Typically this speech "defect" is rendered as a stutter or stammer. But it may simply mean that Moses understood that the power of words was what would ultimately force Pharaoh's hand and inspire his own people, and he felt inadequate to the urgent task of advocacy. One contemporary scholar regards Moses' difficulty as a content issue. When the Bible says that Moses is heavy of speech, it means that he spoke about topics of weight and intensity but understood the role of leader as making small talk, the chatter of politics, niceties, and community organizing. God sought to allay his anxieties by giving him a staff, an object that would work in place of his mouth, an object that would deflect visual attention away from him and toward the task at hand, an object that would signal actions because actions are the ultimate measure of leadership. Moses



was unsure about himself even with Aaron's partnership, God's support, and his new, magical staff. "What if they do not believe me and do not listen to me?" he asked God in Exodus 4. God asked him to look at his staff – "What is that in your hand?" After all, Moses had been out shepherding when he encountered the burning bush. This is such an obvious question – asking a shepherd what he is holding. But it is only obvious if you believe that it is merely a stick and does not represent your own sense of authority, direction, and conviction. God told Moses to cast it on the ground. It became a snake and then turned back into a staff. But more importantly, God was teaching Moses a lesson about self-belief. "What is that in your hand?" – what is it that you already possess that will be a source of strength for you? You already hold it. Recognize your strength for what it is.

When did you discover a hidden source of your own strength at a time of insecurity?

What challenge did you think was beyond you that you eventually overcame?

צא ולמד מה בקש לבן הארמי

Go and learn what Lavan the Aramean attempted

Why do we mention Lavan in the Haggadah, which focuses primarily on the Exodus?

This passage expands on a statement made in the previous one: "In every generation they rise against us to annihilate us."

We mention Lavan here to indicate that throughout our history, two forms of destruction threaten our existence: physical annihilation and spiritual destruction.

Pharaoh subjected us to both threats. He decreed that all male children be drowned, thus threatening our physical existence, and he also wanted to prevent us from serving Hashem. This is why we conclude *Maggid* with a blessing, in which we thank Hashem "for our redemption and for the liberation of our souls."

Lavan tried to uproot us, not by trying to annihilate us in a physical sense, but by attempting to influence Yaakov and his children to become idolaters.

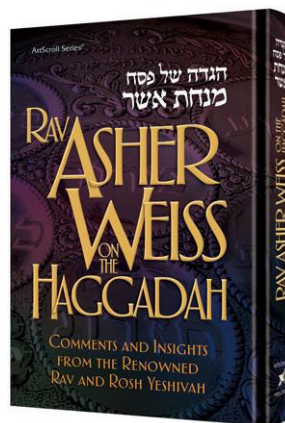
We find these two threats reappearing time and again throughout our history. Haman tried to eradicate the Jewish nation in a physical sense. The Greeks tried to put an end to our spiritual existence by preventing us from learning Torah and fulfilling Hashem's mitzvos.

When Yaakov's sons asked him to send Binyamin to Egypt with them, Yaakov cried, "I am the one whom you bereaved! Yosef is gone, Shimon is gone, and now you would take away Binyamin? **עלי קלנה**, Shimon is gone, and now you would take away Binyamin?" (*Bereishis 42:36*).

The Vilna Gaon¹ notes that years earlier, when Yaakov was afraid to pose as Eisav to claim his father's blessings lest his father curse him instead of blessing him, Rivkah assured him, **עלי קלתיך בני**, *You, curse be upon me, my son*" (*Bereishis 27:13*).

The word **עלי** is an acronym for Eisav, Lavan, and Yosef (ישור, לבן, יוסף). Rivkah foresaw that there was an unavoidable Heavenly decree that Yaakov would have to deal with three difficulties in life — those of Eisav, Lavan, and Yosef.

When the tribes wanted to take Binyamin to Egypt, Yaakov ex-



Questions: How can we work on this as an individual? As a family? Community?

claimed, "**עלי קלנה**!" I have already suffered through the difficulties of Eisav, Lavan, and Yosef. I don't have to face the trial of being bereft of Binyamin. (Yaakov did not realize that this was not a trial, but a salvation from the loss of Yosef.)

Ramban (Introduction to *Shemos*) writes that the events in the lives of our forefathers are symbolic; they foretell the future of the Jewish people.

Yaakov had to face the tests of Eisav, Lavan, and Yosef, and so must we. Eisav wanted to murder Yaakov, and we have faced similar threats from various nations in the course of history. Lavan tried to sever our connection to the Torah and mitzvos, and several nations have tried to follow his lead.

The trial of Yosef is even worse than those of Eisav and Lavan. Yosef was sold as a result of strife and baseless hatred between brothers. The conflicts that tear our nation apart are more destructive than the harshest decrees that others can impose upon us.

We witness manifestations of these three trials in our own times, as well. First came Hitler and the Nazis *ym*'s. Like Pharaoh and Eisav, they sought to obliterate our nation. When they were defeated, Stalin and the Bolsheviks followed in the footsteps of Lavan and the Greeks by trying to prevent us from studying Torah and observing mitzvos.

Thanks to Hashem's infinite mercy, we have survived both of these trials. The Jewish nation lives on and prevails, battered but enduring.

We are now in the midst of facing the most difficult challenge of all, a trial similar to the trial of Yosef. The baseless hatred that caused the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash and brought untold suffering upon us continues to plague us. Hashem does not save us from the battle against inner conflict, for it is our task to defeat it. When we succeed in uprooting this terrible trait from our nation and leave no trace of it behind, we will be able to come together in love and unity, and then our enemies will have no power over us.

סיפור יציאת מצרים,
 הוא לבוא לאמונה שלימה בהש"ת. ויש
 שתי בחינות באמונה. הבחינה האחת היא
 אמונה בלב שמאמין שכן הוא. אך יש
 בחינת אמונה גם בטוח היינו שמאמין בכח
 כל כך חזק עד שהדבר אצלו כאילו רואה
 בעיניו ממש. וזה ענין מה שאכרו ז"ל
 שצריך לומר אמת ואמונה ערבית ואמת
 ויציב שחרית, כי בערבית היא אמונה
 שבלב והוא לילת שהוא כאילו אינו רואה
 כלום רק שמאמין. וביום אף שבעיני בשר
 ניכר אינו רואה כלום רק שמעמיק באמונה
 בטוחו ובשכלו עד שהוא אצלו כאילו רואה
 בעיניו והוא בחינת יום. והנה שאלת מה
 נשתנה עיקרה היא למה הוצרכו לכל

וקאי תלמידיהם
 רבותינו הגיע
 זמן
 בריא ורזי שהיו עוסקים ביציאת מצרים כדי
 לבוא לאמונה זו. ומעשה
 בריא ורזי שהיו עוסקים ביציאת מצרים כדי
 לבוא לאמונה כזו והשיגוה באמת. והוה שבאו
 תלמידיהם ואמרו להם הגיע זמן קריאת שמע
 של שחרית שהוא זמן אמת ויציב שמורה על
 אמונת הטוח כגיל, שיהי כאילו רואה בעיניו
 ואמרו להם תלמידיהם שעל ידי הסיפור
 ביציאת מצרים באו לבחינה כזו של קיש
 שחרית ואמת ויציב.