

Haggadah Shiur Part II: Pesach 5781

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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? עזי קלתי, Upon me has it all fallen!" (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, עזי קלתי בני, Your curse be upon me, my son" (Bereishis 27:13).

The word עזי is an acronym for Eisav, Lavan, and Yosef (עשו, 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, Yaak

claimed, "עזי קלתי!" 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.

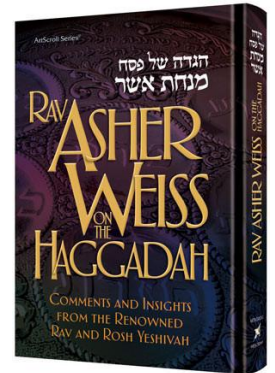
Yaakov had to face the tests of Eisav, Lavan, and Yosef, and so must we. Eisav wanted to murder Yaakov, and we have faced similar threats from various nations in the course of history. Lavan tried to sever our connection to the Torah and mitzvos, and several nations have tried to follow his lead.

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. 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.

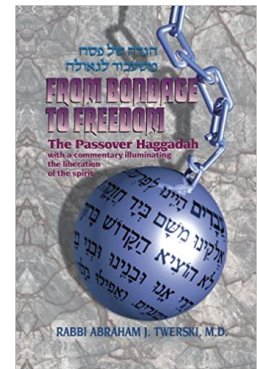
Thanks to Hashem's infinite mercy, we have survived both of these trials. The Jewish nation lives on and prevails, battered but enduring.

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.



🔗 *The rasha of Passover vs. the rasha of Sukkos*

On Sukkos we observe the mitzvah of the four species. The Midrash states that the *esrog* (citron), which has both taste and fragrance, symbolizes the person with both Torah knowledge and good deeds. The myrtle, which is fragrant but tasteless, represents a person with good deeds but who is unlearned. The palm branch, of a tree whose fruit is tasty but without fragrance, represents a person with Torah knowledge but with no meritorious deeds, and the willow branch, which is both tasteless and without fragrance, personifies the *rasha*, one who is ignorant of Torah and barren of good deeds.



Yet the willow branch (the *rasha*) is part of the mitzvah on Sukkos, whereas the *rasha* of Passover is rejected. Why?

The answer is that the *rasha* of Sukkos is bound with the other species, and unites himself with his brethren. Even if he disagrees with them, this is his redeeming feature. The *rasha* of Passover — who observes the family celebrating the beautiful *Seder* ritual and defiantly rejects them with his derisive, “What good is all this anyway?” — has no redeeming features whatever, and is therefore excluded from the mitzvah.

A person may not yet be spiritual, but if he associates with spiritual people, there is hope that he will embrace spirituality.

🔗 *וְשִׂאֵינוּ יוֹדֵעַ לְשׂאוֹל, אֵת פֶּתַח לוֹ — As for the son who is unable to ask, you must initiate the subject for him*

In chassidic lore there is a quote from Rabbi Hirsh of Rimanov. “Take my word for it. The one who does not know what to ask comes away with the best.” Just what could he have meant with this?

At one week-end dedicated to the search for spirituality for people recovering from various addictions, there was a session called “Ask the Rabbi.” One woman, Bernice, who had little exposure to Judaism, spoke up.

“This morning I was frustrated, more than I have ever been in my entire life. I passed by the room where you were having services, and I saw all of you praying. I wanted to join you, but I don’t know how to pray. It’s not that I can

not read the Hebrew, because I could read the English. It's just that my family was not religious, and we never went to Temple. I don't know the first thing about prayer. I stood outside the room, wanting to go in, but not knowing what I would do if I was inside."

I said to Bernice, "Let me understand this. You were frustrated because you saw us praying, but you did not know how to pray.

"That's how things appeared in your prospective. But let us look at how God perceived this.

"When God sees us entering the shul, He may very well say, "Oh, Oh, look who's coming. Some more people with their selfish requests: 'God give me this' or 'God give me that.' All they can think about is their own needs.

"Then God saw you standing outside the room, broken hearted, wanting desperately to pray but not knowing how. God then said, "Look at My child, Bernice. She is in such agony because she wants to reach Me, but does not know how.

"Now tell me, Bernice," I said, "whose prayer was more sincere? My prayers for all that I desire, or your silent prayer for wishing to be able to come closer to God?"



Chassidic lore is replete with stories of people who wanted to pray but knew nothing about prayer.

One of my favorite stories is that of Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev, who held up services on Rosh Hashanah. He later explained.

"There is a young lad in town who is a shepherd. He was orphaned at a young age, and never had the opportunity to go to cheder (Hebrew school) and learn how to read Hebrew. This morning, when he saw everyone streaming towards the synagogues, and upon inquiring was told that today was the solemn day of Rosh Hashanah, he felt very bad that he could not join others in prayer.

"The young lad went out into the field and turned his eyes upward towards heaven. 'Dear God,' he said. 'I have never learned to pray like others have. All I know is the aleph-beis, I will recite the letters for You, and You put them together to make the proper words.'" The lad began reciting aleph, beis, gimmel, daled, etc.

"The lad is now reciting the aleph-beis, and God is busy putting the letters together to form the proper words. We must delay our

prayers until the lad is finished with his, at which time God can be attentive to us."

The Baal Shem Tov often quoted the phrase, "God prefers the sincerity of the heart." Everyone should, of course, become as fluent in prayer as possible. However, the essence of prayer is in the emotional investment one places in it.

I believe this is what the Rabbi of Rimanov meant. The one who does not know what to ask for and is heart-broken because he would like to pray but does not know how, his prayer may be the most precious of all.

Our answer to these questions is prescribed by the Torah: וְאָמַרְתֶּם: 'זָבַח פֶּסַח הוּא לַה' 'You shall say, "It is a 'pesach'-offering to Hashem." It is called פֶּסַח, *pesach*, because: אֲשֶׁר פָּסַח עַל בְּתֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּמִצְרַיִם (Shemos 12:27). This *pasuk* is usually translated as: *Because He passed over the houses of the Children of Israel when He smote the Egyptians, but He saved our households.* It is based on this translation that the Yom Tov is called "Passover" in the vernacular.

However, this meaning of אֲשֶׁר פָּסַח is not quite accurate. To simply *pass over* something would be better expressed as אֲשֶׁר עָבַר. A more accurate definition of פֶּסַח can be found in its relationship to

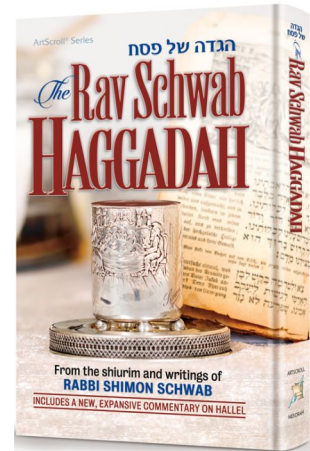
[176] הגדה של פסח

פֶּסַח, which means one who is lame, or has great difficulty walking, and can do so only slowly. [Due to his arthritic condition, which made his walking very slow and difficult, the Rav characterized himself as a פֶּסַח.] Therefore, אֲשֶׁר פָּסַח עַל בְּתֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל means *He slowly, hesitatingly, passed over the households of the Jews.* This meaning of פֶּסַח is also used by Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch (see *ibid.* v. 11) in his explanation there.

Targum Onkelos (*ibid.*) expands on this sense of the word in his rendering of our phrase as: דִּי חָס עַל בְּתֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, *That He mercifully protected the Houses occupied by the Jews.* Onkelos defines אֲשֶׁר פָּסַח to mean *He slowly, protectively, walked*, which conveys the idea of a guard slowly pacing to and fro, עַל בְּתֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, *at, or near the Jewish households, to protect them.*

Therefore, פֶּסַח, *pasach*, means that Hashem mercifully lingered עַל בְּתֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, *at the houses whose occupants were Jews*, and protectively passed over them as He was rapidly passing through Egypt and smiting the Egyptian firstborn.

The phrase אֲשֶׁר פָּסַח עַל בְּתֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, *He mercifully and protectively lingered at the houses whose occupants were Jews*, gives us a picture of those *Jewish houses* at the Pesach celebration during that last night in Egypt. It does not say עַל דְּלֵתֵי בְּתֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, *at the doors of the Jewish households*, but rather עַל בְּתֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, *at the Jewish households.* This indicates that the doors to their houses were open. Their occupants were full of *bitachon*, complete trust in Hashem's protection. While they were complying with the mitzvah of *korban pesach*, they had absolutely no fear of the consequences of the Egyptians seeing them happily enjoying their Pesach meal of a roasted lamb or kid, its blood placed on the doorposts, in open defiance of the Egyptian idolatrous worship of these animals. (See *ibid* 8:22.) This public display of *bitachon* is what designated these houses as בְּתֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, *truly Jewish households.*



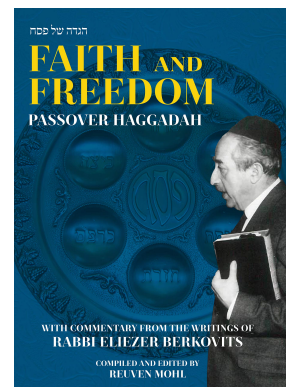
The time has come

הגיע זמן

The Talmud (Brachot 61b) introduces the story of Rabbi Akiva's martyrdom with the words: "The hour when they took Rabbi Akiva to his death, was the time for the recitation of the *Shema*." In our opinion these laconic words hide the true greatness of Rabbi Akiva's deed. We

usually imagine an act of *Kiddush haShem* as the stirring drama of the soul as it reacts to an extraordinary situation. This is how Jewish martyrs through the ages gave their lives and breathed their last with the words of the *Shema* on their lips. It was an affirmation, an "acceptance of the Kingdom of Heaven," brought about by the extraordinary nature of the challenge; specific acceptance, meeting a specific hour. Not so in the case of Rabbi Akiva: it was the hour of the daily recitation of the *Shema*. Accepting "the yoke of the Kingdom," Rabbi Akiva was doing what he had been doing every day of his life. It was, one might say, routine. The extraordinary situation invested the routine with extraordinary meaning and dignity. But Rabbi Akiva was not responding to a situation; he ignored it. The Roman soldiers came to fetch him; they abused his body. It happened to be the time of the day when a Jew recites the *Shema*. Let the Romans do to him whatever they please; Rabbi Akiva could not be concerned with it. He had more important things to which to turn his attention – it was time for the saying of the *Shema*. What did it matter what Rome did to him! He went about his business of living the daily life of a Jew. Continuing with "the routine" of Jewish existence and ignoring the world that is bent on crushing the Jew is one of the marks of *Kiddush haShem*. Often it is practiced long before the hour of radical abandonment arrives. *Kiddush haShem* in this sense is not one final heroic act of affirmation. It may be a form of behavior and daily conduct. Numberless are the instances which show how widely this form of *Kiddush haShem* was extant in the ghettos and in the death camps.

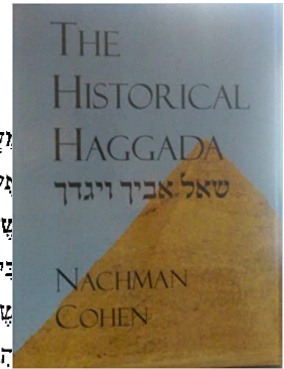
Faith After the Holocaust, pages 82–83



The Rabbis sought insight on this very special night

It happened that Rabbis Eliezer, Yehoshua, Elazar ben Azaria, Akiva and Tarfon were reclining during the Seder in Benei Berak. They spent the whole night discussing the Exodus until their students came and said to them: Rabbis, it is time for the recitation of the *Shema*.

מעשה ברבי אליעזר ורבי יהושע ורבי אלעזר בן עזריה ורבי עקיבא ורבי טרפון שהיו מסבין בבני ברק, והיו מספרים ביציאת מצרים כל אותו הלילה עד שבאו תלמידיהם ואמרו להם: רבותינו, הגיע זמן קריאת שמע של שחרית.



Triumphal Arch of Titus

God abandoned Israel

It is difficult for us to understand the heart-rending soul searching that confronted the Rabbis after the Temple's destruction. From our vantage point of two millennia post-Temple, it is common to assume that the Rabbis were hashkafically united and certain about Israel's relationship with *HaShem* and its ultimate future. Yet this was not the case, as can be seen from the following episode recorded at the end of *Tractate Makḥot*:

R. Gamliel, R. Elazar b. Azaria, R. Yehoshua, and R. Akiva were traveling to Jerusalem. When they reached Mount Tzofim they rent their

garments. When they reached the Temple Mount they saw a fox emerge from the Holy of Holies. The rabbis cried, but R. Akiva laughed. They were puzzled.

R. Akiva explained: Yeshaya was called upon by God to write "plunder hastens, spoils quicken" so that it would be known that Sancherev was coming and he would plunder the property of the ten tribes. To act as witnesses he called upon Uri'ah, the *kohen*, and Zekharia b. Yevarkhehu. I was always troubled by the fact that these two individuals did not live during the same era. Uri'ah lived during the period of the First

Temple, whereas Zekharia lived during the Second Temple. Witnessing the fox's emergence from the Holy of Holies, I realized that Yeshaya mentioned these two individuals because of their respective prophesies. Uri'ah prophesied that Zion would be plowed over, and Zekharia prophesied that elderly people would once again reside in Jerusalem. So long as the prophecy of Uri'ah had not been fulfilled, I was afraid that Zekharia's prophesy would not be fulfilled. Now that I have seen first hand that Uri'ah's prophesy has been fulfilled, I am confident that Zekharia's prophesy will also be fulfilled.

The others responded, "Akiva, you have consoled us. Akiva, you have consoled us."

The divergent responses of R. Akiva and the other Rabbis to what they witnessed goes much beyond their personal temperaments. What troubled the Rabbis was the relationship between Israel and *HaShem* once the Second Temple had been destroyed.

Has God abandoned Israel?

Their quandary can best be understood by an observation made by Ramban. In the Torah there are two sets of admonishments. The one in *Bechukotai* ends with consolation.^a The one in *Ki Tavoh* does not.^b The first *parsha* speaks of the destruction of the First Temple, the second speaks of the destruction of the Second Temple.

The lack of consolation leaves open the possibility that after the destruction of the

Second Temple, God would forsake Israel. This assumption was bolstered by the straightforward reading of the verse "Behold, you [Moshe] will die, and the nation will arise and worship the gods of the nations which surround your land and they will desert Me and tear asunder My covenant. [Consequently,] I will become angered towards Israel on that day **and I will abandon them, and I will conceal Myself from them**, and they will be plundered, and be overcome with many evils and travails, and they will say, 'It is because God is not in our midst that these troubles have come to pass.' [But God responds,] notwithstanding **I will conceal My face from them on that day** because of all of the evil that they have wrought in worshipping foreign Gods."²⁸

^a "And I will remember the covenant with Ya'akov, and even the covenant with Yitzchak, and even the covenant with Avraham will I remember and I will remember the land...And notwithstanding this [i.e., Israel's sins], I will not disgrace them nor purge them to destruction to retract My covenant with them, for I am the Lord, their God. And I will remember the covenant of their elders whom I took out of Egypt in sight of all the nations in order to become their God, I am the Lord" (*Vayikra* 26:42-45).

^b This admonishment ends "And I will return you to Egypt in vessels, on the path that I have told you not to travel, and there you will be sold to your enemy as slaves but no one will desire to purchase you." (*Devarim* 28:68)

It is clear from the Rabbis' response to R. Akiva that after seeing the state of the Temple and a fox emerge from the Holy of Holies that the Rabbis felt that **God might have abandoned Israel** because of their evil deeds, and that He would no longer offer them Divine protection. From the time the Temple was destroyed, the covenant between *HaShem* and Nation Israel was null and void. This belief was bolstered by the fact that **there was no prophecy** which spoke to the aftermath of the Second Temple's destruction.

God has not abandoned Israel!

It is to the latter point that R. Akiva addressed his remarks. He maintained that **the prophecy** of Yeshaya **spoke** specifically **to the post-Second Temple era**. The following was his justification:

Uri'ah prophesied that Zion would be razed. Yet, this never happened after the First Temple was destroyed. Zekharia prophesied that elders would once again inhabit Jerusalem. This is a strange prophesy for one who lived at the beginning of the Second Commonwealth when the streets of Jerusalem were already inhabited by elders.

R. Akiva suspected that both Uri'ah and Zekharia were speaking of **the post-Second Temple era**. Yet, he could not advance his theory because there was no indication after the Second Temple's destruction that "Zion would be razed." However, once he saw the fox exiting

the Holy of Holies, he interpreted this as a fulfillment of Uri'ah's prophecy. This assured him that his interpretation was correct, that *HaShem* had not and would not abandon Israel, and that Zekharia's prophecy would also be fulfilled.

The Rabbis were assuaged by R. Akiva's observation.

An era of confusion

This interchange points up that there was a great distinction between the aftermath of the destruction of the First and Second Temples. Although saddened and distraught, the populace had been forewarned by the prophets about the destruction of the First Temple. Moreover, they were assured that the Diaspora experience would last but seventy years. However, no prophet [clearly] heralded the destruction of the Second Temple and surely there was no statement regarding the length of this *galut*. Thus, the Rabbis had been totally in the dark as to what the future held.

As uncertain as they were of the long-range outlook, they were even more uncertain of their day to day status. Certainly, the Temple was destroyed, but did this mean that it would not be rebuilt? After the Temple was destroyed, the nation was not led off to Rome. They were allowed to remain in their homes and on their land. While the Temple had been destroyed—as a reaction to political rebellion—it surely could be rebuilt if Rome gave permission.

Afikoman and returning to the internal self

Rav Avraham Yitzchak Kook (in *Olat Re'iyah* on the haggadah, p. 50) explains that *afikoman* expresses the *tzafun* – the **hidden aspect of man and life**. The concealed tells us a great deal, for the more something is on a high spiritual level, the deeper and more concealed is its spirituality. The internal significance of *afikoman* is learned from the fact that one eats it when he is full, as emerges from Rav Kook's words:

Afikoman is eaten when one is full, as an **aim in itself**, and not as a necessity for maintaining one's worldly existence. From that perspective, it is appropriate for the deepest (*tzafun*) feelings of the soul.

Generally, a person eats in order to be full, and food is only a means. *Afikoman*, on the other hand, is eaten when a person is already full, and from this it follows that *afikoman* is an **aim in itself**.

We saw above ("Why do we eat *matzot* on Pesach?" p. 241) the explanation of *Maharal* regarding the significance of eating matzah. Matzah, on the one hand, expresses servitude and difficulty – the "bread of affliction" – but, on the other hand, we saw that matzah also has characteristics that teach us about freedom and improvement.

Maharal explains that this is not a contradiction. Matzah is indeed the "bread of affliction," but only because it is that which expresses true freedom. Matzah expresses the pure interior of the person, without any additions or external trappings.

We strive to live according to our true interior, based on our Divine nature and the pure soul that

God placed inside us. When the Nation of Israel reaches such a stage, and lives accordingly, our redemption will come.

Therefore, we were commanded to eat matzah before we left Egypt, for matzah was part of the redemption. According to this, eating matzah is not only a "reminder" of the historical event of the redemption from Egypt, but is the very reason for the redemption! Matzah expresses the level that the Nation of Israel attained by casting off all external influences, and that brought about our redemption.

By eating matzah on the *seder* night we are attempting to again reach this level, that our actions should reflect the truth of our internal self. The *seder* night is a process of redemption for us as well: at the beginning of the *seder* we eat matzah that expresses and displays our inner soul, but we eat it when we are hungry. What is mixed in here is also our desire to eat. After we have gone through the entire process of the *seder* night, with all its symbols and customs, we are now able to eat this matzah with pure intentions – without any real appetite and without any motives other than to fulfill the commandment. The eating of *afikoman* will reveal to ourselves what we have accomplished on the *seder* night, and what we strive for throughout the year. This is a life of freedom and liberation, a life of holy faith in our independence, without any external influences.

R'Rimon

Noraos Harav- Rabbi Soloveitchik

We can, thus, understand why Hallel was divided in such a manner. In the first part of the Haggadah, beginning with the Kiddush the element of Tefillah was not introduced at all. After the completion of the narration of דצ"ך עד"ש באח"ב and the chapter of רבן גמליאל היה אומר, the first part of the Haggadah concludes with the statement: לפיכך אנחנו חייבים להודות ולהלל, We are therefore obligated to thank and offer our praise to G-d. On the seder night, Jews have only one duty, namely, to glorify, extol, and praise G-d. They have no other duty. There is no room for petition and Tefillah. We must forget for a while that we are human beings and that after יציאת מצרים we went through numerous historical experiences, many of which were not very pleasant. We must forget that we were עבדים in numerous other lands, under conditions much worse than those that prevailed in Egypt. We must forget that we offered millions of sacrifices. We must forget all of the blood and martyrdom. At this juncture, we must ignore all that and exclusively offer praise to G-d. These chapters of Hallel are the only sections that consist exclusively of hymnal praise and are devoid of any motif of petition.

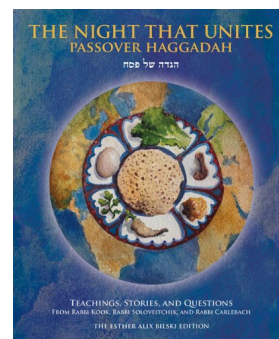
R'Lamm

joy, his dreams and his fears. Darkness can indeed be a plague. But the same darkness can be a blessing; it can be worthy of the closest presence of God Himself. For solitude means privacy; it means not only a devastating loneliness but also that precious opportunity when a man escapes from the loud brawl of life and the constant claims of society and, in the intimate seclusion of his own soul and heart, he gets to know himself and realize that he is made in the image of God. Loneliness can be painful, but it can also be precious. The same *hoshekh* that can spell plague for a man if it seals him off from others by making him blind to the needs of his fellows, this same *hoshekh* becomes Godly when it enables a man to become more than just a social animal, more than just a member of a group, but also a full, mature, unique individual in his own right. *Yoshev be-seter elyon* (Ps. 91:1)—God dwells in the highest kind of secrecy or mystery, which cannot be penetrated by man. So must every person have an inner life, an internal *seter*, a chamber of blessed *hoshekh*, which, in its privacy, assures him of his uniqueness as a different, individual man or woman. As Longfellow once wrote, "Not in the clamor of the crowded street/ Not in the shouts and plaudits of the throng/ But in ourselves are triumph and defeat." In ourselves—that is where we can develop that brilliant darkness which has its source in God.

If, in the conditions of contemporary life, it becomes difficult to escape these intrusions upon our privacy, to enjoy the *va-yashet hoshekh sitro*, it becomes all the more important to guard it zealously. We ought to seek opportunities for this solitude of contemplation wherever and whenever we can—whether during our vacation periods, when we can afford more of this precious and delicious time; at the beginning of the day in the synagogue at minyan, when we can, in a silent *Shemoneh Esreh*, truly find that we are alone with God; any time we can wrest from our busy schedules for the sweet silence of solitude. There is a great deal of *hoshekh*-solitude in the world. The Egyptian makes of it a plague of isolation—*lo ra'u ish et ahiv*—an inability to see his fellow-men, a picture window through which others can look but he is blind to them. The Godlike, however, will make of this solitude an atmosphere of holiness, *yashet hoshekh sitro*, a creative opportunity to discover themselves and the voice of God that speaks to them, a window which does not allow others to peer within, but enables them to see their fellow men and be with them. This kind of *hoshekh* is not the plague of darkness; it comes from the Most High source of all existence. May we learn to make use of that darkness and thus bring great light into the lives of all of us.

A RENDEZVOUS WITH GOD

—◇—
“Had He brought us before Mount Sinai, and not given us the Torah – dayeinu – it would have been enough for us!”
—◇—



What purpose was there in coming to Sinai, if we were not to receive the Torah?

Rabbi Soloveitchik explained that even had we not received the Torah, the encounter with the Shechinah, God's presence, as He descended the mountain amidst thunder and lightning, would have left its impact on our souls forever.

The Rav would often speak of "the encounter of man with the Shechinah." The Rav, in describing the goals of Torah study, teaches us that there are two aspects to the experience of a Jew studying God's wisdom. The first aspect is intellectual: attaining understanding and wisdom by accumulating knowledge and deepening insight. However, there is a second aspect which is as important: the experiential, feeling that one is in God's presence. The Rav would refer to this aspect as a "rendezvous with the Holy One." He would speak of the exalted feeling of sensing the Divine. This experience of encountering God and feeling His presence is not only found through Torah study but should extend to a Jew's whole existence.

Rabbi Soloveitchik describes a profoundly personal and painful experience in his own life. The year 1967 was an extraordinarily difficult time for the Rav: in the short span of three months, his wife, his mother, and his brother all passed away. Rabbi Soloveitchik described the overwhelming pain and grief that he endured

during these days. He movingly describes the following experience of turning to God and feeling His presence during his wife's illness.

... I could not pray in the hospital; somehow I could not find God in the whitewashed, long corridors among the interns and the nurses. However, the need for prayer was great; I could not live without gratifying this need. The moment I returned home I would rush to my room, fall on my knees and pray fervently. God, in those moments, appeared not as the exalted, majestic King, but rather as a humble, close friend, brother, father: in such moments of black despair, He was not far from me; He was right there in the dark room; I felt His warm hand, as if on my shoulder, I hugged His knees, as if He was with me in the narrow confines of a small room, taking up no space at all.

וַיִּצְעַק אֵל ה'

We cried out to Hashem

When Bnei Yisrael stood at the Yam Suf, with the raging sea before them and their Egyptian pursuers approaching from behind, they cried out to Hashem for help. "Why do you cry out to Me?" Hashem asked Moshe. "Speak to Bnei Yisrael, and let them journey forth!" (*Shemos* 14:15). With Nachshon ben Aminadav in the lead, the entire nation marched into the Yam Suf, and the sea split before them.

Mechilta (*Beshalach* 3) comments on this verse:

Hashem told Moshe, "My children are in distress and you stand before Me in lengthy prayer? Why do you cry to Me?"

R' Eliezer derives from here that there are times for lengthy prayers and times for hurried prayers. Moshe Rabbeinu's prayer for his sister Miriam's recovery was "Please, God, heal her now (*Bamidbar* 12:13)." Those circumstances called for a hurried prayer. When Bnei Yisrael sinned with the Golden Calf, Moshe Rabbeinu prayed for their forgiveness for forty days and nights. Those circumstances called for lengthy prayers."

Similarly, *Sifri* (*Parashas Beha'alosecha*) states, "R' Eliezer's students asked him how long a person's prayers should be. He answered that one should not pray for more time than Moshe Rabbeinu, who prayed for forty days and forty nights; and one

should not pray a shorter prayer than Moshe Rabbeinu did when he prayed, 'Please, God, heal her.' "

A similar discussion is also found in the Talmud (*Berachos* 34a).

Our Sages teach us that there are times for lengthy prayers, and times for hurried prayers, but they do not tell us when to engage in each form of prayer. How did Moshe Rabbeinu decide when each type of prayer was appropriate?

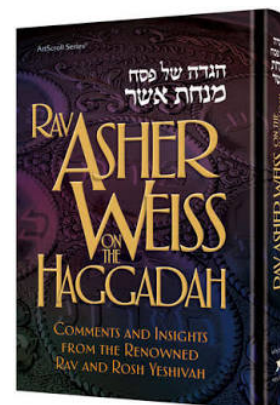
My *rebbe*, the Klausenberger Rebbe *zt"l*, would often quote R' Pinchas of Koritz as saying that when a person finds himself in grave danger, he cannot rely only on prayer; he must also have *bitachon*. That Hashem will make things turn out right. When Bnei Yisrael were stuck between the sea and the Egyptians, Hashem admonished Moshe Rabbeinu for praying, because the correct response in such a situation was to demonstrate faith in Hashem: "Speak to Bnei Yisrael, and let them journey forth!"

We learn from here that *bitachon* has the power to complement prayer.

The power of prayer lies in its ability to open the gates of Divine blessing, and draw through them an abundance of Heavenly mercy and lovingkindness. *Rashba* (*Teshuvos* 5:51) explains that the word *berachah* (blessing) comes from the same root as *bereichah* — a reservoir. Just as a reservoir contains vast quantities of water, Hashem's *berachos* are an endless reservoir of mercy and lovingkindness, and our prayers and blessings are the pipelines via which we can draw those *berachos*.

The same *berachos* can be drawn through *bitachon*.

Based on this concept, we can understand why Moshe Rabbeinu did not need to pray at length for Miriam. The righteous Miriam certainly had *bitachon* in Hashem's ability to heal her, and that *bitachon* complemented Moshe's brief prayer. When Moshe prayed that Hashem forgive Bnei Yisrael for the sin of the Golden Calf, he could not rely on *bitachon* complementing his prayer, because Bnei Yisrael's actions had demonstrated that their *bitachon* in Hashem was far from perfect. Moshe had to rely entirely on his prayer, and therefore needed to pray at length.



When Hashem told Moshe Rabbeinu not to cry out to Him in prayer, but to instruct Bnei Yisrael to march into the sea, they were given a choice. If they would have complete faith in Hashem and march fearlessly into the sea in keeping with His command, then the power of their *bitachon* would create a miraculous salvation on their behalf even with a minimal amount of prayer.

Alternatively, we can suggest that Bnei Yisrael were in fact unworthy of salvation, because they had demonstrated a lack of *bitachon* by complaining, "Were there no graves in Egypt that you took us to die in the Wilderness?" (*Shemos* 14:11). To merit salvation, they had to repent for their lack of *bitachon* by demonstrating an equal level of *bitachon*. Hashem instructed Moshe not to cry out to Him in prayer, but to lead Bnei Yisrael into the depths of the sea. By following Hashem's orders, they displayed a level of *bitachon* that atoned for their earlier lack thereof, and made them worthy of a miraculous salvation.

מעשה ברבי אליעזר רבי יהושע ורבי אלעזר בן עזריה ורבי עקיבא ורבי טרפון שהיו מסבין בבני ברק והיו מספרים ביציאת מצרים כל אותו הלילה

מעשה זה הנו המשוך לנאמר קודם לכן - "וכל המרבה לספר ביציאת מצרים הרי זה משבח", ומספר בעל ההגדה מעשה באותם תנאים שהאריכו בספור יציאת מצרים.

ורבים הקשו, מה התחיל במעשה זה? וכי תנאים אחרים לא הרבו לספר ביציאת מצרים? והאמוראים, כדגמת אבוי ורבא לא ספרו, והנאונים, והראשונים, והאחרונים? הלא כל יהודי מספר ביציאת מצרים כל הלילה! מה הרבותא במעשה זה?

באר מרו הגרי"ש אלישיב זצ"ל: הנה קשנתבונן מעט בגאולת מצרים נראה, שכלל ישראל במצרים היו שקועים במ"ט שערי טמאה, עוד רגע קט והיו נכנסים לשער הני, כמעט אבודים.

אם כיום היינו רואים יהודי השקוע במ"ט שערי טמאה, ודאי היינו מתנאשים מנונו. אומרים: רשע מרשע הוא זה, אין לו כלל סכוי להציל.

אבל את בני ישראל במצרים הציל הקב"ה מתוך מ"ט שערי הטמאה, והעלם לדגרה העילאית של מתן תורה, שם פסקה והמתם.

◆ — דורש טוב — ◆

היכן מצוי בפסח אותו כח מפלא ההופך את האדם ומשנה אותו מן הקצה אל הקצה?

אומר בעל ההגדה: התבונן נא במעשה עם אותם תנאים ותראה כיצד יכול יהודי להשתנות מן הקצה אל הקצה!

התנא הראשון המוזכר כאן הוא רבי אליעזר. רבי אליעזר היה בן עשירים. עד גיל עשרים ושמונה לא למד מאומה ולא ידע אפילו קריאת שמע וברכת המזון, ומפצב כזה צמח והיה ל"רבי אליעזר הגדול".

התנא השני הוא רבי טרפון. במסכת פלה (א, כא) מספר שהיה עשיר גדול, בעל נכסים רבים, שפדרה הטבע אמורים לגרם לבעליהם טרדה מרבה. אך למרות רכושו הרב, לא חשב על כלום מלבד תורה, וצמח להיות רבי טרפון.

התנא השלישי - רבי יהושע בן חנניה. הגמרא (ברכות כח ע"א) מספרת שרבן גמליאל נכנס לבקר ונראה שקירות ביתו שחורים, אמר לו: "מכתלי ביתך נפר שפחמי אתה". העניית היתה זועקת מהקירות. קירות שהורים!! היום אפילו עני מרוד, קירות ביתו צבועים בצבע לבן עם מעט לכלוכים, אבל קירות ביתו של רבי יהושע בן חנניה היו שחורים מרב עני. ומתוך נסיון העני הוא צמח להיות רבי יהושע בן חנניה.

התנא הרביעי - רבי עקיבא. עד גיל ארבעים לא קרא ולא שנה. כלם לעגו לו. אשתו הציעה לו ללכת לחידר ללמד א"ב, אך הוא אמר - "אני מתבייש ללמד עם ילדים קטנים".

מה עשתה אשתו? לקחה חמור שהיה לו שקע בגב, שמה עליו אדמה, וזרעה צמחים, הוציאה את החמור עם הצמחים לרחוב, וככלם התפעלו - ראית פעם חמור עם גנה מהלקת?...?

ביום הראשון יצאו כל תושבי האזור לראות את הפלא הגדול, ביום השני יצאו חצי, ביום השלישי אף אחד לא יצא. אמרה לו: "כה יהיה גם אתה כשתלה ללמד בחידר: ביום הראשון כלם יצחקו עליה, ביום השני פחות, ביום השלישי פחות, ולאחר שבוע יתרגלו ושוב לא יצחקו".

והנה, גם אדם שמתחיל ללמד תורה בהיותו ילד, בקשי גומר את הש"ס, אבל לדעת את כל הש"ס, בבלי וירושלמי, כשבגיל ארבעים הוא לא יודע לקרא ולכתב - כלום יש לו סכוי?

אבל רבי עקיבא - כנגד כל הסכויים - צמח והתעלה, עד שהגיע למדרגה שמשה רבנו היה מתקנא בו!

האחרון - רבי אלעזר בן עזריה. בימינו, כדי להיות חבר מועצת גדולי התורה צריך להיות מינימום בגיל שבעים וחמש. פחות מגיל שבעים וחמש - הוא בכלל לא מעמד. והנה יושבים גדולי הדור, התנאים הקדושים, ענקי הרוח - רבי יהושע, רבי עקיבא, רבן גמליאל, כלם יכולים להיות נשיאים, אולם אף אחד לא זוכה שימנוהו לנשיא ישראל. את מי לוקחים פנשיא? בחור בן שמונה עשרה - רבי אלעזר בן עזריה. כנגד כל הסכויים, כנגד כל ההסתברויות, רבי אלעזר בן עזריה מקבל את המנוי המקבד.

זהו הלמוד שבא בעל ההגדה ללמדנו: רצונה לראות "מעשה"? הבט בכל התנאים האלה, איה עליהם להרבות בספור יציאת מצרים. ואם תשאל, היכן מצאנו את הפסוק הזה לצאת ממ"ט שערי טמאה ותוף חמשים יום להגיע למתן תורה? - זה תלמד מה"מעשה" עם אותם תנאים, אשר ממצב הנראה בלתי אפשרי צמחו והגיעו למדרגתם המפלא.

זה לא סתם מעשה. טמון בו מוסר השכל עבורנו, אודות פח הפסיקה והדלוג שיש לכל יהודי בכל מצב שהוא נמצא. אין יהודי - אפילו כזה הנמצא בשפל המדרגה - שאינו יכול לצאת ממ"ט שערי טמאה ולהגיע למ"ט שערי קדושה.

(רבי גואל אלקריח)