

Hagadah Thoughts 5774

(Dedicated to the memories of the Torah giants who passed this year)

**A Lesson in Haggada:** **Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks** noted that there are differences between the monuments in Washington and the edifices in England. The former have quotations on them while the latter do not. The difference, says Lord Rabbi Sacks, is that in the former case (the US), the goal of having the monuments seems to be to bring the history into the present. The latter (England) is to remind us of the way things were. In regard to a covenantal society, there is no room to merely glorify the past. The greatest freedom is the opportunity to tell the story in the present. Hence the Seder night – it speaks to us and we speak to it and speak it to those around us – keeping our freedom alive and active.

**Kaadeish: Asher Bachar Banu Meekol Am** – The Non-Jews are also commanded to keep the 7 Mitzvos. Why is it that we don't mention our chosen nation status when we do any of the other Mitzvos? Why only in regard to the Yamim Tovim? **Rav Yaakov Galinsky ztl.** notes that it is in the concepts of Yom Tov where we see the differentiation between Jew and non-Jew most pronounced. The party of Achashveirosh was also a party with wine but what was its purpose? It became a debate over hedonism. When Jews sit to a Yom Tov meal, we sit and transform the experience into one of Shirah and Hodaah to Hashem. It isn't just the difference in Mitzva that we highlight. It is the difference in how we do our job of living.

**Moadim I'Simcha Chagim U'Zmanim I'Sason - Rav Yaakov Galinsky ztl.** tells the story of the time an atheist tried to engage him in a debate. "I am ready to debate you because I know a concept or two about science" came the Maggid's reply. "A concept or two?" retorted the atheist – "what good is that? How do you even know if you will apply those concepts correctly?" "Back at you," said Rav Yaakov. "Knowing about sufganiyot on Chanukah, costumes on Purim and stealing the afikomen

**Haggada:** Why is there no Beracha on the recitation of the Haggadah? **Rav Shlomo Wahrman ztl.** explains that the entire purpose of making Berachos is a means of accepting the Yoke of Heaven (Kabbalas Ol Malchus Shomayim). The entirety of the Haggada serves the same purpose. It would be superfluous to make a Beracha when the entirety of the Haggada serves the same purpose.

**Mah Nishtana** - why do we ask Mah Nishtana on the night of Passover and not on the night of Sukkos as well? After all, on Sukkos we leave our comfortable homes filled with luxury to live in the temporary hut made up of boards and beams? **Rav Ovadiah Yosef ztl.** notes that one cannot ask such a question about Sukkos – since throughout the exile, the wandering Jew has left homes filled with riches and walked with his staff and his coat trying to find refuge. However, sitting at a table filled with delicacy and luxury – this is not normal in Jewish tradition – at such a child is urged to ask Mah Nishtana?

**Avadim Hayeenu** – **Rabbi Joseph Grunblatt ztl.** once noted that Neitzche criticized the Jews for creating a slave morality instead of one for supermen. However, we see the greatness in our morality precisely BECAUSE of the experience of slavery. Our compassion for all, our lack of lust for the mundane – all grow from the reminder that we grew from slavery. Had we never learned this lesson, we would have remained slaves of a different type forever more.

**The Rabbis in Bnei Brak**- why didn't the rabbis see the sun had risen and their obligations of the seder night were over? **Rav Belsky Shlita** explains that in other episodes when Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Yehoshua would sit and study Torah, the fire would come down from heaven and surround them (see

Tos. To chagigah 15a). These two men were present in Bnei Brak, certainly the fire must have descended and surrounded them illuminating the night as though it was day.

**KOL Yimei Chayeicha L'Havee L'Yimos HaMoshiach** – Does every time the word Kol get used, it refers to Moshiach? What about the promise to Adam that food would be difficult to eat kol yimei Chayeicha – does this too refer to the times of Moshiach too? **Rav Ovadiah Yosef ztl.** answers that through recalling Yetzias Mitzrayim we bring the Moshiach.

**Baruch HaMakom** – The word HaMakom is a reference to Hashem who fills the space of the world. Nothing is free from his influence. **Rabbi Bernard Weinberger (Shemen HaTov) Shlita** notes that we never refer to Hashem as Hamakom anywhere in the Torah overtly. The only reference is a hint in regard to the Akaida (on the third day he saw the place from a distance). Thus, notes Rabbi Weinberger, the use of the word HaMakom connotes an awareness of distance in our relationship with Hashem. Therefore at the seder we use the word, since in Egypt were so distanced from Hashem, we weren't even able to hear Moshe speak about Him for our benefit.

**Echad Chacham** – Why is there no Tzaddik mentioned? **Rav Yechiel Yitzchak Perr Shlita** noted that we note Chacham and not Tzaddik because how can we tell who is a Tzaddik? Alternatively, maybe anyone not a Rasha by today's standards is a tzaddik in his own right?

**Ein Maftirin Achar HaPesach Afikoman** – **Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm** noted that the Wise son goes beyond the initial recitation of the Hagadah. He understands the concepts and the ramifications beyond the initial moment of the story. Therefore, we teach him the laws including remembering the final taste – that god alone redeems, that he works in mysterious ways which sometimes are paradoxical and that Hashem's ways are surprising but certain. This is the essence; all the rest his commentary, development, and denouement.

I'd like to suggest a different reason for that message. The cerebrally gifted son needs to understand that it's not cognitive ability – memorization - alone that guarantee success in religious life. Rather, it is the Yiddishe Taam – the taste of the afikomen that even after all of the intellectual arguments have been exhausted, will carry the commitment to the faith.

**Lee V'lo Lo: Rav Shteinman shlita** notes that we tell the Rasha that had he been in Mitzrayim he would not have been saved. Yet, we do not even look at him and respond to him but rather address the assemblage surrounding him (we say "lo" and not "Lecha"). On the one hand we must ask why we even bother to answer him if we aren't going to address him but at the same time we also need to recognize that he comes to the Seder – so as if to recognize that even HE has an obligation to see himself as if he left Mitzrayim -- eventhough HE would not have left. How do we reconcile the issue?

I'd like to suggest an answer based on a second question: if we aren't addressing him, whom are we addressing? Perhaps the answer is that we are addressing the non-Rasha side of him. We address the person who perhaps was skeptical during the slavery, due to life circumstances etc. but at the time of Geulas Mitzrayim the Torah tells us that Va'Yaamein HaAm – even the skeptics were won over. The Rasha side of them in them would not have been redeemed.

**At the time that Matza and Marror are in front of you** – **Rabbi Dr. Abraham J. Twerski** explains that the intricate Halachos of Pesach in general and the seder in specific is compatible with the modern psychological view that we change behavior first and then the insight and feeling will come on its own as a result. Putting the Matza and the marror in front of you guarantees that the experience will be one of

Geulah and hopefully the insight and the feelings will last long after. (A Jewish approach puts Naaseh before Nishma as well...)

**And I gave Esav Har Sei'R** – Why must we highlight Esav and what he got? **Rav Joseph Grunblatt ztl.** quoting the Brisker Rav highlights the fact that only we fulfilled Hashem's promises to Avraham about his children and therefore only we have legitimate rights to the benefits that come as a result of being his children. Those who sowed the seeds in tears shall reap the harvest in joy.

**V'Hakadosh Baruch Hu Matzileinu MeeYadam** – **Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach ztl.** explains that it is not merely that Hashem saves us. Rather Hashem saves us from those who enslave us directly. Moshe was raised in Pharaoh's home. Haman was the one who gave the advice to appoint Esther queen.

**Arami Oived Avi** – Where do we find Lavan interested in destroying EVERYTHING? **Rav Shalom Yosef Zevin ztl** answers that Lavan tried to kill Eliezer. Had he been successful, Yitzchak would not have been able to marry anyone out of fear that the girl might be related to the one that Eliezer had selected. Hence Judaism would have died with Yitzchak. **Rav Shlomo Wahrman ztl** pointed out that Yitzchak would still have been able to marry the daughters of Canaan or of Lot. Therefore, he notes, a different explanation is necessary. Citing the Targum Yonasan (to Parshas Matos) he notes that Lavan is none other than Bilaam. Bilaam is he who is identified in the Midrash as the one who proposed the enslavement (See Sotah 11a) – hence his mentioning in the Haggada as a juxtaposition to Pharaoh makes complete sense. Both suggested heinous means of destroying the Jewish nation. Pharaoh tried to destroy the male population. Lavan's (or Bilaam) advice would have destroyed the entire future.

**The Imrei Emes** suggests a third possibility. When Lavan declared "the girls are mine, the sons are mine" what he attempted to do was to remove any unique distinction for the Jew viz a viz the other nations of the world. This, says the author of the Haggadah, is complete and total destruction. For the distinction of what a Jew IS begins with knowing what he's not.

**V'Gam Es HaGoy Asher Yaavodu Dan Anochi** – It sounds like Hashem must judge the nation in order to allow the Rechush Gadol. Why? Why doesn't Hashem simply let it rain gold and silver? **Rav Efrayim Greenblatt ztl. the Rivivos Efraim**, notes that Rechush Gadol does not refer to the gold and silver for that would simply be Rechush. Rechush Gadol refers to the great understanding that Hashem is the provider of all wealth and good tidings in this world. This is what allows us to keep striving and growing no matter what comes our way – good or bad. It helps us build toward a greater tomorrow by beginning on a relationship of a greater today.

**B'Shivim Nefesh** – Why does the Torah refer to those who went to Mitzrayim as a single Nefesh? **Rav Efrayim Greenblatt ztl. the Rivivos Efraim** notes that there is a secret here: They went down together united in thought and guide because they were of one soul – a Torah soul. When we unite around Torah we can bring others close to it. Otherwise, we are a disparate bunch of poor, unfortunate souls.

**And the King died and they cried out** – **Rav Perr Shlita** used to quote his father who used to say that this is the way of the world. First we assume our troubles come from the particular monarch. When the monarch is removed and the situation doesn't improve, hopefully we wake up to realize that the problem is with US and our relationship to Hashem.

**Ani V'Lo Malach** – **Rav Yehoshua Neuwirth ztl.** notes that in today's times we see the hand of Hashem fighting on our behalf as well. Think of the Gulf War or so many of the thwarted Katusha rockets. Before

man has to go out and fight, his enemies have already been weakened. Rav Neuwirth adds that it is a great means of recognizing and strengthening one's emunah if one would merely think about this.

**Ditzach Adash B'Achav** – Why is this such a significant idea that it appears in our Haggadah? **Rav Ovadiah Yosef ztl.** explains that if we count the different opinions about the makkos Al HaYam (250, 200 & 50) it adds up to 500. Ditzach Adash B'Achav also adds up to 501 but the one refers to the Etzba Elokim. Rav Yehudah gives a siman to tell us that they got all the makkos listed.

**Had he given us the Torah and not brought us to Eretz Yisrael – Dayeinu** – **Rav Ovadiah Yosef ztl.** notes that the phraseology here is a reminder to a secular movement of nationalism without care for Torah. Such a situation is not ideal. In fact, it would be better not to be in Eretz Yisrael and be with Torah than otherwise. He adds a story **from Rav Kook** who once met a bunch of kibbutzniks who loved to work the land but had little regard for Torah and Mitzvos. He told them a story of a man who lost his ability to study when he suffered a head injury. The doctors told him that he had no choice but to go into the classroom with the children and learn anew. Soon, the Rebbe reported that the man was acting like a child in the class. He chided the man and told him, “even if you need to learn at a child's level you shouldn't ever forget that you are a certain age.” Rav Kook told the kibbutzniks that since the galus, we lost our ability to learn and to work the land. However, as we return to relearn, we mustn't ever forget that we are part of a certain wise, aged nation.

**Rav Yehoshua Neuwirth ztl.** offered a parallel thought. While Torah is valuable, The value of Toras Eretz Yisroel cannot be minimized ever. When one learns Torah in Eretz Yisrael s/he is adding to the protective measure that already exists as a result of its citizens and inhabitants. Thus, in any war-like situation, learning there protects all of the citizens. Avraham was punished (Says the Ramban) for not realizing this and leaving Eretz Yisrael during a famine. We doubly thank Hashem, for giving us the Torah and for bringing us into Eretz Yisrael on what will hopefully be a one way ticket.

**Pesach** – **Rav Soloveitchik ztl.** notes that the role of the command of eating the Pesach in a Haurah was to show the former slave that whatever material possessions the s/he has is too much to consume on one's own. Their only value is in the formulation of a Chessed community.

**Matza Zu** – **the theme of Chipazon** – of speed pervades the Pesach Seder and exodus. Why? **Rav Chaim Sabato Shlita** explains that you only get one chance to make a first impression. Since the Jews didn't have the Torah, Hashem had to grasp the first opportunity to impress faith in Him on them. To waste the opportunity would be akin to not making a child's first opportunity to communicate congruent with the study of Torah. The lost chance is hard to make up.

**B'Chol Dor VaDor** – **The Rambam** has a different language wherein he requires one not only to see himself but rather to be seen as if he is now leaving Egypt. **Rav Asher Weiss Shlita** notes that these are two distinct issues. One speaks to an inner sense of experience Zecher I'Nes. The other – more demonstrative – is Pirsumei Nissa. Two aspects exist in Hodaah – a personal one and a national publicity one.

**Charoses** - **Rav Pinkus ztl.** notes that Charoses is a contraction of the words Chas and Rus. Chas is the value of Chaim and Rus was the woman who revealed the Kavod Shomayim that was later brought to full realization in the Davidic line. Rav Pinkus explains that Maror which is like death (numerically =Maves) is stopped by those who put themselves out to be as complete as possible – who live and thrive despite obstacles that life throws their way. These people are those who demonstrate that a Torah life is a resilient one.

**L'Shana HaBaah B'Yirushalayim** – Why is it that at the beginning of Ha Lachma Anya we also note where we ARE but at the end of the seder we only note where we are going? **Rav Simcha Sheps ztl.** explains that the Seder is so transformative an experience that when done right, we are transported to a time and place wherein we know not a “Hacha” by the time it is over.