

## Passive and Active Participation in the Redemption

Maimonides notes the difference between the two dimensions of our liberation when he introduces a seeming repetition into his formulation of the obligation to narrate the exodus: “Even great sages are commanded to tell the story of the exodus from Egypt; and whoever expands upon the things *she-ir'u ve-she-hayu*, which happened and took place, is to be praised” (*Hilkhot Hametz u-Matzah* 7:1). *She-ir'u* always denotes passivity; something happened to me; I am the object; I was overpowered. *She-hayu* can also denote active participation, a free decision, purposive action. Apparently, *siyyur yetziat Mitzrayim* encompasses two classes of events, one imposed upon the Jew, and the other precipitated, invited, and caused by him.

There is a famous dispute in the Gemara (*Pesachim* 116a) between Rav and Shemuel about what it means to “begin with denigration and end with praise” in response to the *Mah Nishtanah* questions. Shemuel believes this refers to *Avadin Hayinu*: we were oppressed, we were compelled to engage in slave labor, and then God took us out of Egypt. Of course, this is *she-ir'u*. The Jew did not invite oppression; he did not offer himself to Pharaoh. Rather, he was an object, exploited by the tyrant of a soulless corporate state. The cause lay outside them.

Yet there is another story on Pesah, Rav’s version of denigration and praise—“In the beginning our forefathers were idol worshippers, and now the Omnipresent has drawn us close to His service.” We once worshipped pagan gods, and now we are servants of God. How did it happen? Was Abraham constrained to choose God? The spiritual redemption from idolatry could not have happened to the Jew, for he has *behirah hofshit*, free will. If Abraham did it, it is because he decided so himself. *Behirah*

*hofshit* means that no spiritual ascent, no spiritual elevation, no spiritual progress, is possible, or will be decreed and precipitated by God, unless man is ready to participate and freely commit himself to a certain idea. Regarding this, we cannot say *she-ir'u*; it is *she-hayu*.

In the processes of physical enslavement and redemption, the Jews were completely inactive. The Jew was not ready for *yetziat Mitzrayim*; he did not expect the redemption to come immediately. In fact, matzah is the symbol of the suddenness of the redemption; their dough did not have time to rise. Even though Moses had told them that they finally would be liberated, the Jews did not expect it, and were unprepared. This is *she-ir'u*; the events simply happened to them.

However, the spiritual redemption is different. It dates back to Abraham and continues on Mount Sinai: “All the people answered with one voice, and said: ‘All the words which the Lord has spoken will we do’” (Ex. 24:3). The Torah was not imposed upon them; they chose to accept it. How do I know this? Their acceptance of the Torah was part of a process of *gerut*, conversion, and involuntary *gerut* is impossible. The Jew, of his own free will, has chosen God. Since the Jew is an active participant in his spiritual redemption, it is properly defined as *she-hayu*. And God, in turn, accepted the Jews and chose them: “And now the Omnipresent has drawn us close to His service.”

At the Seder, we recreate this drama. The form of narration in the Haggadah avails itself of dialogue: one person asks and another answers. It is necessary to dramatize this narration because God reveals Himself to man if and when the latter searches for Him. If one does not inquire, if one expects God to reveal Himself without making an all-out effort to find Him, one will never meet God. “But from there you will seek the Lord and you shall find Him, if you search after Him with all your heart and all your soul” (Deut. 4:29).

ליל הסדר of Goal

In order to answer this, let us consider the significance of matzah. It is generally accepted that matzah is a symbol of humility, for a life without airs and conceit. Although this interpretation may be true, it is only a partial answer. Through this interpretation, one can see the aspect of freedom in matzah, but there is another aspect. The Torah (*Deuteronomy 16:30*) refers to matzah as “bread of affliction,” which would imply that it has an aspect of poverty. It is possible that one can explain matzah in a substantively different manner.

In general, one can note the characteristics of matzah:

a. Matzah does not rise. b. Matzah is made only of basic ingredients.

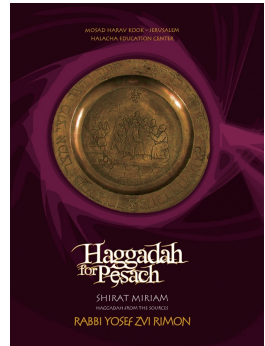
Another characteristic that was pointed out by *Maharal* (*Gevurot Hashem* 51 and 60, as pointed out by my father-in-law and rabbi, **Rav Blumenzweig**) is the fact that matzah is never identified positively,

but only by negation – dough that has not risen, something baked that is not *chametz*).

These characteristics teach us that matzah symbolizes symbolizes **our pure and wholesome internal identity**, which one cannot define or characterize. Matzah teaches us about modesty and humility – without any external and inflated facets, and it expresses simplicity and naiveté, without any technology, sophistication, or human distortion. That is why matzah is able to be the perfect bread, the one offered in the Temple.

That is why matzah is, on the one hand, the “bread of affliction” – simple; straight, pure – and on the other hand it is “the bread of freedom,” as it symbolizes the true internal nature of the person. The “bread of affliction” does not contradict freedom and redemption. On the contrary, it is what enables them. When the Nation of Israel left Egypt, it returned to its internal independence, and, through that, it was able to free itself and be redeemed.

The dough of Israel was indeed not able to rise, but not because of weakness or fleeing, but because the Nation of Israel revealed its true interior, its independence. It is possible that technically the expulsion and the haste in which they left helped in this, but substantively this matter teaches us about the spiritual level Israel had attained, for which matzah – which does



not rise and has no added ingredients – was most appropriate. God commanded them to eat matzah in order to be worthy of being redeemed, and it is because of this spiritual level that Israel became worthy of redemption.

The moment this independence was revealed it

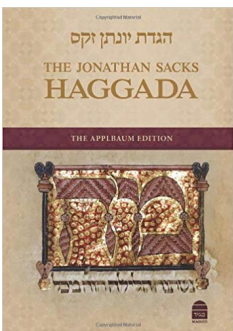


exposed the essence of the bond between God and the Nation of Israel, when the command by God to eat matzah was combined with the reality in which the inner essence of the people was revealed and the dough did not ferment. From this we learn that our inner essence is pure and Divine. This is the point at which we are linked to God. We must remove the external barriers, remove the different servitudes, and from the freedom of our souls we will merit the revelation of God.

Therefore, the words of the editor of the haggadah, that the obligation to eat matzah depends on the fact that their dough did not ferment, are correct, as well as the words of the **Mishnah** that makes it dependent on the redemption of Israel: "This matzah that we eat ... It is because our fathers' dough did not have time to rise **before the King of kings: the Holy One, Blessed be He, revealed Himself to them and redeemed them.**" The dough that did not ferment expressed the internal point to which Israel arrived, and it was this that brought about **God's revelation and the redemption of Israel.**

Eating matzah on Pesach will teach us how to return to our independence, how to live according to our true nature. It is through the power of this eating that we will go out to the rest of the year; we will go back to eating *chametz*, but now we will do so out of a sense of obligation to our internal nature. We will take from the world outside of us, we will be open to the different developments occurring around us, but we will do so out of loyalty to our independence and we will harness them to strengthen our purpose and goal in the world.

Rabbi Jonathan  
Sacks



Where did it come from, this Jewish passion for questions? Clearly it owes much to the fact that three times in the Torah, Moses speaks of children asking for an explanation of religious practice, and in another place it says, "You shall tell your child on that day" (Ex. 13:8). Together, these four verses serve as the basis for the "four sons" of the Haggada. Education is not indoctrination. It is teaching a child to be curious, to wonder, reflect, inquire. The child who asks becomes a partner in the learning process. He or she is no longer a passive recipient but an active participant. To ask is to grow.

But questioning goes deeper than this in Judaism – so deep as to represent a *sui generis* religious phenomenon. The heroes of faith asked questions of God, and the greater the prophet, the harder the question. Abraham asked, "Will the Judge of all the earth not perform justice?" (Gen. 18:25) Moses asked, "O Lord, why have You brought trouble upon this people?" (Ex. 5:22) Jeremiah said, "You are always righteous, O Lord, when I bring a case before You, yet I would speak with You about Your justice: Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why do all the faithless live at ease?" (Jer. 12:1) The Book of Job, the most searching of all explorations of human suffering, is a book of questions asked by man, to which God replies with four chapters of questions of His own. The earliest sermons (known as the *Yelamdenu* type) began with a question asked of the rabbi by a member of the congregation. One classic genre of rabbinical literature is called *She'elat U'Tshuvot*, "questions and replies." Questioning is at the heart of Jewish spirituality.

Religious faith has often been seen as naive, blind, accepting. That is not the Jewish way. Judaism is not the suspension of critical intelligence. It contains no equivalent to the famous declaration of the Christian thinker Tertullian, *Certum est quia impossibile est*, "I believe it because it is impossible." To the contrary: asking a question is itself a

profound expression of faith in the intelligibility of the universe and the meaningfulness of human life. To ask is to believe that somewhere there is an answer. The fact that throughout history people have devoted their lives to extending the frontiers of knowledge is a compelling testimony to the restlessness of the human spirit and its constant desire to go further, higher, deeper. Far from faith excluding questions, questions testify to faith – that history is not random, that the universe is not impervious to our understanding, that what happens to us is not blind chance. We ask not because we doubt, but because we believe.

There are three kinds of questions, each corresponding to a different aspect of God, Humanity, and the intellectual quest. The first belongs to the sphere of *hokhma*, "wisdom," and includes scientific, historical, and sociological inquiry. Rashi interprets the phrase describing the creation of man "in Our image, according to Our likeness" (Gen. 1:26) to mean "with the power to understand and discern." *Homo sapiens* is the only being known to us capable of framing the question "Why?" Maimonides includes scientific and philosophical understanding as part of the commands to love and fear God, because the more we understand of the universe, the more awe-inspiring it and its Architect reveal themselves to be. The sages coined a blessing for seeing a sage distinguished for his or her worldly knowledge ("Blessed are You... who has given of His wisdom to human beings"). The first request we make in the daily *Amida* prayer is "favor us with knowledge, understanding, and insight." Human dignity is intimately related to our ability to fathom the workings of the universe, natural and social. *Hokhma* is an encounter with God through *creation*. Making man in His image, the creative God endowed mankind with creativity.



<https://www.nytimes.com/1988/01/19/opinion/l-izzy-did-you-ask-a-good-question-today-712388.html>

To the Editor:

Isidor I. Rabi, the Nobel laureate in physics who died Jan. 11, was once asked, "Why did you become a scientist, rather than a doctor or lawyer or businessman, like the other immigrant kids in your neighborhood?"

His answer has served as an inspiration for me as an educator, as a credo for my son during his schooling and should be framed on the walls of all the pedagogues, power brokers and politicians who purport to run our society.

The question was posed to Dr. Rabi by his friend and mine, Arthur Sackler, himself a multitalented genius, who, sadly, also passed away recently. Dr. Rabi's answer, as reported by Dr. Sackler, was profound: "My mother made me a scientist without ever intending it. Every other Jewish mother in Brooklyn would ask her child after school: 'So? Did you learn anything today?' But not my mother. She always asked me a different question. 'Izzy,' she would say, 'did you ask a good question today?' That difference - asking good questions - made me become a scientist!"

### משך חכמה שמות יגיד

(והיה כי ישאלך בנך מחר לאמור). התבונן הא שבכל הבנים כתיב "כי ישאלך בנך לאמר" לבד בהבן הרשע כתיב "והיה כי יאמרו אליכם בניכם" (לעיל יב, כו), ולא כתוב "לאמר". - השיבנו תשובה וכו'. והנה החכם ששואל "מה העדות" והתם ששואל "מה זאת", רצונם לדעת ולשמוע תשובה, כי אותה הם מבקשים. לא כן הרשע, ששאלתו "מה העבודה הזאת לכם" הוא רק לועג



על העבודה, שלדעתו הוא דבר בטל, ואין רצונו בתשובה להוסיף דעה, כי לא יחפץ כסיל בתבונה, ורצונו הוא שיהיה הקושיא אלומה כדי שיהיה הלעג חזק. ולכן לא כתיב כאן לא "שאלה" ולא "לאמר", ודו"ק.

There are three conditions, though, for asking a Jewish question. The first is that we seek genuinely to learn – not to doubt, ridicule, dismiss, reject. That is what the wicked son of the Haggada does: he asks not out of a desire to understand but as a prelude to walking away.

R'Sacks

Second is that we accept limits to our understanding. Not everything is intelligible at any given moment. There were scientists at the beginning of the twentieth century who believed that virtually every major discovery had already been made – not suspecting that the next hundred years would give rise to Einstein's relativity theory, Heisenberg's uncertainty principle, Gödel's theorem, proof of the big bang origin of the universe, the discovery of DNA, and the decoding of the human genome. In relation to Torah, many German and American Jews in the nineteenth century could not understand Jewish prayers for a return to Zion, and deleted them from the prayer book. These facts should induce in us a certain humility. Not every scientific orthodoxy survives the test of time. Not everything in Judaism that we do not understand is unintelligible. The very features of Jewish life one generation finds difficult, the next generation may find the most meaningful of all. Faith is not opposed to questions, but it is opposed to the shallow certainty that what we understand is all there is.

Third is that when it comes to Torah, we learn by living and understand by doing. We learn to understand music by listening to music. We

learn to appreciate literature by reading literature. There is no way of understanding Shabbat without keeping Shabbat, no way of appreciating how Jewish laws of family purity enhance a marriage without observing them. Judaism, like music, is something that can be understood only from the inside, by immersing yourself in it.

Given these caveats, Judaism is a faith that, more than any other, values the mind, encouraging questions and engaging us at the highest level of intellectual rigor. Every question asked in reverence is the start of a journey toward God, and it begins with the habit that, on Pesah, Jewish parents teach their children: to ask, thereby to join the never-ending dialogue between human understanding and heaven.

זכירה vs. סיפור

One difference is that one

Pesach night we are

מתחיל בגנות וסיים בשבח

**ספר גבורות השם למהר"ל - פרק נב**

...כי אין להתחיל בשבח מיד מבלי שיספר תחלה הגנות - שאז היה

משמע שהיתה הוצאה במקרה - שכך קרה שנעשה טובה זאת לישראל שלא כיון הפועל אל הפעולה.... לפיכך יתחיל קודם הגנות ויאמר בשביל הגנות שהיה לישראל - הקדוש ברוך הוא עשה עמם מה שעשה ... וכאשר תבין עוד תדע עוד כי השבח שקודם לו גנות יותר שבח כמו שתראה כי היום קודם לו הלילה. וזה מפני כי השלימות אינו נמצא בהתחלתו בעולם הזה וכאשר יגיע לנמצא שלימות מה - אי אפשר שיהיה לו אותה המעלה בתחילתו ... לפיכך המעלה אלהית יוקדם לה גנות ולבסוף יעלה אל מעלה האלהית כי כך ראוי אל מעלה האלהית שלחסרון המקבל אינה נמצאת בו תחלה וזה נמשך אל הויית העולם הזה שאין בתחלתו נמצא מעלתו אבל התחלתו הוא בשפלות ומתעלה באחרונה ולא היה כדאי העולם הזה לקבל המעלה הזאת שיהיה האור בתחלתו, כי האור הוא מעלת המציאות לכך יוקדם לו לילה ...

Bruce Feiler "The Stories that Bind Us", NY Times March 2013

Psychologists have found that every family has a unifying narrative, he explained, and those narratives take one of three shapes.

First, the ascending family narrative: "Son, when we came to this country, we had nothing. Our family worked. We opened a store. Your grandfather went to high school. Your father went to college. And now you. ..."

Second is the descending narrative: "Sweetheart, we used to have it all. Then we lost everything." "The most healthful narrative," Dr. Duke continued, "is the third one. It's called the oscillating family narrative: 'Dear, let me tell you, we've had ups and downs in our family. We built a family business. Your grandfather was a pillar of the community. Your mother was on the board of the hospital. But we also had setbacks. You had an uncle who was once arrested. We had a house burn down. Your father lost a job. But no matter what happened, we always stuck together as a family.'"

Dr. Duke said that children who have the most self-confidence have what he and Dr. Fivush call a strong "intergenerational self." They know they belong to something bigger than themselves.

**פסחים קטז:**

רבי טרפון אומר אשר גאלנו וגאל את אבותינו ממצרים ולא היה חותם

רבי עקיבא אומר כן ה' אלהינו ואלהי אבותינו יגיענו למועדים ולרגלים אחרים הבאים לקראתנו לשלום שמחים בבנין עירך וששים בעבודתך ונאכל שם (מן הפסחים ומן הזבחים) כו' עד ברוך אתה ה' גאל ישראל

**הגדה ליל שימורים**

**R'Yechiel Michel Epstein**

**זלכן** אחי אומר שנעדר זה המזיקו טובה  
לר"ע על שחוקס בחקות כלל  
ישראל סיכף אחר החורבן ולכן באו כולם  
לעירו ולביתו של ר"ע לכד ר"ג לא הלך  
זמני שהיה נשיא והם כולם באו אליו לספר  
ציל"מ בליל חג הפסח מפני שמיליאת מזרים  
ג"כ מתבדר נחיות ישראל שכל כלי יונר עליו  
לא יללח לכלותו ח"ץ והיו מאריכים בזה עד  
שבאו תלמידיהם ואמרו רבותינו הגיע זמן  
ק"ש של שחרית והו"ג"כ לאמץ ברכים כושלות  
דבק"ש של שחרית אנו אומרים ג"כ עזרת  
אבותינו וכו' מגן ומושיע לבניהם אחריהם  
בכל דור ודור וטוד דברים כאלה שבין ק"ש  
לשמ"ע שמוכטמים אגחנו מפיו יתכרך שיהיה  
לט קיום עולמי :

**ידן** הן הדברים שנדברו בין החנאים  
הקדושים שהם לא הלטערו על שלות  
ברומיים כי אין אנו מתקנאים בזה אלא  
נלטערו על דחקת ונרות ישראל מהרומיים  
שנזורים עליהם נזירות קשות כי הם היו  
סמוך לחורבן נהמ"ק ולא שטערו בנפשה  
שחיה תקומה לישראל ח"ו ולכן בכו מרוב  
לער וזהו שנחמם ר"ע שמוכטת הוא שעיני  
ה' אל ישראל שלא יכלו ח"ו וג"כ מטעם זה  
דאם לעוברי רצון השפיע להם כל כך חסד  
ושלום ח"כ על אחת כמה וכמה שישפיע  
מדת רחמים על ישראל שלא יכלו ח"ו :



## R'Rimon

### **Weeping in the middle of the haggadah – seder night in the Holocaust**

The story of Rabbi Yonah Emmanuel – Pesach within the bitterness of the Holocaust (as told at the *brit* of his grandson):

I would like to tell you what happened forty years ago today. I was unable to tell this story until now. I never told it to my wife, I never told it to my children, I never told it to anyone – I was unable to. For the first time I feel that I can tell it now, at the *brit* of my grandson, Aharon Chananel.

On the morning before Pesach eve in the year 5705 (1945) I left for hard physical labor in the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, as I had done every day for the previous two years. I came back at night, utterly and totally exhausted, as I did every night during those two years. I was 19 years old. My father was already dead, my older brother, Elchanan, was already dead, my younger brother,

Shalom, was already dead, and my younger sister, Bayta, was also not among the living.

The Bergen-Belsen camp was not an extermination camp but a labor camp, and Jews died of the unbelievably hard labor, the terrible cold, starvation, and disease. During that time, hundreds of Jews died each day in Bergen-Belsen.

I went to the hut where my mother was. She was very ill. I sat next to her and began to recite the haggadah. We had no wine, we had no *matzot*, we did not even have any bread. We only had one thing – in the greatest abundance – *maror*! There was a very great amount of *maror* – bitterness – in our hearts! I whispered the haggadah, and I was not sure whether my mother heard me or did not hear me. When I came to the blessing of deliverance, and I said the words, “So too, Lord our God and God of our fathers, enable us to reach future holidays and festivals in peace, rejoicing in the rebuilding of Your city and ecstatic in Your service,” I felt that for the first time I did not believe what I was saying. Would any of us there reach future holidays and festivals? Would anyone of us ever see Jerusalem? Would any of us ever rejoice again? I burst into tears, and in the middle of the blessing I stopped reciting the haggadah...

Had I been able to describe to myself on that Pesach eve of 5705 an iota of what took place today, had I been able to picture to myself that I would be privileged to come to the Land of Israel with my sister and my two brothers, that I would be privileged to live in a Jewish country, that I would be able to establish a family, to raise seven children, to be a *sandek* at the *brit* of my grandson in Jerusalem forty years later... had I been able to image any of that – I might have been able to complete the reading of the haggadah...



הגדה באר חיים R'Elimelech Biderman

### • יכול מראש חודש •

התחדשות ו'גוטע 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 יתב"ש.

סיפר החסיד רבי מרדכי מיירנץ שליט"א, שבליל 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 חודש, 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

From Out of Nowhere?

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

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

ורבים הקשו, מה התחדש במעשה זה? וכי תנאים אחרים לא הרבו לספר ביציאת מצרים? והאמוראים, כדגמת אבאי ורבא לא ספרי, והגאונים, והראשונים, והאחרונים? הלא כל יהודי מספר ביציאת מצרים כל הלילה! מה הרבותא במעשה זה?

באר מרו הגר"ש אלשיך וצ"ל: הנה קשונתבונן מעט בגאלת 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 מתאשים ממנו. אומרים: רשע מרשע הוא זה, אין לו פלל ספוי להנצל.

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



את פתח לו The Haggadah teaches us the importance of a proper approach in our confrontation with the fourth son. *At petah lo*, you must begin the conversation, or, more literally: “You open up to him.” We must initiate the dialogue with the fourth son, make him feel welcome, open up our hearts with warmth and love, never in anger or contempt.

The next lesson we learn from the Haggadah in approaching the fourth son, is to go beyond history, beyond theology, and beyond philosophy, in explaining what Judaism really is. Every religion can boast beautiful concepts, stories, and ideals. If we are to be honest, and we must be, we must emphasize that which is unique to Judaism. And that is: the practical commandments as defined by the Halakhah. Thus the author of the Haggadah instructs us to inform the fourth son about our exodus from Egypt, but that this teaching be accomplished “*be-sha’ah she-yesh matzah u-maror munnahim le-fanekha*, while the *matzah* and *maror* lie before us”! We must stress the actual, practical *mitzvot*.

Finally, what troubles so many of these silent Jews who have lost the capacity to ask the great questions is: despair. They have discovered Judaism, but they think that it is too late and that they are inadequate to the task of reshaping their lives to the great and noble purposes of our faith. Our response must be to inform them that their predicament is no different from that of our people as a whole. “In the beginning,” we read in the Haggadah, “our ancestors were idol worshippers” — just pagans, no different from the people amongst whom they lived. However, “now the Lord has brought us close to His service.” We grew spiritually. The whole story of the Jewish people is one of rising from the very bottom, of emerging from the lowest depths. Any Jew who returns to Judaism today despite a complete lack of background, recapitulates Jewish history in his adventure and romance with Judaism.



## פסח, מצה, ומרור — Pesach, Matzah, Maror

These three mitzvos can be homiletically connected to the three negative character traits that are the foundation of all negative character traits — jealousy, lust, and pursuit of honor — which are said to remove a person from this world (see *Avos* 4:29). Therefore, when Hashem took the nation out from Egypt, He immediately commanded them regarding the three mitzvos of *pesach*, *matzah*, and *maror*, which counter the three roots of bad character traits, to purify them of these negative traits.

The mitzvah of *pesach* serves to uproot jealousy from within us. The *pesach*-offering must thus be roasted by fire to combat the trait of jealousy that burns like fire in the bones of one who is jealous: “its flashes are flashes of fire” (*Shir HaShirim* 8:6). In addition, every Jew must eat his *Pesach*-offering in the same manner, such that there is no apparent distinction between the rich and the poor and, as a result, no opening for jealousy.

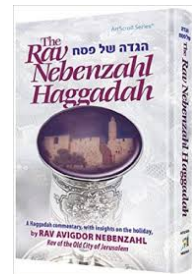
The mitzvah of *matzah* serves to uproot the desire for honor, for *matzah* is לחם עני — the poor man’s bread. A poor man has a broken heart, as we find (*Yeshayahu* 66:2): “It is to this that I look; to the poor and broken-spirited person.” Haughtiness is the opposite of *matzah*. *Matzah* that rises and becomes inflated (like one who is haughty in spirit) is forbidden as *chametz*.

*Maror* symbolizes the uprooting of lust, for *maror* is so bitter that no one “lusts” to eat it. By filling oneself with the bitter *maror* he breaks his tendency to lust.

The Jewish people were given these three mitzvos immediately upon leaving the impurity of Egypt to purify them of the negative traits that serve as the basis for all sins.

***Pesach, matzah, and maror*** — *Maror* commemorates the bitterness of the bondage in Egypt, and the *pesach*-offering commemorates the Exodus when Hashem passed over (*pasach*) Jewish homes while slaying the firstborn. Accordingly, *maror* (representing the bondage that preceded the Exodus) should apparently be mentioned before the *pesach*-offering! Nevertheless, *maror* is mentioned last because the Torah does not write it as an independent mitzvah, rather, it is secondary to the *pesach*-offering and must be eaten together with it. For this reason, nowadays, when there is no *pesach*-offering, the mitzvah of *maror* is Rabbinic (*Hilchos Chametz uMatzah* 7:12).

***Pesach***. According to *Pesachim* 96a, there was a unique law that applied only to that first *Pesach* in Egypt: the *pesach*-offering had to be purchased on the tenth of *Nissan*. Apparently the early purchase of the animal was for a specific purpose — that the Egyptians see the Jewish people slaughtering their object of worship (see *Tur*, beginning of 430). Now, according to some Talmudic opinions, the three days of darkness were 11-13 *Nissan*, and the *pesach*-offering was slaughtered on the 14th. Thus, for the Egyptians to see the Jewish people taking the *pesach*-offering, they perforce had to take it on the 10th, for after that the Egyptians were enveloped in pitch darkness and could see nothing.



## זכרון יציאת מצרים – תקוה בכל הגלויות!

**"הא לחמא עניא די אכלו אבהתנא בארעא דמצריםו השתא הבא לשנה הבאה בארעא דישראל, השתא עבדי לשנה הבאה בני חורין"**

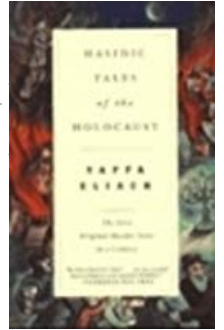


לכאורה – אמר הגאון והדדושן הנודע רבי גדליה סילברסטון, רבה של ואשינגטון - עלינו לתמוה על שמחתנו בליל הסדר: לשמחה מה זו עושה, והלא עדיין עבדי אחשוורוש אנחנו, ואף שיצאנו משעבוד מצרים, שעבוד של ארבע מאות שנה, הלא נכנסנו לשעבוד של אלפי שנה, ואם כן על מה ולמה השמחה הגדולה כשאנו מזכירים בפסח את יציאת מצרים?

אלא – גאולת מצרים מחזקת בנו את התקוה גם בגלויות שלאחריה, שהרי ארץ מצרים היתה מקור הצרות, כפי שאמרו חז"ל שהיו עבדים נסגרים שם בכ"ד מפתחות עד שהיה בלתי אפשרי לצאת משם בדרך הטבע, ובעת שהיינו שם במדרגה התחתונה, במ"ט שערי טומאה, וכמעט אמרנו נואש ואבדנו אבידת הגוף והנפש, בכל זאת הושיענו אבינו שבשמים בדרך נס, ויוציאונו משם ביד חזקה ובזרוע נטויה, וזה נותן לנו תקוה עד היום הזה בגלות המרה והארוכה (ובפרט בדור האחרון ששתה את כוס התרעלה בשואה הנוראה).

בימים כאלו של חושך ואפלת הגלות, כאשר האלמנות והיתומים של הנטבחים והנרצחים בשל יהדותם, יושבים ועורכים את הסדר בעיניים זולגות דמעות, ואומרים בקול רם: "הא לחמא עניא די אכלו אבהתנא בארעא דמצרים", שאף היא היתה ארץ דמים שבה גזרו "כל הבן הילוד היאורה תשליכוהו", ובכל זאת נושענו בדרך נס ופלא, הרי גאולה זו נותנת לנו תקוה גם כן לגלות הנוכחית, ועל כן אנו מוקיפים ומביעים תקוה בפה מלא כי אף ש"השתא הבא", הרי לשנה הבאה אנו יכולים להיות בארעא דישראל, ואף ש"השתא עבדי" – הרי כבר בשנה הבאה אנו יכולים להיות בני חורין, כי גאולת מצרים היא מופת של תקוה ואמונה עד היום הזה, ומי יתן וכימי צאתנו מארץ מצרים נראה נפלאות!

"קרבן פסח" (הוצאה שנייה, ירושלים תרצ"ט)



## Seder Night in Bergen Belsen: “Tonight We Have Only Matzah”

A FEW WEEKS BEFORE PASSOVER, ABOUT SEVENTY JEWS IN THE SECTION for foreign nationals in Bergen Belsen organized into a group. Most of them were Hasidic Jews who had arrived at the camp from the Bochnia ghetto. The majority of the people from the Bochnia transport were holders of South American passports; a few held British papers from Eretz Yisrael. They organized the group in order to request flour for baking matzot in honor of the approaching Passover holiday. They addressed their written request to the camp commandant, suggesting that instead of their daily ration of bread they be given flour from which they would bake matzot. In this way they would not strain the camp food supplies. Each of the seventy people signed the petition, and the Rabbi of Bluzhov, Rabbi Israel Spira, an old-timer in Bergen Belsen, was selected as the group's spokesman.

Adolf Haas, the camp commandant, read the petition carefully, then looked at the rabbi with open contempt and ridicule. "I will forward the request to Berlin," he said, after a long silence, while nonchalantly toying with his revolver, "and we will act according to their instructions."

Days passed and there was no reply from Berlin. With each passing day, the signers of the petition became more depressed. Some were convinced that they had made a grave mistake by signing the petition, for in doing so, they separated themselves from the rest of the inmates and probably signed their own death sentence, thus making their own "selection." Knowing from their past experience that the Germans set apart the Jewish holidays as days of terror, torture, and death, the seventy petition signers feared that they would probably be the Passover sacrifice, the Paschal lambs of Bergen Belsen.

Passover was only a few days away and the reply from Berlin had not yet arrived. At the height of their despair, when all hope appeared lost and a bitter fate seemed to be inevitable, two tall S.S. men with two huge dogs briskly entered the section for foreign nationals. They summoned the Rabbi of Bluzhov to the camp commandant. In those dark days a summons by an S.S. officer clearly spelled one thing for a Jew: death. The rabbi parted from his friends and began to recite the Vidduy, the prayer one recites before death, as he walked in the direction of the commandant's office.

Camp cap in hand, the rabbi stood before the commandant and listened to what he had to say: "As always, Berlin is generous with the Jews. You can bake your religious bread." The rabbi remained standing, waiting for the horrible decree to follow the commandant's statement, but to the rabbi's great amazement, none did.

Instead, the commandant called in a few inmates from another section in camp who were already waiting at the office entrance, and ordered them to help the rabbi build a small oven for baking matzot in the section for foreign nationals. The rabbi thanked the commandant and rushed back to the barracks in disbelief that they had indeed been granted permission to bake matzot.

The building of the oven began with feverish haste, the Hasidim fearing that the camp commandant would change his mind at any minute and stop them. In the few days before Passover, matzot were baked from the meager rationed flour, matzot that only in name resembled the pre-World War II matzot baked at home. But the people were thrilled with the shapeless black matzot, especially for the children's sake, so they might see and learn that a holiday is observed even in the Valley of Death.

Passover arrived. A Seder was arranged in one of the barracks. Three-tiered wooden bunk beds served as tables and as traditional seats for reclining. Three precious unbroken matzot were placed on the table. An old, dented, broken pot was used as the ceremonial Seder plate. On it there were no roasted shank bone, no egg, no haroset, no traditional greens, only a boiled potato given by a kind old German who worked at the showers.



But there was no shortage of bitter herbs; bitterness was in abundance. The suffering of the Jews was reflected in their eyes.

The Rabbi of Bluzhov sat at the head of the table. He was surrounded by a group of young children and a few adults. The rabbi began to recite the Haggadah from memory.

He uncovered the matzot, lifted the ceremonial plate, and began to tell the story of the Exodus.

This is the bread of affliction that our fathers ate in the land of Egypt. All who are hungered—let them come and eat, all who are needy—let them come and celebrate Passover. Now we are here; next year may we be in the land of Israel! Now we are slaves; next year may we be free men!

The youngest of the children asked the Four Questions, his sweet childish voice chanting the traditional melody: "Why is this night different from all other nights? For on all other nights we eat either bread or matzah, but tonight only matzah."

It was dark in the barracks. The moon's silvery, pale glow was reflected on the pale faces. It was as if the tears that silently streamed down their cheeks were flowing toward the legendary angel with the huge jug of tears, which when filled to its brim would signal the end of human suffering.

As is customary, the rabbi began to explain the meaning of Passover in response to the Four Questions. But on that Seder night in Bergen Belsen, the ancient questions of the Haggadah assumed a unique meaning.

"Night," said the rabbi, "means exile, darkness, suffering. Morning means light, hope, redemption. Why is this night different from all other nights? Why is this suffering, the Holocaust, different from all the previous sufferings of the Jewish people?" No one attempted to respond to the rabbi's questions. Rabbi Israel Spira continued.

"For on all other nights we eat either bread or matzah, but tonight only matzah. Bread is leavened; it has height. Matzah is unleavened

and is totally flat. During all our previous sufferings, during all our previous nights in exile, we Jews had bread and matzah. We had moments of bread, of creativity, and light, and moments of matzah, of suffering and despair. But tonight, the night of the Holocaust, we experience our greatest suffering. We have reached the depths of the abyss, the nadir of humiliation. Tonight we have only matzah, we have no moments of relief, not a moment of respite for our humiliated spirits. . . . But do not despair, my young friends."

The rabbi continued in a forceful voice filled with faith. "For this is also the beginning of our redemption. We are slaves who served Pharaoh in Egypt. Slaves in Hebrew are *avadim*; the Hebrew letters of the word *avadim* form an acronym for the Hebrew phrase: David, the son of Jesse, your servant, your Messiah? Thus, even in our state of slavery we find intimations of our eventual freedom through the coming of the Messiah.

"We who are witnessing the darkest night in history, the lowest moment of civilization, will also witness the great light of redemption, far before the great light there will be a long night, as was promised by our Prophets. 'But it shall come to pass, that at evening time there shall be light,' and 'The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light; they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined.'" It was to us, my dear children, that our prophets have spoken, to us who dwell in the shadow of death, to us who will live to witness the great light of redemption."

The Seder concluded. Somewhere above, the silvery glow of the moon was dimmed by dark clouds. The Rabbi of Bluzhov kissed each child on the forehead and reassured them that the darkest night of mankind would be followed by the brightest of all days.

As the children returned to their barracks, slaves of a modern Pharaoh amidst a desert of mankind, they were sure that the sounds of the Messiah's footsteps were echoing in the sounds of their own steps on the blood-soaked earth of Bergen Belsen.

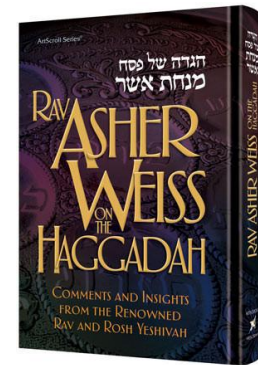
*I heard it at the house of the Grand Rabbi of Bluzhov, Rabbi Israel Spira, June 22, 1975.*



As we noted earlier, the Talmud (*Pesachim* 39a) explains that *chasah* alludes to Hashem having mercy (*chas*) on us. *Chasam Sofer* (*Teshuvos*, O.C. 132) points out that תמכא, another herb that can be used as maror, is an acronym for תמיד מספרים כבוד אל, *Constantly relating the honor of Hashem*.

*Chasam Sofer* adds that his *rebbe*, R' Nosson Adler, invested much effort into identifying the vegetable known as *karpas*, because *Maharil* said that the word כרפס is comprised of the letters סיפרך, which means that 600,000 people endured crushing harshness from the Egyptians.<sup>1</sup> He found that the vegetable commonly used is called אפגיא in most European languages, which can be an acronym for א-ל פועל ישועות אמה, *For You effect salvations, O God*.

It would seem that *Chasam Sofer* and R' Nosson Adler were not simply trying to find acronyms for the items we use at the Seder. They were teaching us that the purpose of the maror is to remind us to constantly declare the Glory of God; even during the most bitter and painful episodes of our lives, we should realize that Hashem is truly looking to benefit us, and that He can prepare the remedy from the very ailment from which we are suffering.



I heard from my *rebbe*, the Klausenberger Rebbe *zt"l*, that this is why we cover our eyes when we accept Hashem's Sovereignty upon ourselves in *Shema* (as discussed in *Berachos* 13a). In *Shema* we declare, ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ ה' אֶחָד, The Name (י-ה-ו-ה) represents Hashem's Attribute of Mercy, and אֱלֹהֵינוּ the Attribute of Justice, but in *Shema* we declare that both Names are one, since the Attribute of Justice is also a manifestation of Hashem's mercy. Hashem's justice often appears to be so harsh that we must cover our eyes to hide the outward appearance, and declare ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ ה' אֶחָד, expressing our firm belief that everything He does is for our best.

*Kol Aryeh* (Introduction, *Ma'amar Pesach Tov* 7) offers a beautiful explanation of the verses in which Hashem tells Yaakov Avinu, "Do not fear to descend to Egypt ... Yosef will place his hands over your eyes" (*Bereishis* 46:3,4).

Yaakov considered his descent to Egypt a terrible misfortune, but Hashem reassured him that in the end he would see that it was actually for the best, like Yosef's descent into slavery. Yosef's descent also seemed like a terrible misfortune at first, but in the end it became apparent that the entire story had been a manifestation of Hashem's hidden kindness: Yosef became the viceroy to Pharaoh, and was able to support Yaakov's family during the years of famine.

When Hashem told Yaakov that Yosef would place his hands over his eyes, He was referring to the practice of covering our eyes when we recite *Shema*. He reminded Yaakov that we must ignore outward appearances, and trust that Hashem's Attribute of Justice is actually part of His Attribute of Mercy.

This is why *Zohar* describes the incident of Yosef's sale to Egypt as "the secret of *Kerias Shema*."

Similarly, *Kol Aryeh* cites *Chasam Sofer's* explanation of the verse, "You will see My back, but My face you may not see" (*Shemos* 33:23): We cannot always see the face of Hashem and His kindness when tragedy descends upon us. Many years later, however, we can often see His kindness in retrospect — "from the back" — and realize that all was for the best.

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## Food for Thought

### What end did God calculate?

In the simple sense, the expression, “the Holy One, Blessed be He, calculated the end,” refers to the Covenant between the Pieces, where God **determined the end** of the stay in Egypt, which was to be four hundred years. However, a number of interpretations were given by our *Rishonim* about this expression.

*Shibolei HaLeket* on the haggadah writes that God “calculated the end” in such a way as to minimize the number of years. Thus, our Sages tell us in the midrash (*Yalkut Shimoni, Shir Hashirim* 986):

*“The sound of my beloved! Behold, he is coming!” This refers to Moses. When he came and said, “In this month you will be redeemed,” they said to him: “Our teacher, Moses, how are we to be redeemed? Did not the Holy One, Blessed be He, say to Abraham, that ‘they will enslave them and oppress them, for four hundred years’ and only 210 years have passed?!” He said to them, “As God wishes to redeem us, He will not look at the calculations but will be skipping over the mountains, jumping over the hills... and this month you will be redeemed.”*

*Shibolei HaLeket* offers another interpretation. The word for “end” (that we say that God “calculated the end”) is *keitz* in Hebrew, and the *gematria* value of the word *keitz* is 190. Thus God subtracted 190 years from the original 400 years, and that was why we were only in Egypt for 210 years (see the solutions to the riddles, in explaining the calculation, p. 443).

When we look at the different textual versions of the haggadah, we will see that there are two different versions of this text here. Many *haggadot* have the words, “*mechashev et hakeitz*” – He calculates the end (**Rav Amram Gaon, Rav Sa’adiah Gaon**, and others), while others have the version, “*chishev et hakeitz*” – He calculated the end (**Rambam, Avudraham** on the haggadah, and that is our version). Our version is that God **calculated** (in the past) the time for the redemption from Egypt. On the other hand, the other version has the verb in the present, which God **calculates** – namely that at every instant God calculates when the redemption is to come. That is the interpretation of *Shibolei HaLeket*: that when we speak of the Exodus from Egypt, we must be consoled by it, namely that in the future God will again redeem us, “as He kept His word in the past.” There, we are also told, “Blessed is He who keeps His promise to Israel,” and that is also in the present tense, because at all times God calculates the redemption.

**The fact that God calculates the redemption teaches us that everything depends on Divine Providence. Everything is calculated, both our troubles and our consolations.** In reading the haggadah on the *seder* night, we must remember that we are not only speaking about the past, but that this is also a description of the present and the future that will come, with God’s help, as the prophet Micah said to us (7:15), “As in the days of your Exodus from the land of Egypt, I will show him wonders!”

### Why the trickery and the theft?

“Afterwards they will go forth with great possessions.” God promised Abraham at the Covenant between the Pieces (*Genesis* 15:13-14) that after the slavery of Egypt, the Nation of

## Nirtza

In the plenitude of joy we do not overstep our bounds. We remind ourselves that our observance remains *“as prescribed, in accordance with all its laws and statutes.”* The essence of Jewish self-mastery is to express the highest spiritual ideals within the framework of legal conduct. We sanctify God’s Name within the clearly defined boundaries of space and time. The unique quest of the Jewish People is to be *“One nation – on earth!”*<sup>134</sup>

From this point of view, bounded by the framework of halachic obligations, we turn our eyes to the future. We express our faith that just as we were privileged to conduct the Seder as prescribed, so too may we be privileged to sacrifice the Pesach offering in the Beit Hamikdash, and to partake of it in accordance with all its laws and statutes – *be’ezrat Hashem!*

Even though Hakadosh Baruch Hu “dwells in the highest abode,”<sup>135</sup> His gaze is turned earthward. He will soon reestablish His congregation, and bring them back to Tzion in jubilation.

The conclusion of the Seder is termed *“Nirtza”* – Acceptance. This title calls to mind the verse: *“Go on your way, eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a happy heart; for God has already accepted your works”* (KOHLELET 9:7). We conclude the Seder confident that our service has found favor in the eyes of Hakadosh Baruch Hu.

The term *“Nirtza”* alludes also to our redemption, as in the verse: *“You have shown favor to your Land; You have brought Ya’akov back from captivity”* (TEHILLIM 85:2).

We conclude the Seder in gladness and sublime joy with the resounding call: “Next year in Yerushalayim rebuilt!” The only other time during the year that we use these words is at the conclusion of the service of Yom Kippur. On this night we sense that our trust and faith has elevated us to a spiritual level approaching that of Yom Kippur. May Hashem on this night likewise absolve us of all our sins, and may we live to see Hashem guide the offshoots of his plants, redeemed, to Tzion in jubilation!

