Haggada points to Ponder 5783

**Mikadeish Yisrael V’Hazmanim – Dayan Chanoch Ehrentrau[[1]](#footnote-1)** noted that one of the fundamental differences between Shabbos and Yom Tov can be found in the closing of the Kiddush Beracha. Citing Rabbi Tzaddk Hakohein of Lublin, he noted that Shabbos is totally brought on by Hashem without human involvement. It is therefore known as Isarusei D’Leila (awareness from above) as opposed to Yom Tov which is a joint effort based on Kiddush Hachodesh (hence Isarusei D”Litata). Rav Ehrentrau noted that whenever there is an awareness from Shomayim without human involvement there is always a Nisayon afterward. Hence the Gra didn’t want to learn from a Malach (acc. To Rav Chaim of Volohzin in intro to Sifrei D’Tzniyusa) since he did not want to have the Nisayon in order to make things stick. Pesach is an example of heavenly awareness and Sefirah is the Nisayon. Through the tests of Sefirah growth we are zocheh to Kabbolos Hatorah.

**Chametz and Matzah**- **Rabbi Zechariah Wallerstein**[[2]](#footnote-2) noted the difference in the makeup of chametz and matzah, and particularly the way they come into being. Chametz is leaven bread, is dough that has risen and now looks puffed up and larger than when you began mixing its ingredients. Matzah, on the other hand, remains flat and without excess volume. But there is something even more telling about how each of these processes unfold. To make chametz, you would think that it should require a lot of work. After all, there is more of the bread. It’s larger, denser and much more significant than something slender and flat. But it’s quite the opposite. Chametz is relatively easy to make. You place the initial ingredients of water and flour together, and then simply sit back and let it do the work. You let it rise by not doing anything to it, but rather allowing it to grow on its own accord. Matzah, in contrast, is exactly the opposite. You’d think that it’s flat and meager, and doesn’t require much work and effort to produce, especially in contrast to real bread. But it’s not so. It, in fact, demands from the very minute when the water and flour make contact that the baker work assiduously and without respite and ensuring no leavening takes place. The lack of work generates a chametz status, and the continuous application of effort is what keeps it matzah. In life, true success and spiritual growth occur when there is never a lack of stagnation, not a point of resting on one’s laurels and thinking that now is time for a vacation, now is time to sit back and rest. The continual effort is what is required, at its very basic and elemental level, to retain the matzah in our life, to obtain the goals of spiritual ascent and mastery. It’s human to desire a break, pine for a respite and look forward to time off. But not a break from acting as a committed Jew and focusing on our Torah values and principles. A vacation from those, an unguarded attitude in those realms, leads to a life of chametz, of inflation and self-aggrandizement where Hashem finds little room to enter. The holiday of Pesach reinforces the principles of hard work, of spiritual labor. Our freedom comes when we remain committed, always and always, to the Torah. Instead of being enslaved to our passions and desires, we are devoted and dedicated to Hashem. And nothing, not even for a moment, will stir our attention away from our desired result: matzah. A life of purity and subordination to the will of G-d. There is no greater life, neither rich nor rewarding, than that.

**Avadim Hayeenu** – In this section of the Haggada we note that if Hashem had not taken us out of Mitzrayim we, our children and grandchildren would still be enslaved to Pharaoh in Mitzrayim. It seems like a bold declaration. In an address to a celebration of a Baal Teshuva Yeshiva, **Rav Shimon Badani[[3]](#footnote-3)** explained that the Rambam in Hilchos Teshuva notes that the Jewish nation cannot be redeemed without Teshuva and that in the end the people will indeed do Teshuva. Rav Badani noted that there is no source supporting either assertion of the Rambam in the Talmud. He added that one of the requirements of a Moshiach in the future is that he will convince the masses of the Jewish people to do Teshuvah. When that happens and how it happens, noted Rav Badani, is when the families work together toward a Torah lifestyle and Teshuva. He added that he sees this firsthand and that it encourages others too to spur on the process of reaching to even more Jews to encourage Teshuva in a familial lifestyle. He added that there is no Jewish home without life (or at least life potential) in it and none should be forgotten. Maybe that is our declaration here as well. Had Hashem not arranged that our families be geared toward him, no family could have merited leaving and we, our children and grandchildren would still be enslaved.

**The rabbis in Bnei Brak** – In other years we have highlighted that the Rabbis all came to Bnei Brak which was the locale of Rabbi Akiva. We’ve noted the comments of the **Aruch HaShluchan** in his Haggada commentary that Rabbi Akiva was the one who could provide the best Geulah related inspiration as he was the man of Geulah. The Talmud (Pesachim 112) notes that when Rabbi Akiva was in prison, Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai came to speak to him in prison and asked him to Teach him torah. Rabbi Akiva refused. Rabbi Shimon told him that if he did not, then Rabbi Shimon would tell his father Yochai and he would hand him over to the Malchus. How could Rabbi Shimon threaten to be a Moser? And how could Rabbi Akiva refuse? It seems so out of his character? **Rav Yosef Liberman[[4]](#footnote-4)** explained that Rabbi Akiva thought that the time he was living in was one where the Novi’s statement (Ami Bo B’Chadeirecha) was being fulfilled and that he needed to be silent . Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai noted that for Rabbi Akiva, this would mean an end to his life. If Rabbi Akiva would want to thrive, he would need to be able to keep giving to others (which was his reason for living) <Chasam Sofer points out that when one gives beyond himself, Hashem will add to his years> . If he would not, Rabbi Shimon told him that he would return his soul to Hashem – the real Malchus.

**Baruch HaMakom** - We mention the word “Baruch” 4 times in this introductory piece to the 4 sons section of the Seder. Why? **Rabbi Haim Drukman**[[5]](#footnote-5) [[6]](#footnote-6)explained that every son is a blessing, including the wicked son, and this is because in their essence they are all sons–“You are sons to the Lord your God”” (Deut. 14:1). When we sit all together around a Seder table, that is a great lesson to always remember.

**Chacham Mah hu Omer – Rav Yaakov Bender[[7]](#footnote-7)** reminds us that the children who are Chachamim also deserve to be listened to, rewarded and attention paid to them.

**Rasha Mah Hu Omer** – Great legend **Rav Uri Zohar[[8]](#footnote-8)** wrote extensive works trying to help parents deal with their children who were off the derech. Trying to give them the Ometz and direction, he set a tone by noting that the first step is not to give up on them. But at the same time he also encouraged parents to seek an ability to recognize the quality time that a parent spends with children who are off so that they do not think that they are worthless. As he noted “we owe our thanks to the children that are our gifts from Hashem who merits us the opportunity to raise them and correct and effect the greatest Tikkun in our lives – that by raising and ‘correcting’ their traits, we are really correcting and improving ourselves.” He encouraged the parents to realize that these are times that the parents can test themselves on their own inner fortitude (to withstand their own sense of loss over the choices their children make) and to rely on the third partner in child rearing – He too, must be looking and hurting along with the parents. It helps. Seder night is a time not to abandon nor look for failure. (think Miriam and not Amram’s approach )

**Tze U’Limad** – This section of the Seder describes the great suffering of the Jewish people in the land of Mitzrayim as told by he who brings the Bikkurim. He begins in the negative and mentions how Hashem took us out. However, we know that those who were taken out were not the ones who were originally enslaved. It raises the constant Hashkafic challenge of how to relate to challenges in life when it does not look great for the individual. **Rav Mordechai Sternberg[[9]](#footnote-9)** suggested that there are 2 ways to look at life. In the former, one sees himself or herself in the center and the world rolling around him or her. The other way is to see oneself as a part of a world running around Hashem’s master plan. He compares the situation to a soldier fighting a battle who smashes his glasses in the context of a fight. The soldier can lose the focus on his own loss or he can move on and focus his energies on the greater focus and emerge with his fellow soldiers victorious. This is the context of Emunah that Rav Sternberg recommends in dark times and otherwise. The key is to constantly ask ourselves what Hashem wants from us in His masterplan.

**Arami Oved Avi** – It is interesting that the selection utilized for the backbone of the Haggada text is the text for the bringing of Bikkurim and not the text from Yetzias Mitzrayim. Why? **Rav Abba Bronspiegel[[10]](#footnote-10)** cited the Gemara (Shabbos 31a) that equates Seder Zeraim (the agricultural Mitzvos including Bikkurim) with Emunah. Tosafos cites the Yirushalmi there by explaining that the farmer demonstrates his belief in Hashem and plants. Rav Bronspiegel added that unlike his more urban counterpart who is distracted by tall buildings and man made technological advancement, the farmer gets a chance to see the hand of Hashem in everything he does. In the end, his crops success and failure are ultimately and directly related to the level of Beracha he receives from Hashem. Hence, one who lives within nature is more aware of the Hand of Hashem in daily events and more attuned to the opportunities to engage in Emunah. Maybe that is part of the reason we use this text as a backbone. The one bringing the Bikkurim is attuned to matters of Emunah in his gift of Bikkurim. The Seder night, a night dedicated to expanding on the Emunah of Hashem is greatly enhanced by the awareness of the faithful farmer and his text declaring his Emunah every single year.

**Arami Oved Avi** – What is the connection between Parshas HaBikkurim and Yetzias Mitzrayim**? Rav Chaim Walkin**[[11]](#footnote-11) explained that the purpose of Sippur Yetzias Mitzrayim is Hakaras Hatov. Hakaras Hatov is the basis of Emunah which leads one to the open mouth (Peh Sach) of the Sippur. It is similar to the open mouth of the farmer who brings his Bikkurim to Hashem. He also opens his mouth to express the Hakaras Hatov. (Rav Schachter spends time at his seder pointing out how each step is another revelation of Gilui Ikkrei Emunah on the Seder night)

Lefichach – It is interesting that we note that the obligation to see oneself as if s/he left mitzrayim is stated in the singular while the responsibility to recite Hallel in response is noted in the plural. Why? Perhaps one could suggest based on a comment of Rav Simcha HaKohein Kook[[12]](#footnote-12) who, at the wedding of his grandnephew and niece – Yedidya and Sivan Rahav-Meir -- spoke of the Gemara in Sanhedrin which described a final discussion between the evil king of the ten tribes Yerovam Ben Nevat who had split the Jewish kingdom away from the unity under the Davidic line led by Rechavam ben shlomo. The Gemara describes how Hashem grabbed his garment and tried to get him to change his mind and his path. If Yerovam would return to the proper path, then Hashem and Yerovam and Ben Yishai (the Davidic leadership) would stroll together in Gan Eden. To this Yerovam asked: Who will go first? G-d answered that the Davidic king would go first. Yerovam responded: If so, I do not need to go. And so, instead of walking in Gan Eden together with Hashem and the Jewish leaders, he chose Gehinnom. Rav Kook told the young couple, “Ego is an enemy. The desire to prevail over the other person and prove that you are better, can spoil and destroy everything. This is true in marriage, in children's education, and in all areas of life.” Similarly, while the individual needs to recognize that s/he left Mitzrayim this evening and needs to see himself that way, the Hallel is recited in its greatest glory when it is said in a group – egoless. That, is true recognition of freedom.

**Hallel –** Generally we know that it is Assur to speak or interrupt in the middle of Hallel. Yet, on the Seder night we intentionally split the Hallel into 2 distinct parts – the part at the end of Maggid which we separate from the other half with Rachtza, Motzi Matza, Marror, Koreich, Shluchan Oirech, Tzafun and Bareich – intentionally! How can we do that? How does it make sense? **Rav Simcha Hakohein Kook[[13]](#footnote-13)** explained that all of our meal on the Seder night is part of a Mitzva – albeit a Mitzva Kiyumis (not the obligational Mitzva but the fulfillment mitzva. The entire meal is one big Seudas Hodaah (thanksgiving meal) and therefore is not a Hefsek (interruption of Hallel) but rather a fulfillment of the purpose of Hallel – thanksgiving. (Rav Kook added that therefore it is incumbent upon us to make sure that our Seder conversations are focused on thanksgiving and Seder-related talk instead of political endeavors).

**וְאָתָא חוּטְרָא וְהִכָּה לְכַלְבָּא** And the stick came and hit the dog - In Chad Gadya, everything naturally makes sense in the sequence of events. Cats eat goats, dogs eat cats, water extinguishes fire, cows drink water and so on. But how did the stick hit the dog? Sticks don’t walk. It should have said that a person came with a stick and hit the dog. But it doesn’t say that.” Rav Zechariah Wallerstein[[14]](#footnote-14) suggested that the Haggadah was written in this way for a reason. When you read the story of Chad Gadya, everything appears to occur naturally. But there is something the author of the Haggadah put into the middle of the story that doesn’t make sense at all. A stick appears on its own and hits the dog. When you read this, you immediately raise your eyebrows and say, ‘Wait a second! How did the stick get there?’ And then you realize that it must be Hashem holding the stick. And if that is so, the same is true of all the other ‘natural’ events. Even the cat eating the goat and the water extinguishing the fire is the hand of Hashem. Nothing is natural and happens by itself.” Throughout all the hardships in our lives, we can never think it is natural. At the end of the Haggadah when we read about the events of Chad Gadya, we are meant to think of all the incidents in our own personal lives. And then we are to realize that even the stick that hits and the hardships that confront us are from Hashem. He is behind our lives every step of the way.

1. **Dayan Chanoch Ehrentreu** (27 December 1932 – 24 November 2022) was a German-born British Orthodox rabbi. He served for many years as the head of the London Beth Din in Great Britain (also known as The Court of the Chief Rabbi), serving the United Synagogue Community and those independent Orthodox Congregations that accept the authority of the Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth. He retired from the post in December 2006.He continued to lead the British Jewish community (and beyond) until his death in 2022. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. **Rabbi Zecharia Wallerstein** was the founder of Ohr Yitzchak, Ateres Naava Seminary for Girls, and Ohr Naava Women's Institute in Brooklyn, NY. Ohr Naava is a unique program designed for women ages 17 through 120 who are interested in furthering their Torah experience. The program, which was under the leadership of Rabbi Zachariah Wallerstein, started out as a Wednesday evening class in a small classroom known as a "Chabura." It brought together girls who had just returned from studying in Israel, college students who needed a weekly moment of inspiration, and most of all, Jews of different backgrounds with one common goal, to grow and change. The signature of Ohr Naava is to provide a multitude of programs, absolutely free of charge, for women wishing to make the time to grow, change and further their Torah knowledge. He passed in 5782. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. **Rav Shimon Ba'adani**, was a leading Sephardi rabbi and rosh kollel in Israel. He was the co-founder and dean of Kollel Torah V'Chaim in Bnei Brak, and served as president of dozens of Torah institutions. Baadani was known for his simple lifestyle and demeanor. He made himself available to petitioners at his home and by phone; he had a listed number and answered the phone himself. He did not have his own association or central fund, but assisted widows from his personal bank account and provided tefillin for orphaned boys celebrating their Bar Mitzvah. He was successful in the area of shidduchim (marriage matches); among the matches he suggested are those of Torah leaders, notably Rishon Letzion Rabbi Eliyahu Bakshi-Doron. He set aside one room of his house for a matchmaking organization and paid the salaries of the shadchanim himself.He was also a senior leader of the Shas political party and a member of that party's Moetzes Chachmei HaTorah rabbinical leadership council which he led after the death of Rav Shalom Cohen. He passed away in 5783 at 95 years old. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. **Rabbi Yosef Liberman** was the Rosh Kollel and Rosh Yeshiva At Shomrei Hachomos and Rabbi of the Sadigura Shul in Jerusalem, Rav Yosef Liberman was the author of Mishnas Yosef, 14 volumes of responsa on issues of Shvi’is and laws of Eretz Yisrael, on which he was considered a world authority, as well as on all other parts of Shulchan Aruch. He also authored three seforim on Shas, two with Torah commentaries and three with Drashos given on various occasions. He passed away in 5783 at 95. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Lazman Hazeh, p. 98 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. **Rav Haim Drukman** was the most senior spiritual leader of the Religious Zionist community at the time of his death, he served as rosh yeshiva (dean) of Yeshivat Or Etzion, and head of the Center for Bnei Akiva Yeshivot.

   He was a founder of Gush Emunim movement and served in the Israeli Knesset as a member of the National Religious Party and Morasha. As director of the State Conversion Authority, he worked to make Jewish conversions more accessible to immigrant Russians of Jewish descent. He was awarded the Israel Prize for his contribution to society and education. He passed away in 5783. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. One of America’s great Mechanchim, **Rav Yaakov Bender** is the Rosh Hayeshiva of Yeshivas Darchei Torah and a master educator whose opinions on issues of Chinuch are sought far beyond his own Yeshiva. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. **Rav Uri Zohar** was born in Tel Aviv. His parents were Polish Jewish immigrants. In 1952, he graduated high school and did his military service in an army entertainment troupe. In 1960, he studied philosophy at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. He was sentenced to three months of community service on charges of marijuana possession. In the late 1970s, under the influence of Yitzhak Shlomo Zilberman, Zohar turned to religion. In 1977, he began wearing a kippa on the television game show he was hosting. He eventually withdrew entirely from Israel's popular culture scene to become a full Baal Teshuva and began to study in yeshiva. He became a rabbi in Jerusalem and immersed himself in Torah totally.He became active in the Kiruv movement to attract secular Jews to religious orthodoxy, and used his entertainment skills to promote this objective. He later directed a film about a successful dancer who embraces Orthodox Judaism, mirroring his own story. When asked in an interview about how he regarded his former career in entertainment, Zohar said that "I respect it, the way a mature adult remembers his childhood. But there's no escaping the fact that I was a child." Rav Uri passed in 5782. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Rav Mordechai Sternberg was one of the Roshei Yeshiva of the Har Hamor Yeshiva. Recognized as a leader in what is commonly known as “Knitted Kippah Hareidi”, he was responsible for the education of thousands and the bringing of a new generation of successful Mechanchim to this sector. His shiurim were known for their clarity and depth and he would regularly give dozens of Shiurim throughout the Dati Leumi community’s Yeshivos. He passed in 5783. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. **Rav Abba Bronspigel**, famed Rosh Yeshiva first of RIETS and then of Beis Medrash L’Torah (Lander’s). He was known among the Talmidim at both Yeshivos for his incredible shiurim and more importantly, his strong love and bond that he shared wth his students. Each felt close to him personally. Although short in stature and mostly soft-spoken, Rabbi Bronspiegel made a very powerful impression upon his talmidim and all who heard his shiur. He radiated a sincere sweetness and Chein. He passed in 5783. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. **Rav Chaim Walkin** was the Mashgiach Ruchani of Yeshivas Ateres Yisrael and recognized as one of the great Mashgichim of our time. Born in China while the Mirrer Yeshiva was in Shanghai, he was raised under the tuteledge of Rav Chaim Shmuellevitz and adopted his style when reaching students. Walkin developed his signature method in line with the teachings of Rabbi Chaim Shmuelevitz, with emphasis on personal attention to individual students, in groups of six to eight students at a time and short lectures with a clearly defined message. He espoused a way of education through cooperation and not by harsh methods. He passed in 5783. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. **Rav Simcha Hakohein Kook** was Chief Rabbi of the city of Rechovot and the Rav of the Churva Synagogue in the old city of Yirushalayim. He was President of the "Meor Hatalmud" yeshiva in Rechovot and stood at the head of many other educational institutions throughout the years. He was an eloquent speaker who was much sought after by audiences both in Israel and abroad and led many public struggles, especially in building bridges between the non-observant and religious sectors. He was a gem of a person to whom everyone felt close and for everyone he had an open house to. Visits to his Sukkah on Sukkos were made by all different shades and stripes in the city City employees such as firemen and policemen are often among the guests, though the self-effacing Rav Kook says he believes that for the latter group, at least, the visit has more to do with an old legend than anything else. According to that legend, any police officer that visits the Rav’s sukka during Sukkos will receive a promotion.“It’s actually quite an uncanny thing-many of the officers who have come to the sukka are now in the top echelon of the police department,” says Rav Kook with a chuckle, and starts counting them off on his fingers. “They see it as a sort of segula.I think its one of the only places in the country where members of Meretz, the NRP and the religious parties get together under one roof and just relax and talk together,” says Rav Kook. “It’s a very special atmosphere.” It was, because Rav Kook and his Rebbetzin made it that way. He often commented that the way to bridge the gap that is tearing apart the rest of Israeli society: “First,” he says, “one has to learn to understand others-yet without compromising Torah values. And second, the best way to bring people closer to each other, and to Hashem, is by showing them respect, regardless of who they are. When I see a person,” he said simply, “I look for the Jew inside [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. **Rav Simcha Hakohein Kook** was Chief Rabbi of the city of Rechovot and the Rav of the Churva Synagogue in the old city of Yirushalayim. He was President of the "Meor Hatalmud" yeshiva in Rechovot and stood at the head of many other educational institutions throughout the years. He was an eloquent speaker who was much sought after by audiences both in Israel and abroad and led many public struggles, especially in building bridges between the non-observant and religious sectors. He was a gem of a person to whom everyone felt close and for everyone he had an open house to. Visits to his Sukkah on Sukkos were made by all different shades and stripes in the city City employees such as firemen and policemen are often among the guests, though the self-effacing Rav Kook says he believes that for the latter group, at least, the visit has more to do with an old legend than anything else. According to that legend, any police officer that visits the Rav’s sukka during Sukkos will receive a promotion.“It’s actually quite an uncanny thing-many of the officers who have come to the sukka are now in the top echelon of the police department,” says Rav Kook with a chuckle, and starts counting them off on his fingers. “They see it as a sort of segula.I think its one of the only places in the country where members of Meretz, the NRP and the religious parties get together under one roof and just relax and talk together,” says Rav Kook. “It’s a very special atmosphere.” It was, because Rav Kook and his Rebbetzin made it that way. He often commented that the way to bridge the gap that is tearing apart the rest of Israeli society: “First,” he says, “one has to learn to understand others-yet without compromising Torah values. And second, the best way to bring people closer to each other, and to Hashem, is by showing them respect, regardless of who they are. When I see a person,” he said simply, “I look for the Jew inside [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. **Rabbi Zecharia Wallerstein** was the founder of Ohr Yitzchak, Ateres Naava Seminary for Girls, and Ohr Naava Women's Institute in Brooklyn, NY. Ohr Naava is a unique program designed for women ages 17 through 120 who are interested in furthering their Torah experience. The program, which was under the leadership of Rabbi Zachariah Wallerstein, started out as a Wednesday evening class in a small classroom known as a "Chabura." It brought together girls who had just returned from studying in Israel, college students who needed a weekly moment of inspiration, and most of all, Jews of different backgrounds with one common goal, to grow and change. The signature of Ohr Naava is to provide a multitude of programs, absolutely free of charge, for women wishing to make the time to grow, change and further their Torah knowledge. He passed in 5782. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)