

BET MIDRASH KEHILLATI

# ניצנים

קונטרס בענייני פסח

Pesach Companion by Members of the Bet Midrash Kehillati 5781



Bet Midrash Kehillati

# Weekly Schedule



## Mon Nights

Women's Bet Midrash

8:00-8:40  
**CONTEMPORARY  
HALACHIC QUESTIONS**  
R' Chaim Cohen

Halacha

8:45-9:25  
**HEROES & VILLAINS IN  
TANACH & TALMUD**  
Rabbanit Laura Silbermann

Texts

## Tues Nights

Women's Bet Midrash

9:00-9:30  
**TZURBA M'RABANAN**  
R' Ari Silbermann

Halacha

## Weds Nights

Men's Bet Midrash

8:30-9:00  
**GREAT DEBATES IN  
JEWISH THOUGHT**  
R' Ari Silbermann

Machshava

9:00-9:30  
**NAVIGATING THE  
MODERN WORLD**  
R' Ari Silbermann

Hashkafa

## Thurs Nights

Men's Bet Midrash

8:00-8:30  
**PARASHAT HASHAVUA**  
*In Easy Hebrew*  
Matan Miller

Torah

8:30-9:30  
**TZURBA M'RABANAN**  
R' Ari Silbermann

Halacha

9:30-10:15  
**MINING THE TANACH**  
R' Ari Silbermann

Tanach

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ZOOM ID WOMEN'S PROGRAMME: 818 4505 7928  
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R' Ari: 07784043318 ravari@mizrachi.org



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## Introduction

In Shir Hashirim the Lover calls to His beloved (2:12): "הניצנים נראו בארץ" – The blossoms have appeared in the land. Allegorically, in the words of Rashi, 'The days of summer are near, when the trees blossom and the travelers enjoy seeing them.' Hashem calls us to leave Egypt in the days when it is nice to stroll about, when nature is inviting us to see her beauty. It is only fitting that the first fruits of the Beit Midrash Kehillati are dedicated to Pesach, when we as a people begin our journey and the world is returning to life anew.

Our goal in developing the Bet Midrash Kehillati is to teach *Torat Eretz Yisrael* and to provide a place where Kol Torah is multiple and diverse. A home for men and women voices that seeks to bring Torah into conversation with our modern world. With our return to Eretz Yisrael, and more importantly to sovereignty, the call of the hour is for Torah to burst through the *dalet amot* of halacha to become the overflowing well-spring of the nation - in all of the paths of a full-blooded national existence. Our firm belief is that a Beit Midrash needs to also be outward looking and needs to contribute to the community conversation and activities. It is not only a space where the community enters, rather it should also reach out to the community – hence Bet Midrash *Kehillati*. With Hashem's help, and the dedication of the wonderful members of the Beit Midrash, we will begin to fulfill this vision.

We are delighted to present the writings and thoughts of the teachers and learners associated with the Bet Midrash Kehillati. Our main aim with this journal was to encourage people to develop their own thoughts and skills. The quality, breadth and depth of these works give a glimpse into the Bet Midrash Kehillati. It is a profound experience for us to witness members of the BMK chose to learn and grow while balancing work, home, lockdowns, and zoom schooling during this time of global instability. That such people also dedicate time to writing and developing Torah ideas and responding to editorial feedback is overwhelming. On that note we would like to thank Mrs. Talia Ezekiel who copy edited many of the articles.

Finally, we would like to express our appreciation to our partners. Firstly, to Stenecourt which serves as our אכסניא. Secondly, we could not have begun this journey had it not been for our predecessors Rav Yehuda and Chagit Peles. Thirdly, recognition is in order for Mrs. Vikky Weinberg, Mrs. Lizzie Caplan, Rav Chaim Cohen, Rav Yehuda Pearlman and Mr. Mord Maman who offer constant support and insight. Thank you to all of the members who set aside time to tune into the various shiurim and chaburot of the BMK! We cannot wait to b'eizat Hashem resume learning in person.

אנו בעיקר חובים תודות עמוקות לריבונות של עולם שזיכה אותנו להיות בין יושבי בית המדרש. כולנו תפילה שירחם על עמו בית ישראל וכל העולם כולו בעת צרה זו. בע"ה נזכה ליום שכלו ארוך ליום שצדיקים יושבין ועטרתיהם בראשיהם ונהנין מזיו השכינה ויהי חלקנו עמהם.

Chag Pesach Kasher Ve'Sameach

Rav Ari and Rabbanit Laura Silbermann

## והגדת לבנוך – The Power Of Our Stories

Lizzie Caplan

The *mitzvah* of לבנוך – telling of the Exodus to our children – takes center stage on Pesach. This piece will explore aspects of this *mitzvah*, consider its connection to our personal narratives and reflect on childhood experiences of *sedarim* which were framed by my grandparents' own story of escape and survival.

The source for the *mitzvah* of יציאת מצרים סיפור on Pesach evening<sup>1</sup> can be found in Parashat Bo:

וְהִגַּדְתָּ לְבִנְךָ בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא לֵאמֹר בְּעֶבְרָה זֶה עָשָׂה ה' לִי בְצֵאתִי מִמִּצְרָיִם:

And you shall explain to your son on that day, 'It is because of what G-d did for me when I went free from Egypt.'<sup>2</sup>

Our classical sources provide insight as to the timing and tone of the *mitzvah* to recount the Exodus. Based on the use of לִי – 'for me' in the above *pasuk*, the Mishna in Pesachim requires to retell the Exodus as a *personal* experience – rather than something that occurred to previous generations:<sup>3</sup>

'In each and every generation a person must view himself as though he personally left Egypt, as it is stated: "And you shall tell your son on that day, saying: It is because of this which G-d did for me when I came forth out of Egypt" (Shemot 13:8)...each person must say: "This which the L-rd did for me," and not: This which G-d did for my forefathers.'<sup>4</sup>

From the phrase בְּעֶבְרָה זֶה (because of this) the Mechilta learns that the retelling must be on *seder* night, when we have tangible reminders of the Exodus before us, 'When [this] *matzah* and *maror* are resting in front of you [meaning, on the night of the fifteenth]'.<sup>5</sup> In terms of content, the Rambam notes that this positive *mitzvah* involves relating 'the miracles and wonders that were done for our fathers in Egypt'.<sup>6</sup> The Gemarra dictates that the story should be told 'beginning with discredit, and finishing with praise' (מתחיל בגנות ומסיים בשבח).<sup>7</sup> Thus, the Haggadah starts with

<sup>1</sup> As distinct from the *mitzvah* of יציאת מצרים זכירת, remembering the Exodus daily (Rambam Hilchot Keriat Shema 1:3).

<sup>2</sup> Shemot 13:8.

<sup>3</sup> This is because as stated in the Haggadah 'Had HaKadosh Baruch Hu not taken our fathers out of Egypt, we and our children and our children's children would still be enslaved to Pharaoh in Egypt' (Haggaddah Shel Pesach, Maggid – Avadim Hayinu).

<sup>4</sup> Pesachim 10:5-6.

<sup>5</sup> Mechilta d'Rabbi Yishmael 13:8, see also Hagaddah Shel Pesach, Maggid – Yachol M'Rosh Chodesh, Rambam Hilchot Chametz uMatzah 7:1.

<sup>6</sup> Rambam Hilchot Chametz uMatzah 7:1.

<sup>7</sup> The Or Hachaim (Shemot 13:8) in fact points out the close connection of the word 'והגדת' to 'גיד' – 'tendons' in Hebrew, denoting toughness and difficulty. Mishna Pesachim 10:4 and see discussion in Pesachim 116a as to what exactly is the 'גנות' we should begin with. Rav states this is 'עבדים עובדי עבודה' – 'עבדים היינו' – 'at first our ancestors were idol worshippers', yet Shmuel states it is 'עבדים היינו' – 'we were slaves'. According to Rabbenu Chananel we state both passages, but following Rav Nachman's practice begin with עבדים היינו.

our difficult beginnings, and concludes with our freedom, praise of Hashem, and our anticipation of the future redemption.

Finally, the way the story is presented is also important. Based on the Rambam's direction to 'introduce change at the table' to provoke children's questions, Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik emphasises that narrating the story should also have an element of *chiddush* - innovation and freshness to it, not merely repeating what everyone knows about the Exodus.<sup>8</sup> We should be expanding and deepening our understanding of this story with each passing year. This is also perhaps hinted at by the Sefer Hachinuch who advocates for every individual to retell the story 'according to his own power of expression' (כפי צחות לשונו).<sup>9</sup>

Thus we see that the *mitzvah* to recount the Exodus is to occur on the night of the 15<sup>th</sup>, when we are fulfilling the *mitzvot* of eating *matzah* and *maror*. It should be a personal retelling, flowing from difficult beginnings to triumphant words of praise. It should also be a dynamic expression of our own new appreciation for the narrative, and determination to convey it to the next generation.

A few weeks ago, the Women's Tzurba group studied the *mitzvah* of *chinuch*. The root חנ"כ means to 'train'.<sup>10</sup> We discussed one of the broader goals of *chinuch* as being the introduction of the next generation into the halachic community, through the ongoing guided practice of *mitzvot*. In the case of *leil haseder* and the *mitzvah* of *veHigadeta Levincha* – the essence of intergenerational transmission – we have seen that it must take place alongside the practical *mitzvot* of *matzah* and *maror*. Yet we have also seen how it must be a dynamic, interactive and highly personal endeavour which connects us to both the past and the future. It would seem therefore that in addition to the introduction to the practical aspects of our *mesorah* that *chinuch* entails, it is the stories and narratives that provide a backdrop by which this can occur – and on *leil haseder*, in the *mitzvah* of *veHigadeta Levincha*, we see a powerful fusion of the two. In the case of *leil haseder*, it is not only the practical initiation into *mitzvot* that takes place but also a deeper connection between generations. *leil haseder* shows us that this takes place via dynamic, interactive and personal story telling. This is true in Judaism in general but is highlighted by *leil haseder*.

On an individual level it is interesting to observe that the story of Exodus we learn in Shemot is as much a national story as the personal search for identity on the part of Moshe himself. He is a Hebrew brought up in the Egyptian palace and throughout his life grapples with the tension between two opposing cultures. In her essay developing this idea, Peyser states:

'Woven between the layers of the narrative of the nation's developing identity is the parallel story of one member's struggle to discover his personal identity....'

<sup>8</sup> Rambam Hilchot Chametz uMatzah 7:3. Shiurim Le-zekher Abba Mori z"l, vol. II, pp 153-154, and Mesorah Torah Journal, vol. 3, Nisan 5750, pp 27-28, and ibid. vol. 5, Adar 5751, p. 38. (See also 'Sippur Yetziat Mitzrayim – retelling the Exodus' by Rabbi Daniel Schreiber.

<https://www.etzion.org.il/en/retelling-exodus> ) Here the Rav is discussing the difference between the *mitzvot* of יציאת מצרים and זכירת יציאת מצרים.

<sup>9</sup> Sefer HaChinuch 21:1.

<sup>10</sup> Such as in the pasuk 'חנך לנער על פי דרכו' (Mishlei 22:6).



'Alienation and identity play a central role in the Exodus narrative. Both on the individual and national levels, the experience of being a stranger and searching out one's past figure prominently in the process of psychological development' <sup>11</sup>

In my own childhood the power of personal narrative at our family *seder* was enormous. In 1939, my maternal grandparents – then just a young couple – escaped on the last train from Prague before the Czech borders closed. Following a perilous journey, they arrived on the shores of this country on first-night *seder*. They were never to see their families again.

Every year at *leil haseder*, my grandfather would be overcome with emotion when we reached the passage at the end of *maggid* which recalls the Jewish nation being brought out 'from darkness to great light.' Those were the words his own father used to refer to my grandfather's arrival in the UK, in his final letter to him. Though my grandparents arrived penniless, they established a life and a family. My grandfather became a well-known paediatrician in Leicester and my grandmother became a writer and teacher of creative writing (in her second language no less). Her story '*The Last Train From Prague*' was published and broadcast on the BBC.<sup>12</sup>

Those *seder* nights are etched in my memory, characterised by the very elements of *sippur* our sources describe; The 15<sup>th</sup> of Nissan was both the date of our national and personal freedom as a family. Our story was most certainly one which went from difficult beginnings to a triumphant end, and each year as we gathered, we could marvel anew at the great miracle that had ensured our family's continuity. More than anything though, I believe that the power of those *sedarim* was because in the immediacy of my grandparents' story, both the practical observances of the *seder*, and the story of *Yetziat Mitzrayim* many generations ago were brought together.

To conclude, we have explored the *mitzvah* of *veHigadeta leVincha* and the various aspects required in its fulfilment. We have seen that it must take place alongside practical *seder* observances, but must also be highly personal and dynamic. The moment of the *seder* is an ideal platform for our own individual and family narratives. This year all the more so, we have our own stories of challenge and struggle to tell, and with our world having shrunk to our family units we experience this with heightened focus. Let us pray this Pesach that just as the story of *Yetziat Mitzrayim* moved from challenge to triumph, ours will do the same, and that as families and communities we can look ahead to brighter and better times.



**Lizzie Caplan** works as a Primary school Jewish Studies advisor for PajES. She is currently studying for an MA in Jewish Education with LSJS.

<sup>11</sup> Peyser, C. (2006) 'The Book of Exodus: A Search for Identity' in *Torah of the Mothers*. Urim Publications: Jerusalem, New York. P. 379, 397.

<sup>12</sup> Dub, T. 'The Last train from Prague' in *Home this Afternoon*. Lutterworth Press.

## Korban Pesach Nowadays

Rabbi Chaim Cohen

Each year, we sit around the *seder* table, eating the *matza* and *maror* as we have been doing since the first *seder night*, some 3,333 years ago. In the center of our tables, lies a small bone. A mere chicken neck or wing serves as a reminder for the *Korban Pesach*, the sacrificial lamb, that was eaten along with the *matza*.

The *mitzva* of the *Korban Pesach*, the second *mitzva* to be given to the Jewish nation<sup>1</sup>, is comparable to *brit mila*. Unlike other personal *Korbanot* which are not offered up on Shabbat, the *mitzva* of the *Korban Pesach* overrides Shabbat. *Brit mila* and the *Korban Pesach* are the only two positive *mitzvot* for which one is punished by *karet* (spiritual excision) for transgressing. While *brit mila* is the physical mark of a Jewish boy, the *Korban Pesach* serves to remind us of our Jewish identity throughout history. According to Rambam, there are no less than 16 *mitzvot* involving *Korban Pesach*.

There were three shifts in the *azara* in order to accommodate everyone's *Korban Pesach*. While the animals were being slaughtered and sacrificed, the *Levi'im* sang *Hallel*, and together with the *Kohanim*, played various musical instruments. Erev Pesach was truly a spectacular day.

What prevents us from offering the *Korban Pesach* nowadays?

In the 1860s, R' Zvi Hirsch Kalischer (1795-1874) published a series of articles in the Halevanon journal concerning the *Korban Pesach*. R' Kalischer corresponded with the leading Rabbis and later published these popular articles into a *sefer* named *Derishat Tzion*. This *sefer* was printed multiple times and soon translated into German. In this *sefer*, R' Kalischer makes the case for making *aliya*, contends that the *geula* will only occur through our efforts, and argues for the reinstatement of the *Korban Pesach*. But not everybody agreed.

Year earlier, in 1837, R' Kalischer had considered appealing to Mahmud II, the Ottoman Sultan (1785-1839), for the rights to be able to offer up the *Korban Pesach*. Before doing so, he consulted with his teacher, the famed R' Akiva Eiger (1761-1837), who in turn, consulted with his son-in-law, R' Moshe Schreiber, known as the Chatam Sofer (1762-1839) who agreed that it would be permitted, though noted that the Ottomans would never allow Jewish people to sacrifice there.<sup>2</sup>

## No Beit Hamikdash

One issue thar R' Kalischer had to contend with was whether one is permitted to offer *Korbanot* in the absence of a *Beit Hamikdash*.

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<sup>1</sup> Shemot 12.

<sup>2</sup> Responsa, Yoreh Deah 236.

The Mishna teaches that one can offer *Korbanot* even in the absence of the *Beit Hamikdash*.<sup>3</sup> The Gemarra records that this was taught by one of the three *nevi'im*, Chaggai, Zecharia and Malachi, who returned to Yerushalayim following *galut Bavel*.<sup>4</sup>

Nonetheless, R' Yaakov Ettlinger (1798-1871) disagreed,<sup>5</sup> writing that this *halacha* only applied to that specific period when the Jewish people were in the process of rebuilding the second *Beit Hamikdash*. It does not apply after the second *churban* when *Korbanot* could no longer be offered. R' Yaakov Emden (1697-1776) cites the Mishna that records how Rabban Gamliel instructed his servant, Tevi, to perform the *mitzva* of the *Korban Pesach*.<sup>6</sup> He suggests that this may have been Rabban Gamliel II of Yavneh who acted as *nasi* of the *Sanhedrin* following the *churban* of the second *Beit Hamikdash*. Indeed, R' Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin (1816-1893), known as the *Netziv*, writes that there was a period of fifty four years following the *churban* when the Jewish people still continued to perform the *mitzva* of the *Korban Pesach*.<sup>7</sup>

## Kedusha of Har Habayit

The Gemarra<sup>8</sup> teaches that during the time of the *Mishkan*, people were allowed to offer up *Korbanot* on private *bamot*. Once Shlomo Hamelech built the *Beit Hamikdash*, it was only permissible to sacrifice on the *mizbeach* in the *Beit Hamikdash*. *Tosafot* writes that the prohibition against private *bamot* continued even after the *churban*.

Nonetheless, there is a *machloket* regarding the status of *Har Habayit*. Rambam (1138-1204) writes that the *Har Habayit* maintains its *kedusha* even after the *churban*.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, one may sacrifice *Korbanot* there. Raavad (1125-1198) however, disagrees, writing that the *Har Habayit* no longer retains any *kedusha*. When Ezra returned to Yerushalayim, he only consecrated the *Har Habayit* on a temporary basis. As there is no longer a *Beit Hamikdash*, one can no longer offer *Korbanot*. R' Avraham Gombiner (ca. 1634-1683) writes that we follow the ruling of Rambam. However, R' Akiva Eiger argues that we still need to be concerned for the Raavad's opinion.<sup>10</sup> R' Kalischer responded that even if the *halacha* would follow Raavad, then one would still not be transgressing any *aveira* by sacrificing any *Korbanot* there.

## Mizbeach

A further issue that R' Kalischer dealt with was the need for a *mizbeach*. Rambam stresses that the location of the *mizbeach* is very precise and must never be altered.<sup>11</sup> R' Ephraim HaKohen (1616-1678)<sup>12</sup> and R' Avraham Yitzchak Kook (1865-1935)<sup>13</sup> maintain that one would only be

<sup>3</sup> Eduyot 8:6.

<sup>4</sup> Zevachim 62a.

<sup>5</sup> Binyan Tzion 1.

<sup>6</sup> She'ailat Yaavetz 1:89. Pesachim 74a.

<sup>7</sup> Haamek Davar Vayikra 26:31; Devarim 16:3.

<sup>8</sup> Megilla 9b.

<sup>9</sup> Mishneh Torah, Beit Habechira 6:14.

<sup>10</sup> Magen Avraham 561:2.

<sup>11</sup> Mishneh Torah, Beit Habechira 2:1.

<sup>12</sup> Shaar Ephraim (Yoreh Deah 79).

<sup>13</sup> Mishpat Kohen 91.

able to sacrifice in that exact location. R' Akiva Eiger posed this as one of his challenges to the *Korban Pesach*. R' Kalischer replied that as we know the approximate location, one can build a smaller *mizbeach*, thereby ensuring that it is within the space of the original *mizbeach*.<sup>14</sup>

## Machatzit Hashekel

Rashi (1040-1105)<sup>15</sup> and Rambam (1138-1204)<sup>16</sup> write that the *machatzit hashekel* that was collected each year was used to fund the communal offerings. R' Yaakov Emden questions how the *Korban Pesach* can be offered in the absence of the *machatzit hashekel*. He answers that the *Korban Pesach* is paid for by private funds.

R' Ishtori Haparchi (1280-1355) left France in the 13<sup>th</sup> Century and made *aliya*. He related a story that he heard upon his arrival of R' Yechiel of Paris (died c. 1268), one of the *baalei Tosafot* who had planned to come to Yerushalayim to offer *Korbanot*. R' Yaakov Emden suggests that R' Yechiel must have been attempting to offer the *Korban Pesach*.<sup>17</sup>

## Bigdei Kehuna

The Mishna teaches that one of the requirements for a *korban* to be sacrificed is the *bigdei kehuna*, priestly garments.<sup>18</sup> R' Akiva Eiger asked how it was possible to offer the *Korban Pesach* in absence of the *Kohen* wearing the *bigdei kehuna*. Among other issues, we do not know what the colours of *argaman* and *techeilet* are. The Chatam Sofer, however, replied that the *Korban Pesach* could be offered even without the *bigdei kehuna*.

## Kohen Meyuchas

Rambam writes that only a *Kohen meyuchas*, a *Kohen* who can trace his lineage, is eligible to eat *challa* and *teruma*. R' Akiva Eiger asked, therefore, how we can allow our *Kohanim* nowadays, who just have a *chazaka* that they are *Kohanim*, to perform the *avodah*.<sup>19</sup>

However, the Chatam Sofer and R' Kalischer answered that *Korbanot* could even be offered by *Kohanim* with a *chazaka*, explaining that it was only when the Jewish people were returning from *galut Bavel* that there was this requirement for *Kohanim meyuchasin*.

## Conclusion

There were numerous challenges posed as to why we no longer perform the wondrous *mitzva* of *Korban Pesach*. Various answers have been put forward to each of these.

<sup>14</sup> Derishat Tzion, Maamar Ha'avoda 1:2.

<sup>15</sup> Megilla 29b.

<sup>16</sup> Mishneh Torah, Shekalim 1:9; 4:11.

<sup>17</sup> Kaftor Vaferach 6.

<sup>18</sup> Zevachim 2:1.

<sup>19</sup> Mishneh Torah, Issurei Biah 20:2.



As we sit around our *seder* tables and sing *leshana hab'ah biyerushalayim*, let us hope and pray for the day when we can offer up the *Korban Pesach* and celebrate Pesach properly together with our family and friends. לשנה הבאה בירושלים.



**Rabbi Chaim Cohen** is Rabbi of Yavneh Girls and Associate Rabbi of Stenecourt. He writes weekly Halacha articles and gives regular Shiurim for Mizrachi.

## Why Dads Matter: Fatherhood And The Pesach Seder

Shmuel Frankel

What is the role of the father in a child's life? What is the role of the Jewish father? How can the paradigm of the *leil haseder* help us to answer these questions?

In popular culture, dads are often depicted as incompetent, bumbling, emotionally and physically absent, and certainly less important than mothers. Although relatively neglected by researchers fatherhood is now an emerging field of study.<sup>1</sup> Current trends point to the numerous benefits of a father's involvement in children's lives.<sup>2</sup> Strikingly, when we turn to consider the Jewish approach, particularly *leil haseder*, the father is the central figure, the *baal haseder* (Master of the Seder). The father's very presence is the living embodiment of the historic *masorah* and initiates the child into what Rav Soloveitchik calls the '*masorah* community'.<sup>3</sup> The very term '*masorah*' implies that as Jews, we exist as links in an unbroken chain, stretching from *Yitziat Mitzrayim* to an-as-yet unrealised future redemption. It is in this process that the Jewish father plays a key role.<sup>4</sup> How does he do this? Let's consider four things that the father does during the *seder*.

### Acts As A Role Model

The most basic role of a father is that he models (both for his sons and his daughters) what it means to be a man. A Jewish father demonstrates by example what it means to be a Jew. His 'lessons' are taught primarily by his personal example. This is reflected in role of the father at the *seder* in relating the historic Exodus as his own personal story.

"And you shall tell thy son on that day, saying: It is because of that which the Hashem did for me when I came out of Egypt." (Shemot 13:8)

The Talmud (Pesachim 116b) says on the above verse in Shemot: In each and every generation a person must view himself as though he personally left Egypt. The Rambam (Laws of Chametz and Matzah 7:6), interprets this as "to show himself" or demonstrate that he left Egypt. Dressed (according to the widespread Ashkenazic custom) in a white kittel symbolising the clothes worn by our ancestors,<sup>5</sup> the father as *baal haseder* literally re-enacts the Exodus for his children. He relates these events not as ancient history but as personal experience. In effect he says: "This is what happened to me, what I saw with my own eyes when I left *Mitzrayim*."<sup>6</sup>

### Loves And Accepts All His Children Unconditionally

My children have always been fascinated by the questions of the four sons in the Haggadah. The inclusion of the wise son, the wicked son, the simple son and the one who does not know how to ask points to a fundamental truth about fatherhood: Your father loves you not because you are

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.fatherly.com/health-science/science-benefits-of-fatherhood-dads-father-effect/>

<sup>2</sup> The positive outcomes include: better peer relationships; fewer behaviour problems; lower criminality and substance abuse; higher educational / occupational mobility relative to parents'; capacity for empathy; non-traditional attitudes to earning and childcare; more satisfying adult sexual partnerships; and higher self-esteem. <http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/2007/fatherhood-institute-research-summary-fathers-influence-over-childrens-education/>.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.torahmusings.com/2014/06/mesorah-community/>.

<sup>4</sup> Regarding whether only fathers are *chayav* in the *mitzvah*, see the discussion here <https://www.toraland.org.il/22883>.

<sup>5</sup> Taz 472:3.

<sup>6</sup> Ramban (Shemot 13:8).

clever, gifted or successful. He loves you because you are you.<sup>7</sup> The connection between father and child is intrinsic and existential. My father not only helped raise me and taught me but also brought me into existence. This is why the metaphor of fatherhood is used to describe none other than G-d Himself. Chassidic sources use the image of the child as a physical continuation of the life of the father as a metaphor for the soul as 'truly a part of G-d above.'<sup>8</sup>

The powerful inner bond between father and child explains why it is fathers and not Rabbis or teachers who are given the job of passing-on the story of Jewish peoplehood to the next generation. The Shulchan Aruch rules: "A student in the presence of his teacher does not need to recline (at the *seder* table). A son in the presence of his father does need to recline."<sup>9</sup> The *mitzvah* of '*heseiba*' (reclining) expresses freedom, defiance of authority.<sup>10</sup> This is not appropriate in the presence of one's Torah teacher, towards whom one needs to display an attitude of awe and reverence. A father, on the other hand, demands our respect but allows us to recline and display a (respectful) degree of defiance. It is precisely this paradoxical balance of defiance and respect which provides the relatively relaxed environment in which the child willingly absorbs the messages of *seder* night. This is personal and family story, not just a rabbinic text.

The father's message of history, identity and faith needs to be conveyed in a format appropriate to the personality and intellect of the child.<sup>11</sup> There is no child who is not worth reaching out to. No child is too wicked, simple or ignorant to engage. Even the 'wicked' son is there at the *seder* table. He's part of the conversation and the father is not afraid to confront his scepticism. With the right messaging, he can also be reached and enabled to become part of the community of faith.

However, this intimacy between fathers and children can sometimes be fragile. As Rabbi Jonathan Sacks observes, the issue of the relationship between fathers and sons is a theme which recurs throughout Sefer Bereshit:<sup>12</sup>

How did Isaac feel towards Abraham, knowing that he had lifted a knife to sacrifice him? How did Jacob feel towards Isaac, knowing that he loved Esau more than him? How did Leah's sons feel about Jacob, knowing that he loved Rachel and her children more? Does my father really love me? - that is a question we feel must have arisen in each of these cases...

For Freud, the Oedipus complex - the tension between fathers and sons - is the single most powerful determinant of the psychology of the individual, and of religion as a whole.

Freud, however, took as his key text a Greek myth, not the narratives of Genesis. Had he turned to Torah instead, he would have seen that this fraught relationship can have a non-tragic resolution.

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<sup>7</sup> Even though a simple reading of the rasha ('wicked' son) in the Haggadah would suggest that he is rejected by his father, this is not how all Jewish thinkers have read it. Rav Soloveitchik writes: "One may emerge victorious even with the radical atheist if one uses the proper terms and the proper categories...The Torah did not say to throw the rasha out of the house. Rather, engage him in debate and show him that he is wrong: "blunt his teeth." Talmud Torah requires bringing the one who got lost, the child who was alienated, back into the fold. He or she is a rasha now, but there is potential in the rasha." [The Seder Night: An Exalted Evening](#) p. 48.

<sup>8</sup> Likutei Amarim Chapter 2.

<sup>9</sup> Orach Chayyim 472:1.

<sup>10</sup> Rav Soloveitchik, cited in [The Seder Night: An Exalted Evening](#), p. 23.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. p. 46.

<sup>12</sup> Covenant and Conversation: Genesis, p. 321.

The Exodus story (in which the Jews left Egypt in family groups) and the retelling of that story by fathers to sons can be seen as a resolution of the tensions which occurred earlier in our history. In Sefer Shemot and later in the Chumash we find rivalries between individuals, even cousins (Moshe and Korach) but not between fathers and sons.<sup>13</sup> Perhaps it was the experience of *Yetziat Mitzrayim* itself which healed that strained relationship. Today, the shared experience of the *seder* night, relived each year, helps us as fathers to create a deep and lasting bond with our children.<sup>14</sup>

## Encourages The Children To Ask Questions And Develop Intellectually

If the father is one of the main protagonists in the drama of the *seder*, then the audience to whom this performance is directed is undoubtedly the child. Surprisingly little of Massechet Pesachim (the volume of the Talmud devoted to Pesach) actually deals with the *seder* night itself. Of what it does say on this topic, a surprisingly large emphasis is placed on laws designed to ensure that the children will be there at the *seder* and will be alert:

Rabbi Yehudah said "What purpose is there in obligating children in drinking wine [at the *seder*, as they are exempt from *mitzvot*]? Rather, kernels and nuts should be distributed to them on Erev Pesach so that they should not fall asleep [at the *seder*] and will [remain awake in order to] ask questions!"

It is said of Rabbi Akiva that he would distribute wheat kernels and nuts to children on Erev Pesach so that they would not fall asleep and [remain awake in order to] ask questions. Rabbi Eliezer sates: The *seder* plate is raised on the night of Pesach for the benefit of the children, so that they [ask questions and] do not fall asleep at the *seder*. It is said of Rabbi Akiva that he would never say [to his students] "it is time to leave the Bet HaMidrash" except on Erev Pesach and Erev Yom Kippur. On Erev Pesach for the benefit of the children, so that they would [get a rest on Erev Pesach and] not fall asleep [at the *seder*].<sup>15</sup>

These great Torah sages understood very clearly that how Jewish children experience Judaism in the home is key to ensuring our survival as a people. But what is emphasised here is not the filling of empty heads with a huge quantity of parental knowledge. Rather, the emphasis is on something else, without which the endeavour of education is liable to be fruitless: fostering the ability to ask questions. Is there or has there ever been a people who place a greater value on questioning?<sup>16</sup> (Even our enemies are quick to claim that we always answer a question with a question!). If the child at the *seder* lacks the interest and awareness even to ask (like the simple son) "What's this, Dad?" then nothing we say or do is likely to engage him or her intellectually.

The four sons of the Haggadah are representative of four stances which children might take towards Jewish tradition. Notice how each one is defined by the kind of question he asks. The wise son is wise, not so much because he knows a lot, but because he can ask a good, detailed question. Even the wicked son feels compelled to express his rejection of tradition in the form of a question, albeit a defiant one. For Rav Soloveitchik, the child who does not know how to ask is actually a

<sup>13</sup> This is not true in terms of David and Avshalom, though this occurs later in Tanach.

<sup>14</sup> It could be suggested that in Bereishit we are talking about a family and in Shemot we are talking about a nation. Yetziat Mitzrayim as the birth of our nation means the *seder* is just that and therefore we engage in that together, father to son, without tension.

<sup>15</sup> Pesachim 109a.

<sup>16</sup> <https://rabbisacks.org/necessity-asking-questions-bo-5777/>.



wicked child who is passive, so uninterested and uninvolved that he does not even have the ability to ask the question.<sup>17</sup> The father's job is partly to encourage and facilitate the asking of questions. Only then will children listen to and absorb the answers which he gives them.

## Provides Children With A Sense Of Identity And Belonging

The poet T.S. Eliot expressed the attempt by modern man, alienated from the traditions which had once given his life meaning, to hold on to something which would reconnect him with the civilisation which had been laid waste by the First world War: "These fragments have I shored against my ruins."<sup>18</sup> In a secular age in which individualism is the overriding ideology, tradition may have become more important than ever. While the word "traditional" still carries some negative connotations, we are also coming to recognise how tradition can contribute to our sense of identity and psychological well-being. A child with a sense of family tradition can proudly say: This is what we do in our family; this is how my father breaks the middle *matzah*; this is how we steal the *afikoman*; this is how we throw ping-pong balls at each other to act-out the *makka* of *barad* etc. Memories like this become the "fragments" with which the child will form a sense of who he or she is, a sense of identity.

At the heart of the tradition which the child receives from his father is faith itself. According to Rabbi Yehudah HaLevi,<sup>19</sup> our belief in Hashem and in Torah is based not on abstract philosophical proofs but on the reality that we are "believers the sons of believers."<sup>20</sup> The place and time that this tradition is handed down from father to child is at the Pesach *seder*. We have faith because of the historical experience of the Exodus. In fact, the Exodus itself only happened because we already had faith: "In the merit of faith (*emunah*) our ancestors were redeemed from Egypt."<sup>21</sup> It was *emunah* that enabled Jews to survive the Egyptian exile as a nation and it was *emunah* which enabled us to get out of *Mitzrayim*. It is our *emunah* in the future redemption which has enabled us to survive as a nation during the long years of our exile. It is only this *emunah* that enables us to deal with the seeming contradictions between slavery and freedom, which are highlighted in the *seder* and which we see reflected in the advances and retreats of our contemporary national narrative.

It is the mother who provides the setting for the education of the child but it the father to whom the Torah gives the primary *mitzvah* of *chinuch*, Jewish education.<sup>22</sup> By extension, it is the father who provides the *emunah* which is the basis of that *chinuch* and this chain of *emunah* is transmitted from father to child throughout the generations at the *leil haseder*. Why are fathers so important? It is possible that in your lifetime, no man will love you more than your father. That, in essence, is why fathers matter so much and why fathers are in a unique position to plant the seeds of *emunah* in the fertile soil of their childrens' lives.



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<sup>17</sup> Studies on the Haggadah from the teachings of Nechama Leibowitz, p. 39.

<sup>18</sup> The Waste Land (1922).

<sup>19</sup> Although not according to the Rambam.

<sup>20</sup> Yalkut Shimoni, Hoshea, sec. 519; Mechilta to Shmos 14:31.

<sup>21</sup> Shabbat 97a.

<sup>22</sup> Nazir 29a

## Putting The 'Other' First, What Moshe Teaches Us About Social Justice

*Binyomin Gilbert*

This Pesach, (somewhat) like every year, Jewish families will sit together and talk about our people's Exodus from Egypt. The story is riveting, as inspiring as it is powerful, the unifying experience of our disparate tribe. Telling us about how, in this moment of emancipation, a nation of downtrodden slaves transform into a proud and independent people with agency.

This story of redemption hinges on the actions of G-d's appointed redeemer, Moshe. The emancipatory leader, and spokesperson who confronts the seemingly untouchable Pharaoh and fights for the people's right to physical and spiritual freedom. Moshe is the leader who drives an oppressed and downtrodden Jewish people from utter misery, to freedom. In this regard Moshe is iconic in his fight for justice. His story, and that of the Jewish Exodus is not only of huge historic and spiritual significance, it bears a vital contemporary message for us all to embody.

Moshe's story is unique in his generation. Alone amongst the Jewish people he was not a slave. He grew up in privilege and affluence at Pharaoh's palace, at the hand of Pharaoh's daughter. Growing up, like all those blessed with enormous privilege, he had every opportunity to ignore the plight of the enslaved Jewish community and could easily continue to benefit from this system that gave him his status, comfort and luxury. Instead, Moshe, when faced with the oppression his privilege relied upon, could not ignore it.

This journey starts with empathy. In Shemot, Moshe, insisting on a relationship with his family and community, descends into the world of the slave people. Here, seemingly for the first time, he witnesses the injustices the Jewish population faced, coming face to face with a slave driver beating a Jewish slave.<sup>1</sup> Rather than turning away and ignoring the inconvenient he steps up, faces off the slave trader, kills him and hides the body. This is no shameful act. The Netziv explains direct action such as this our duty when perceiving injustice in an unjust system.<sup>2</sup> This act sets in motion a series of events that leads to the liberation of the Jewish people.

With a single choice he picks a path that forever shaped our world. In this moment in time Moshe faced two disparate paths. On the one hand he could have acted in self interest, choosing to move past this incident and ignore injustice, something sadly all too common in the world today, or he could stand up for a powerless slave. Moshe chose the latter. He chose to stand up against a status quo, one which was an accepted and normalised structure of society. In so doing, Moshe risked his station, his privilege and his future. To counter this risk he pauses, ensures that nobody will witness this and makes his decision. This is not hot-headedness, nor is it impulse, Moshe puts forethought into his actions and takes necessary precautions for his own safety. This is a value judgement. R' Hirsh comments on this that Moshe proves himself here to both be worthy in his "sense of duty to rush to the aid of any innocent person who is oppressed"<sup>3</sup> and also "far from the fiery and infectious daring that is required for one to lead a great multitude and urge them along

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<sup>1</sup> Shemot, 2:11-12.

<sup>2</sup> Ha'amek Dvar on Shemot 2:12, 3.

<sup>3</sup> Rav S.R.Hirsh, Sefer Shemos, Feldheim Publishers, Judaica Press, Jerusalem - New York. (2014) p.22.

to the hazardous enterprise of breaking their chains and fighting their way to freedom from the tyrant's yoke."<sup>4</sup>

In this insightful reading R' Hirsh shows us how Moshe's instinct is for justice and to stand up for those less privileged than him. It is a core aspect of his character, something which sets him up for his eventual role of emancipator. Indeed, we see further evidence of that in the path that led Moshe to the burning bush at Har Sinai. In which the Midrash<sup>5</sup> says, Moshe care for his suffering animals, and his detour to ensure a lamb was watered earned him the right to revelation. Juxtaposed to that, we see why it is that Moshe was an "*Ish Anav*."<sup>6</sup> Moshe never wanted his actions to be known to anyone. He was happy to have done what was necessary for a greater good without glory, position or fame. Moshe as a leader is a reluctant one. On many occasions he doubts himself, questioning G-d as to why he was chosen.<sup>7</sup> Moshe presents an image of humility, he values justice and cares nothing for status.<sup>8</sup> He and we need no glory or position to do what is right.

Moshe returned later in life to dedicate himself fully to fighting for Jewish liberation and to lead his people. Through the process of the plagues, endless negotiations and petitioning of Pharaoh he battles for his people's fundamental freedoms. Finally, Moshe achieves G-d's mission, the mission to liberate, the mission to free and with an almighty song of joy and praise, the people shrugged off their shackles, gripped their *matzah*, and walked into the desert.

This image of Moshe as a reluctant radical, a tireless and self-sacrificing freedom fighter, is not one we are necessarily so familiar with. However, this is not the case universally. Across the world the actions of Moshe have resonated with the oppressed. In Latin America, Moshe and the Exodus are part of what has proven to be an inspiration for a religious social justice movement, which subsequently spread around the world, called Liberation Theology.

Liberation Theology is a movement and theory based on the *centering* of the experiences of the oppressed.<sup>9</sup> Originating in the 1960's in Latin America it has revolutionised the involvement of church figures in human rights and social justice movements. Across the world now Christian movements have shown a radical streak, willing to fight for those who have been oppressed no matter the cost. Many world renowned justice movements have been headed by deeply religious figures, those from within the Abrahamic faiths have drawn on this concept. Most famously Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. gave a renowned speech "I've been to the mountaintop" in which he declares to those tireless and long suffering civil rights campaigners in Memphis, "I would watch G-d's children in their magnificent trek from the dark dungeons of Egypt through, or rather across the Red Sea, through the wilderness on toward the promised land."<sup>10</sup> Dr. King recognised the eternal lessons of Moshe and Jewish liberation from Egypt, the way in which this was not just an inspiration, but a warning and a blueprint. Dr. King referenced Moshe and how Moshe was unable to enter the land, how his part in the glorious story of Jewish redemption ended just short of that

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Shemot Rabbah, 2:2.

<sup>6</sup> Bamidbar, 12:3.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> For more on the humility of Moshe and his reluctance to pursue glory for his own sake, see Parshat Tzetzavah and the book; 'The Particulars of Rapture: Reflections on Exodus' by Dr Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg, 2011.

<sup>9</sup> Brittanica, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/liberation-theology>.

<sup>10</sup> Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., I've Been To The Mountaintop, 1968.

"promised land."<sup>11</sup> Dr. King took this inspiration, he spoke about it and more fundamentally still, he acted upon it. He shook his country and the world and the reverberations of his speeches and his marches are still felt today.

Dr King was not alone in this. The story of our liberation has served as a template for many. Across Latin America, the United States and across the world, the Exodus of the enslaved Israelites has brought hope to the oppressed and the downtrodden. This perspective is not alien to Judaism either. We are told in Shemot<sup>12</sup> that we must never oppress the stranger in our land "for you know the soul of the stranger as you were once strangers in the Land of Egypt." The message is crystal clear, the Jewish people know what it is to be mistreated and oppressed. They know what it is to be a minority, a stranger in someone else's land. Ramban comments on the *Ger Toshev* that 'since I see the tears of the oppressed who have no comfort and have no power from the hand of their oppressors' and I save every person 'from the hand of one stronger than he.' And so [too], do not afflict the widow and the orphan, since I hear their cries. As all of these do not rely on themselves and [so] upon Me do they rely. And in a different verse, it adds another reason (Shemot 23:9), "and you know the soul of a stranger, since you were strangers in the Land of Egypt." This is to say, you know that the soul of any stranger is lowly towards himself, and he sighs and cries, and his eyes are always to G-d - and He will have mercy upon him, as He had mercy upon you, as it is written (Shemot 2:23), "and the Children of Israel sighed from the work and they cried out, and their prayer ascended to G-d, from the work." This is to say that not because of their merit [did G-d hear], but rather He had mercy upon them due to their [heavy] work.<sup>13</sup>

Ramban reminds us as to why, fundamentally, G-d saw fit to remember us and save us from our oppression. Our redemption in the story we retell on *seder* night is not because of some Divine, inherent right to be saved. Nor is it based on legalistic commitments. It is something far more significant and far more revolutionary. G-d hears the cry of the oppressed.

These principles have been espoused throughout time but never in a more inspiring manner than it was through those Rabbis who stood in the 1960s, as activists and members of the civil rights movement in America. Many of those inspired by these principles hail from non-orthodox denominations most famously, Rabbi Heschel. Similarly, it was these same principles that Rabbi Joachim Prinz, former President of the AJC, who escaped Germany in the late 1930s, embodied when he spoke, immediately before Dr King delivered the iconic "I Have a Dream" speech at the famous March on Washington. In his powerful speech he reminded the crowd that their country must not "become a nation of onlookers...it is not enough to hope together and it is not enough to pray together. When I was a rabbi of the Jewish community of Berlin under the Hitler regime, I remember many things, bigotry and hatred are not the most urgent, the most disgraceful, the most shameful and the most tragic problem is silence (of bystanders)..."

The fundamental message is that one must stand against injustice. It is our obligation to fight for a fairer and more equal world. Social Justice is the movement to create a "fair and equal society in which each individual matters, their rights are recognised and protected, and decisions are made in ways that are fair and honest."<sup>14</sup> In practice this movement looks to protect the

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Shemot, 23:9.

<sup>13</sup> Ramban, Shemot, 22:20.

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100515279>.



oppressed, fight against injustices and create a better future. This rings remarkably familiar when, on *seder* night, Jewish families around the world sit down to discuss the story of our peoples emancipation, how an enslaved people gained their freedom and were guided out of Egypt and into the desert beyond, eventually realising their dreams and becoming the Jewish nation.

It is a sad reality that this proud and fundamental element of Judaism has slipped us in the Orthodox world in recent years. Movements for justice and for good have grown and developed without our input or involvement. We have seen injustice around the world, we have seen injustice immediately around us, from George Floyd to the genocides in Burma and China. In the UK today millions of children are living in poverty, with little certainty around what they will eat day to day.<sup>15</sup> This Pesach, as we sit to remember our emancipation we should remember the words of Ramban and apply our privilege to help others, and build a community that fights for what Moshe fought for. As the story of our Exodus has inspired movements, so to this year it should inspire us. This year may we all take to heart the message of *seder* night, not just a memory but a call to arms, a call for solidarity with others, never easy, never convenient but always a moral obligation. A call, for justice.



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<sup>15</sup><https://cpag.org.uk/child-poverty/child-poverty-facts-and-figures#:~:text=There%20were%204.2%20million%20children,parent%20families%20are%20in%20poverty>.

## Learning from Sippur Yetziat Mitzrayim All Year

By Noah Haber

While we remember *Yetziat Mitzrayim* every day, there is a special *mitzvah* of *Sippur Yetziat Mitzrayim* - telling over the Exodus - on *seder* night. This requirement of *sippur* is significantly more far reaching and involved than the daily remembrance. The Mishna in *Pesachim* goes as far as to require that *'In each and every generation, a person is obligated to see himself as if he left Egypt,'* and this is also quoted in the text of the Haggadah, just before the beginning of Hallel. The Mishna quotes *Shemot* 13:8 as the source of this requirement, *'And you shall tell your son on that day, saying: It is because of this which the L-rd did for me when I came forth out of Egypt'*.

The fact that the *pasuk* used the words 'did for me' shows us that we are not just telling over what happened to others, but rather we should view it as if it actually happened to us.

The Mishna provides only this scriptural derivation as the reason for this requirement. However, it is clear that in the process of fulfilling this requirement there is a lot of meaningful religious experience to be found. The Exodus was a formative event in the process of Am Yisrael formally becoming G-d's nation. It makes sense that the experience of having lived through it would add much to the character and personality of the nation. Through fulfilling the scripturally derived obligation, we should be able to attain for ourselves that which was added to the character of Am Yisrael through their experience of *Yetziat Mitzrayim*. There are several approaches towards understanding what precisely the experience of *Yetziat Mitzrayim* added to the spiritual personality of the nation. Through understanding these approaches we can understand what should be gained by an effective *Sippur Yetziat Mitzrayim*.

Perhaps the most basic approach can be found in *Parshat Yitro*, in the first of the *Aseret Hadibrot*, *'I am Hashem your G-d, who took you out of the Land of Egypt, from the house of slaves'* (*Shemot* 20:2). Rashi explains the phrase *'who took you out of the Land of Egypt'* as G-d saying, *'taking you out of Egypt is sufficient reason for you to be subject to me'*. We see therefore, that the process of *Yetziat Mitzrayim* was a transfer, from being under the dominion of Pharaoh as his slaves, to becoming subjects of G-d.

This idea can be seen again in *Parshat Mishpatim*, in the passage dealing with the boring of the ear of a Hebrew slave. We are told of the procedure which must be carried out in the event of a Hebrew slave not wishing to leave his master after completing his term of service: *'His master shall bring him to the judges and shall bring him to the door or to the doorpost, and his master shall bore through his ear with the awl, and he shall serve him forever.'* (*Shemot* 21:6).

Rashi quotes the Tanna R' Shimon in his explanation of this verse:

*'What makes a door and a doorpost unique among all the furnishings in the house? The Holy One, blessed is he said "the door and the doorpost that were witnesses in Egypt when I skipped over the lintel and the two doorposts and I said, 'for the Children of Israel are slaves unto me-they are*

*my slaves and not slaves of slaves' and this person went and acquired a different master for himself, his ear should be bored in their presence.'*

Clearly our servitude to G-d is to be understood in the context of having previously been slaves to others but now serving no one but G-d.

Having been slaves specifically to Pharaoh gives another layer of meaning to this servitude transfer. When Moshe first approaches Pharaoh to tell him to send out the people, he makes the demand in the name of Hashem. Pharaoh arrogantly replies 'who is Hashem that I should heed his voice...I do not know Hashem' (Shemot 5:2). In addition to this, Pharaoh's behaviour actually goes beyond denying G-d. When Moshe is later to warn Pharaoh of the plague of blood, G-d instructs him saying '*Go to Pharaoh in the morning- behold he goes out to the water...*' (7:15). Rashi quotes Midrash Tanchuma to explain that the reason for Pharaoh would go out to the water was because he would pretend to be a god and claim that due to this he had no need to relieve himself. He would therefore go out to the water early in the morning in order to relieve himself when no one was watching. Pharaoh therefore simultaneously denied the true G-d while ascribing divinity to himself.

Being G-d's nation would be a wonderful thing in any circumstance. However, going from being enslaved by a horrifically cruel ruler who claimed to be a god himself, to being a free people who are able to serve only the one true G-d, adds another dimension to our identity as a people. The joy that *Bnei Yisrael* would have felt when completing this transfer of servitude must have been phenomenal. Presumably, they would have had an incredible appreciation of what it means to be free to serve G-d. By not just remembering, but actually reliving and re-experiencing *Yetziat Mitzrayim*, we can reach these levels of passion for and appreciation of *Avodat Hashem* that the experience must have generated.

Another approach to what we can gain through the obligation of *bechol dor v'dor* comes from a teaching of the Lubavitcher Rebbe. The Rebbe taught that *Mitzrayim* is both a physical location and a state of mind. This state of mind is that of feeling limited and of being unable to transcend those limitations. The Rebbe pointed out that the word *Mitzrayim* actually reflects this idea as it is similar to the word *meitzarim*, which means straits or limitations. When the Jewish people experienced *Yetziat Mitzrayim*, the physical exit was only part of the redemption. The other part was an internal redemption whereby they came to be able to transcend and move beyond their own limitations.

The internal redemption of *Mitzrayim* was not simply that which was experienced internally during the physical act of leaving Egypt. Rather it is relevant to all areas of life in which one may feel limited. By reliving *Yetziat Mitzrayim* each year, we are able undergo an internal redemption and remind ourselves that we are truly capable of transcending our limitations and of liberating ourselves from the mindset of *Mitzrayim*. This is an ongoing experience which can influence the rest of the year. In fact, to emphasise the ongoing nature of this inner redemption, the Alter Rebbe removed the passage of '*Chasal siddur Pesach* - The Pesach *sefer* is concluded' from his Haggadah.

A third approach to what we can gain is developed in the teachings of Rabbi Sacks. Rabbi Sacks drew attention to the fact that one of the most repeated commandments/warnings in the Torah is against mistreating a stranger. In fact, according to the Gemarra it is mentioned either 36 or 46

times. While this warning is given in several different contexts, on more than one occasion it is associated with our own experiences of having been strangers in Egypt. *'You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him for you were strangers in the Land of Egypt'* (Shemot 22.20).

In his commentary on the Torah, the Ramban gives a very powerful explanation of this mention of our having been strangers in Egypt:

*'For you know what it feels like to be a stranger, because you were strangers in the Land of Egypt. That is to say, you know that every stranger feels depressed, and is always sighing and crying, and his eyes are always directed towards G-d, therefore he shall have mercy on him even as he showed mercy to you'.*

Clearly for the Ramban, our responsibility to not wrong or oppress the stranger derives from our own experience and knowledge of what it is like to be a stranger.

Rabbi Sacks also quotes another explanation, given by the Ohr HaChaim, of the mention of Egypt in Shemot 22.20. The Ohr HaChaim commented that the sanctity which we have as children of the covenant may cause us to look down on a stranger who does not come from such lineage. To prevent this, the Torah commands us to remember the degradation of our ancestors in Egypt in the same verse in which we are warned to not oppress the stranger. Remembering our experience in *Mitzrayim* should therefore have a grounding effect.

To explain the emphasis in the Torah on warning against wronging and oppressing the stranger, Rabbi Sacks points out that dislike of the other has been a constant throughout all of history. *'The pages of history are stained with blood spilled in the name of racial or ethnic conflict.'* In the view of Rabbi Sacks, the Torah is a protest against, amongst other things *'the use of power against the powerless; the widow, the orphan and above all the stranger.'* In order to be sufficiently sensitive to the plight of the stranger we had to be strangers ourselves. Rabbi Sacks powerfully wrote *'it is as if the Torah were saying with utmost clarity: reason is insufficient. Sympathy is inadequate. Only the force of history and memory is strong enough to form a counterweight to hate.'* Enduring the subjugation of *Mitzrayim* before becoming a free people in our own land can therefore be viewed as having been a mechanism to ensure that our society would be a just and kind one, free from oppression of the other. By reliving *Yetziat Mitzrayim* every year, we are re-experiencing what it was like to be oppressed and to be strangers and as a result of this we give ourselves the most powerful possible 'counterweight to hate.'

The obligation to see ourselves as if we left *Mitzrayim* can therefore enhance our religious experience, not just on Pesach itself, but throughout the entire year. The first two approaches are about what we can gain in terms of personal growth and appreciation of our relationship with G-d and status as G-d's subjects. The third approach enhances our ethical sensitivity and reminds that when we have experienced suffering ourselves, we have an even greater responsibility to prevent others from going through the same. This Pesach, as we look forward to what Boris has called the 'road to freedom,' this message is more relevant than ever. Over the past year many of us have experienced challenges which we had never faced before and never anticipated having to deal with. Please G-d we should soon be able to transcend the limitations of the past year in every

sense, but we must make sure to use the hard times we have been through to improve ourselves in the future.



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## True Freedom And The *Mitzvah* Of Haseiva

*Mord Maman*

The first cup of wine has been drunk, hands have been washed and the karpas consumed. After breaking the middle *matzah* we begin *maggid* asking four questions pondering why this night is different from any other night. We note that on *seder* night we dip twice, we make a point of eating *maror* and only eat *matzah*. We also ask a fourth question, "Why on all other nights do some eat and drink sitting with others reclining but on this night, we all recline?"

Except we don't recline on the other nights of the year. We are so unaccustomed to leaning during meal-time that it has become somewhat of a jarring experience. "Don't forget to lean!" We must remind those present at the table, adding to "Make sure it's to the left, and that you are leaning on something and not hovering mid-air!"

However the *halacha* is clear. The Shulchan Aruch OC 475:1 delineates the procedure at *seder* night, and notes that we must recline when we eat the *matzah*. This is based upon the Mishna in Pesachim 99b mandating that "**Even the poorest of Jews should not eat the meal on Passover night until he reclines**".

We have been taught that we recline at *seder* night to symbolise freedom and aristocracy but is that still the case? Debretts, a leading authority on modern manners, detail that at the table one should "Sit up straight" and "Do not tilt the chair or hunch forward over the plate"<sup>1</sup>. Would reclining during dinner be seen as the behaviour of the free as it once was a time of the codification of the Mishna?

Rav Shagar<sup>2</sup> (Rabbi Shimon Gershon Rosenberg, 1949-2007, Rosh Yeshiva Siach Yitzchak) struggles with this, he asks "is a poor person reclining on *seder* night able to achieve an authentic and existential experience of freedom?" Regardless of any simulation the poor person is still poor, how does reclining in his chair liberate him in any way. Can liberty be reduced to a good meal? He notes, as above the anachronistic arrangement of reclining as we see it, especially in the West where we no longer recline.

Rav Shagar persists in his perplexity, which perhaps strikes at the heart of a lot of our experience of halacha on *seder* night. How can we mandate freedom? How can we obligate liberty? What is the nature of a freedom that arises from meticulous and binding guidelines? In reconciling this practice with modern norms he returns to the Talmud which discusses this practice, and traces the discussion through the Talmud and beyond trying to establish what the intent of the enactment was in the first place. Was it meant to actually achieve freedom or rather serve as a role-play?

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.debretts.com/expertise/etiquette/table-manners/table-rules/>.

<sup>2</sup> Rav Shagar, "Freedom on *seder* Night – Symbolic Freedom or Actual Freedom?," in "Time of Freedom" (5770).

His approach will ultimately reveal a deeper understanding of what freedom is. It's something that goes beyond the contradiction of freedom and obligation but runs along the paradox between liberty and obligation itself!

When we recline on *seder* night, are we doing so in the form of ritual which symbolises a freedom that was or are we now realising an actual experience of freedom in the moment we lean back?

Rav Shagar begins to answer this question starting with the Talmud in Pesachim 108a<sup>3</sup> where they discuss the exemptions of a son, student, wife or servant from the obligations to recline.

**"A woman who is with her husband is not required to recline, but if she is an important woman, she is required to recline. A son who is with his father is required to recline. A dilemma was raised before the sages: What is the halakha with regard to a student who is with his teacher?** Perhaps he is not obligated to recline, as he is in awe of his rabbi, and reclining is a sign of complete freedom and independence.

**Come and hear a proof that Abaye said: When we were in the house of my Master, Rabba, there was not enough room for everyone to recline on Passover, so we reclined on each other's knees, to fulfill the obligation to recline. When we came to the house of Rav Yosef, he said to us: You need not recline, as the fear of your teacher is like the fear of Heaven.** A student is subject to the authority of his teacher and may not display freedom in his presence.

The Gemarra **raises an objection: A person must recline** in the presence of anyone, and even a student who is with his teacher must do so. This baraita directly contradicts the statement of Rav Yosef. The Gemarra answers: **When that baraita was taught, it was with regard to a craftsman's apprentice**, not a student of Torah in the company of his rabbi. One who is in the presence of a person teaching him a trade is not in awe of his instructor, and he is therefore obligated to recline.

**A dilemma was raised before the sages: What is the halakha with regard to a waiter?** Is a waiter obligated to recline? The Gemarra answers: **Come and hear a solution, as Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said: A waiter who ate an olive-bulk of matzah while reclining has fulfilled his obligation.** The Gemarra infers: If he ate *matzah* while reclining, yes, he has fulfilled his obligation; if he was **not reclining, no**, he has not fulfilled the obligation. **Learn from this that a waiter requires reclining.** The Gemarra concludes: Indeed, **learn from it that this is the case.**"

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<sup>3</sup> Translation taken from The William Davidson Talmud at Sefaria.



The discourse deals with two issues, whether the person in question is accustomed to leaning in general (i.e. A servant), and what would be the protocol in a situation where there is no freedom (i.e. A student before a teacher or a son before his father).<sup>4</sup>

Rav Shagar suggests that according to the Gemarra reclining is meant to achieve actual freedom on *seder* night. Therefore those who find themselves in a situation which would limit this freedom are exempt. If it were simulation, play-acting perhaps, then what difference would the actual status of a person make?

This analysis can explain the argument between Rava and Shemuel concerning the four cups of wine.<sup>5</sup> Shemuel states that if a person drank four cups of undiluted wine they have fulfilled their obligation but Rava disagrees, distinguishing between the *mitzvah* to drink wine and freedom. Rava argues that while the cups have been drunk they were not done in a manner that expresses freedom.

According to Rava the *mitzvah* to drink wine can be done with any wine as long as it is wine, but freedom can only be achieved by drinking diluted wine, good wine, a wine of freedom. According to Rava "there has to be *real* identification with leaving Egypt."<sup>6</sup>

The Rambam makes it clear that the purpose of the *seder* night and it's rituals is to achieve a state of freedom, abstract is not enough. We are to seek concrete and actual freedom.

"In each and every generation a person must present themselves as if they have now left the slavery of Egypt."<sup>7</sup>

Starting with the Gemarra Rav Shagar demonstrates that the freedom we are trying attain during the *seder* is a real one. Yet if that is the case, what is the nature of the pauper who reclines on *seder* night? More importantly, how can we express freedom by reclining - something that is no longer in fashion amongst those who are free. Even more, how can we even achieve freedom when we are still in exile? We claim to be free but there is still patently a lack of liberty.

Rav Shagar notes that there are those who claim that reclining is merely a symbolic action hinting at the past freedom of the Exodus.<sup>8</sup> Ra'avya argue that owing to changing cultural norms in Europe one should sit as usual during the *seder*.<sup>9</sup>

Perhaps it would be easier then to explain leaning as the simple fulfilment of a *mitzvah*. It isn't about actually achieving freedom. There is not question about a poor person leaning despite the obvious lack of liberty, it is simply symbolic. We don't have the power to achieve any state of

<sup>4</sup> There is a machloket rishonim between the Rashbam and the She'iltot regarding which issue would relate to the woman.

<sup>5</sup> Pesachim 108b.

<sup>6</sup> This is Rava's approach throughout. For instance in Pesachim 116b he notes "When mentioning the exodus from Egypt one must say: And He took us out from there."

<sup>7</sup> Hilchot Hametz u'Matza 7:6

<sup>8</sup> Meiri to Pesachim 99b.

<sup>9</sup> Sefer Ravia, 525.

actual freedom, our wings have been clipped. Let us recline in accordance with the halacha and forget about fanciful flights of freedom.

Rav Shagar goes on to argue that it could be that the obligation to recline then allows us to access a different form of freedom. Not the freedom of the Mishna, that of Rava or the Mishneh Torah. A freedom that is accessible to anyone. The halacha which seems outdated or inapplicable instead of being something symbolic actually allows us, any of us, at any stage of history to achieve real freedom.

The Maharal of Prague it would seem offers a different way of understanding the *mitzvah* to recline. In his *Gevurot Hashem* he challenges the Ra'avya. That the fact that all year long we do not recline is precisely why we *must* recline on *seder* night. Reclining for the Maharal is not tied to real freedom, nor does he suggest we do so in a symbolic fashion. Rather the fulfilment of *mitzvot* is in and of itself an expression of freedom.

Pesach is the festival of freedom which comes during a time of freedom. This freedom can only be manifest through the conscious practice of *mitzvot*. This deviation from the everyday into the halachic space, where we leap outside of reality as we perceive it forms a new type of freedom. When the whole world no longer reclines to then lean back to drink and eat is a demonstration of liberty. If we were to base our practice on contemporary culture then we are allowing ourselves to remain in the purview of those around us.

We may still be in exile but as we recline to drink our wine and eat our *matzah* in a way opposed to societal norms we are able to present ourselves as if we have right now left the slavery of Egypt.



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## Coming Home

Rabbi Yehuda Pearlman

One who undertakes a careful reading of the *parshiot* in Shemot dealing with the *Galut* and *Geulah* from *Mitzrayim*, will discern the regular repetition of the noun בית. In fact a check in the Concordance, will reveal the use of the *shoresh* ב"ת, no less than twenty one times from the beginning of Shemot until the end of Bo.

It would appear as though the בתים of the Egyptians are being annihilated by the ten plagues, and in their place the בתים of the Jewish people are being consecrated through the מצות associated with the קרבן פסח.

R' Hirsch in his opening comments to Sefer Shemot on the words איש וביתו בא comments:

These are the names of the Children of Israel - the book of Exodus opens the history of the Jewish people. The story shifts from the description of the lives of individuals and families to the history of the nation; And the transition was made by mentioning the names of individual people, who have long been known to us as cornerstones of the national Jewish community.

And these, from these people, with many and different qualities, the Jewish people have now developed. And one basic feature was inherent in character and common to all, and that is the foundation of Jewish nationalism: "Together with Jacob, each man and his **household**"!

....At the time of redemption, G-d will begin the building up of his people, on the rock like foundation of **homes** - שה לבית אבות שה לבית - on the bond of children to parents and parents to children.

The future of the Jewish People was to be ensured by the establishment of the Jewish home. On a simple level, the significance of the home is obvious. Whereas the Beit Midrash, Shul, School and any other form of religious institution might enrich the religious lives of individuals, it is within the confines of the home where the life skills which are necessary for productive living are learnt and developed. The courage to admit one's mistakes, the resilience to overcome disappointment, the empathy to relate to another's feelings, the ability to share love, the capacity to demonstrate loyalty, are some of the human qualities that are nurtured in the natural home environment.

The message that Sefer Shemot conveys, is that before the Jewish people are ready to be instructed in a religious way of life, they need the time to develop their humaneness. The home as the cradle of life, is where human beings are best placed to develop the life skills that will empower them to lead meaningful lives guided by Torah and *mitzvot*.

But it goes much deeper. Rav Yacov Nagen in his recently published book *Be, Become, Bless*, quotes from the Sefer Habahir 1:14;

Why is the letter 'ב' closed on all sides and open in the front? This teaches us that it is the house ( *בית* - *Bayit*) of the world. *G-d* is the place of the world, and the world is not His place. Do not read Bet, but Bayit (*house*).

What does it mean *G-d* is the place of the world, and how is this related to the home?

One of the central themes underpinning Rav Kook's worldview, is the understanding that Hashem is present in everything; in life, in humanity, and in humanity's relationship with the world and all living creatures. Hashem, in encompassing all, is the source of life for all; He sustains all. When we open ourselves to this way of thinking, it changes the basic consciousness in the way we experience reality. Appreciating the oneness at the root of existence, opens our eyes and hearts to the light and goodness in the world and in humanity, to love life in all its expressions and manifestations.

The *Dveikut* to Hashem that we can experience through living life as an expression of *Eloket*, is mirrored in the attachments created between parents and children nurtured in the home environment. Children who are raised within the bonds provided by healthy connections to their primary care givers, develop the capacity to grow into maturity and lead productive lives. According to leading developmental psychologist, Gordon Neufeld, mature people are characterised by three features:

- They are able to adapt when faced with adversity and change.
- They have emerged as distinct individuals with a real sense of personal autonomy.
- They can integrate and balance opposing perspectives and demands.

As we continue to endure the hardships presented by the COVID pandemic, our capacity as human beings is being challenged like it has never been, since the second world war. Firstly, we are being tested to see if we are able to adapt- to find creative ways of maintaining what's most important to us while at the same time keeping ourselves, our families and our communities safe. Secondly, the decisions we make might be very different to the approach adopted by many around us, and therefore require us to follow our intuition and to obey our internal moral compass. And thirdly, we are being asked to balance the need for safety and social responsibility together with our concern for the continuity of religious practice that is so vital for our identity.

Our response to this crisis will largely be influenced by the way we see the world. If we embrace the oneness, underlying existence, then we will be able to retain our *Deveikut* to Hashem through expressing life in every scenario, no matter how seemingly far removed from the normal expectations of religious living and experience. Our *Deveikut* to Hashem-our primary care giver will empower us to develop our capacity to adapt, thrive as individuals and able to balance seemingly contradictory demands and pressures. Embracing this paradigm, our homes will likewise serve as arenas for the natural development of our ourselves and our children and thus empower us and them to face this crisis with maturity and resilience.

Our homes are not meant to be perfect - they are the natural habitats where life's up and downs are played out in real time. Episodes fraught with anxiety and anger are softened with moments of love, hope and courage. It is in the imperfect, natural home where the *Shechina* as the life force that sustains existence, resides.

May Hashem gives us the wisdom to know how best do His will and the strength to able carry it out successfully.



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## על השובע **Rambam's Approach to** על השובע **for the** **Korban Pesach\***

Rabbi Ari Silberman

Many people summarise Jewish festivals as, 'They tried to kill us, we won, let's eat!' On the other hand eating is central to many of our festivals not only as a celebration but because eating binds the spirit to the material in the deepest of ways. The world of *Korbanot* (sacrifices), foreign to us, hammers this idea home. We eat from the table of G-d, as it were, and are transported to a world above time.

On Pesach we eat a lot of different foods which guides our re-experience of the Exodus. Matzah, *maror* and the Hagaddah form the center piece of our *sedarim* although in times past the *Korban Pesach* was the central element.<sup>1</sup> The destruction of the Temple largely ended that experience. However, when we speak about the *seder* as being an attempt to re-experience the Exodus, the *Korban Pesach* is the reason. The *Korban Pesach* was sacrificed and actually eaten in Egypt, and as such when we ate the *Korban Pesach* the experience of Egypt was intertwined with the very meal.<sup>2</sup>

I focus here on the Rambam's approach to the *Korban Pesach* and the requirement to eat it על השובע (When satiated or to satiation).<sup>3</sup>

### Sources

The source which is probably most widely known is the Shulchan Aruch (OC 477:1):

לאחר גמר כל הסעודה אוכלים ממצה השמורה תחת המפה בזית כל אחד זכר לפסח  
הנאכל על השובע ...

After the completion of the entire meal we each eat an olive sized-portion of the Matzah guarded under the cloth as a remembrance for the [*korban*] Pesach that was eaten satiated...<sup>4</sup>

This halacha is tied to how we relate to the *afikoman* in our days, but when the Temple stood the *Korban Pesach* was the focus of the meal and it had to be eaten על השובע.

A source for this can be found in the Mechilta DeRabbi Yishmael (Bo - Masechet Depascha 6):

\* Many thanks to my wife Rabbanit Laura Silberman and my brother-in-law Rav Michael Hoenig who reviewed the essay.

<sup>1</sup> See most recently Henshke, D. 'Mah Nishtanah: The Passover Night in the Sages' Discourse (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2016) who argues that our Pesach *Seder* is based on the ancient *Seder* which saw the *Korban pesach* as situated between parts of Hallel and the Hagaddah so that they were all bound together.

<sup>2</sup> The famous midrash found in the Hagaddah – בעבור זה, when Matzah and Maror are before you. Implying that Pesach is built on eating foods tied to the Exodus.

<sup>3</sup> There is an argument as to whether this means it must bring one to satiation (Rashi, Meiri, Rabbeinu Chananel) or should be eaten once completely satiated (Chazon Ish, 124).

<sup>4</sup> In general translations are my own unless otherwise noted. Biblical verses are based on the NJPS translation and quotes from the Talmud are based on the Steinsaltz Translation.

על מצות ומרורים יאכלוה (במדבר ט,יא) מכאן אמרו: הפסח נאכל אכילת  
 שבע, ואין מצה ומרור נאכלים אכילת שבע  
 'They shall eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs'  
 (Bamidbar 9:11): From hear they said: the [*Korban*] Pesach is  
 eaten satiated while Maztah and Maror (Bitter Herbs) are not  
 eaten satiated.

Although the Mechilta is addressing whether matza and *maror* also need to be eaten while satiated we also learn from here that the *Korban Pesach* should be eaten while satiated.<sup>5</sup>

A Tosefta (t. Pesachim 5:3) also makes this plain:<sup>6</sup>

חגיגה הבאה עמו היא נאכלת תחלה כדי שיהא פסח נאכל על השבוע  
 The *Chagiga*-offering brought with him is eaten first so that the  
 [*korban*] Pesach is eaten satiated.

The Tosefta teaches that the special *Chagiga*-offering brought on the fourteenth of Nissan<sup>7</sup> is to ensure that the *Korban Pesach* is eaten while satiated.<sup>8</sup> There are a number of explanations for this ruling.

## Rambam

Rambam believed that the *Korban Pesach* should *ideally* be eaten while satiated (Laws of *Korban Pesach* 8:3):

מצוה מן המובחר לאכול בשר הפסח אכילת שובע, לפיכך אם הקריב שלמי  
 חגיגה בארבעה עשר - אוכל מהן תחילה ואחר כך אוכל בשר הפסח כדי לשובע  
 ממנו...

The ideal way to perform the *mitzvah* is to eat the meat of the  
 [*korban*] Pesach in a way of satiation, therefore if he offered the  
 [*korban*] *Chagiga* on the 14th [of Nissan] he eats from them first  
 and afterwards eats the meat of the [*korban*] Pesach in order to  
 become satiated from it.

<sup>5</sup> According to the Mechilta the structuring of the verse implies that the Matza and Maror are accompaniments to the main meal – the *Korban pesach*: 'They shall eat the flesh that same night; they shall eat it roasted over the fire, **with** unleavened bread and **with** bitter herbs.' For this reason the Mechilta distinguished between the *mitzvah* of satiation for the *Korban pesach* and the Matza and Maror.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. also b. Pesachim 70a.

<sup>7</sup> As opposed to the *Chagiga* normally brought on each festival.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Pesachim 69b-70a which clearly notes the secondary nature of the *Chagiga* as part of the *Korban pesach*; although Ben Torai believed the *Korban Chagiga* on the fourteenth of Nissan to be a Torah requirement. Even though Rashi and others point to Devarim 16:2 as a source for the *Chagiga* of the Fourteenth of Nissan, it would seem that Rashi and the Mechilta only see it as an support (אסמכתא). Note also that the Ramban (and others Cf. Tg. Pseu-J ibid.) disagrees and believes Devarim 16:2 refers to the regular *Korban Chagiga* offered at all festivals. Cf. m. Menachot 7:6 which explains the difficulty of the verse. See also Midrash Sekhel Tov Shemot 12:9:5 which sees the description of Pesach in 2Chr 35:13 as also describing the *Chagiga* to ensure that the Pesach was eaten satiated.



In this section the Rambam defines *על השבוע* to mean 'to become satiated,' but also notes that it is ideal if we can eat the *Korban Pesach* *על השבוע*. The Rambam believed that in principle eating an olive's worth of the *Korban Pesach* was sufficient to fulfill the *mitzvah* and that *על השבוע* was an added ideal if possible.<sup>9</sup> Rambam's approach is likely tied to the fact that the *Korban Chagiga* was not always offered, thereby implying that it cannot be an absolute requirement.<sup>10</sup>

## Rashi

Rashi sees the role of *על השבוע* as bound up with the importance of the *seder* meal. Rashi comments:<sup>11</sup>

על השבע - שיהיו נהנין באכילתו ותיחשב להן;  
[Eaten] satiated: That they should enjoy eating it and it will be considered important for them.

According to this opinion the [*korban*] Pesach needs to be eaten as a special feature and highlight of the meal.<sup>12</sup> A second and related reason is also brought by Rashi:<sup>13</sup>

דהיינו אחר הפסח שהוא נאכל באחרונה על השבע שכן חובת כל הקרבנות בדקיימא לן (חולין דף קלב:) למשחה לגדולה בדרך שהמלכים אוכלין אין נפטרינן על ידי אפיקומן:  
...the [*korban*] Pesach which is eaten at the end [of the meal], to be satiated - for it is an obligation for all *Korbanot* as we rule (Chullin 132b) למשחה means '**for greatness' in the way that kings eat...**

According to Rashi here, the *Korban Pesach* is eaten *על השבוע* because it is the same as all other *Korbanot*. The reason for this is because all other *Korbanot* are eaten in a stately manner, with *על השבוע* being one way this is expressed. Kings, it seems, would not just eat but would eat other delicacies before the main course, of which they would just eat a small amount which would satiate them.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Responsa Shevet Halevi 1:158 believes that the Rambam also held it was a *mitzvah* to eat *על השבוע* but not necessarily with the *Korban Chagiga*. See my discussion below in note 27.

<sup>10</sup> M. Pesachim 6:2. It is clear that the Rambam sees the Chagiga of the fourteenth as optional (רשות) (*Korban pesach* 10:13; Chagiga 2:10). See Rambam on m. Pesach 6:3, where he clearly states it is not an obligation. See also R' Hirsch to Devarim 16:2 who notes the Rambam felt it was a Torah *mitzvah* but not obligation.

<sup>11</sup> b. Pesachim 70a. See also Rabbi Yosef Kurkus, *Hilchot Korban Pesach* 8:3.

<sup>12</sup> A slight variant to this approach is the Ralbag to Shemot 12:43 who believes eating satiated is necessary for the honour of the *Korban* itself.

<sup>13</sup> B. Pesachim 86a. Cf. also Rashbam and Rabeinu David (Pesachim 119b); Meiri (Pesachim 114b).

<sup>14</sup> Although it may seem obvious that the *Korban pesach* is eaten like other *Korbanot* there are a number of distinctions between it and a regular *Korban*. Even a regular *Korban* is possibly only eaten *על השבוע* by the *Kohanim* and not by the ones who brought the *Korban*. b. Zevachim 90b; b. Menachot 21b; b. Sotah 15a.; particularly b. Temura 23 notes that other food may be added to the *Korbanot* to ensure that it is eaten *על השבוע* for the sake of *למשחה*. One may ask why the other laws of *למשחה* do not apply? However, as can be seen in the sources above, although the *Kohanim* can choose to add different things based on

## Yerushalmi

A third approach is found in the Yerushalmi and is also quoted by the Tosafot in the name of Riva.<sup>15</sup> According to this approach the *Korban Chagiga*, offered on the fourteenth of Nissan, is of rabbinic origin to provide satiation and thereby ensure that one does not break the bones of the *Korban Pesach*.<sup>16</sup> This opinion relegates the rule of על השבוע to a rabbinic decree to ensuring that no bones of the *Korban Pesach* are broken, which is a Torah prohibition.<sup>17</sup>

על השבוע, therefore, three main opinions regarding why the *Korban Pesach* needs to be eaten:

1. Rambam believed that the *Korban Pesach* is a Torah law performed *ideally* but is not a requirement to fulfill the *Korban Pesach*.
2. Rashi believed that על השבוע is a Torah requirement comparable to other *Korbanot*. In addition, it uniquely serves to grant the eating of the *Korban Pesach* special status.
3. The Yerushalmi believes that על השבוע is of rabbinic origin designed to ensure that people do not breach the scriptural law of breaking the bones of the *Korban Pesach*.

## Understanding Rashi and the Yerushalmi

The Sefer Hachinuch suggests, implicitly, that Rashi's opinion and that of the Yerushalmi can be read as related. He writes regarding the reason why we cannot break the bones of the *Korban Pesach* (*mitzvah* 16):

שׂאִין בְּכּוּד לְבַנֵּי מַלְכִים וְיוֹעֲצֵי אֶרֶץ לִגְרוֹר הָעֲצָמוֹת וּלְשִׁבְרָם כְּכֻלָּבִים, לֹא יֹאֵת לַעֲשׂוֹת כִּכָּה כִּי אִם לַעֲנִי הָעָם הָרַעֲבִים. וְעַל כֵּן בְּתַחֲלֵת בּוֹאֵנוּ לִהְיוֹת סְגוּלַת כָּל הָעַמִּים מִמַּלְכֹת כְּהִנָּם וְעַם קָדוֹשׁ, וּבְכָל שָׁנָה וְשָׁנָה בְּאוֹתוֹ הַזֶּמֶן, רָאוּנוּ לֵנוּ לַעֲשׂוֹת מַעֲשִׂים הַמְרָאִים בְּנוֹ הַמַּעֲלָה הַגְּדוֹלָה שֶׁעָלֵינוּ לֵה בְּאוֹתָהּ שָׁעָה. וּמִתּוֹךְ הַמַּעֲשֶׂה וְהַדְמִיּוֹן שֶׁאֲנַחְנוּ עוֹשִׂין נִקְבְּעַ בְּנַפְשׁוֹתֵינוּ הַדָּבָר לַעֲוֹלָם (סֵפֶר הַחִינוּךְ מִצְוָה טוֹ)

For it is not honourable for princes...to scrape bones and break them like dogs, and it is only fitting for the poorest starving people to act in this way. And therefore at the beginning of us becoming an treasured people amongst all of the nations, a priestly kingdom and holy people, and each year at the same time, it is fitting for us to engage in actions that show to us the great level we were raised up to at that hour...

their tastes some things are preferred, such as being roasted (צלי) and על השבוע – Both part of the *Korban pesach* as well. Cf. b. Chullin 132b which records R. Chisda as giving preference to eating with mustard (חרדל).

<sup>15</sup> Y. Pesachim 42b:3 and Tosafot to B. Pesachim 70a Cf. also Hamaor Hakatan (Rav Zerachia Halevi), Ramban Milchamot Hashem (Pesachim 26b in the Rif); Rabeinu Manoach Hilchot Hametz Umatzah 8:9; Or Zarua b: Hilchot Pesachim 236.

<sup>16</sup> According to Mordechai (Pesachim 38a in the Rif) the Yerushalmi is not disagreeing in principle with Rashi, but is rather suggesting a reason as to why the *Korban pesach* is eaten second, since they both require eating על השבוע. In any case the Yerushalmi serves to justify why we are only concerned about על השבוע with the Pesach and not the Chagiga – because its bones are soft for it is young and so we are more concerned. Cf. Tosafot to Pesachim 120a.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Shemot 12:46; Bamidbar 9:12; m. Pesachim 7:11.

If this is correct, then both Rashi and the Yerushalmi see the rule of *על השבוע* as somehow connected to the obligation to dine like royalty when eating the *Korban Pesach*. That is not to say that their opinions are completely in unison. Rashi sees this requirement as stemming from the world of *Korbanot*, whereas the Yerushalmi see it as tied directly to the *Korban Pesach* and the prohibition of breaking its bones.

Why then according to Rashi and the Yerushalmi was it so necessary to eat the *Korban Pesach* as priests and kings? According to Rav Shaul Yisraeli, based on the *Sefer Hachinuch*, the eating of the *Korban Pesach* *על השבוע* is essential because Each one, on *seder* night is raised to the level of priest and acts like a King.<sup>18</sup> We need to experience a stately meal to really understand the experience of freedom. For the Jews in Egypt this was a necessary element for them to begin to be truly free. It is one thing to remove someone from slavery, it requires a lot of work for them to actually feel and act as a free person. This only comes from the ability to view oneself as free. In this way food actually defines how we see ourselves.

## Understanding Rambam's Approach

We cannot suggest that the Rambam linked *על השבוע* to the breaking of bones. In the Guide for the Perplexed, Rambam writes that we are prohibited from breaking the bones of the *Korban Pesach* as a way of simulating eating in haste (*חפזון*) experienced in Egypt.<sup>19</sup> This is further seen in the fact that the Mishneh Torah refers to the prohibition of breaking bones (*halacha* 10) separately from the obligation to eat satiated (*halacha* 8).

Rambam also does not see the rule of *על השבוע* as connected to the fact that it is a *korban*. He lists eating general *Korbanot* when satiated as a *requirement*, whereas regarding the *Korban Pesach*, it is merely the ideal (*מצוה מן המובחר*).<sup>20</sup> Since Rambam makes this distinction in his language it would seem that he does not see the law of *על השבוע* for the *Korban Pesach* as linked to other *Korbanot* like Rashi argued.<sup>21</sup> If that were so, he would have stated that it is a requirement just like it is for other *Korbanot*.

Rav Chaim of Brisk similarly argued regarding the view of the Rambam that the law of *על השבוע* for the *Korban Pesach* must be separate from that of regular *Korbanot* because for regular

<sup>18</sup> Yisraeli, S. "Regarding Eating the *Korban pesach* Satiated,' *Shaarei Shaul Pesachim*, 172-73. See also the *Avnei Nezer* (*Yoreh Deah* 454:12) who notes that the requirement for each individual to eat the *Korban pesach* reinforced the notion that while in Egypt they ate from the table of the Egyptians now we eat from the table of Hashem and are His slaves. Although, it is worth noting that according to the *Minchat Asher*, according to Rashi, the rule of *למשחה* applies also to the eating of the owners of the sacrifice and not only to the *Kohanim*. See also *Responsa Chazon Nachum* 1:99 who argues similarly based on m. *Shabbat* 14:4 that according to Rabbi Shimon all of Israel and princes.

<sup>19</sup> Rambam, *Guide* 3:46. See also *Rashbam* (*Shemot* 12:46). For a more comprehensive discussion regarding the prohibition of breaking bones see Shlomo Zeev Pick, *The Prohibition of Breaking Bones of the Korban pesach*, *Maalin Bakodesh* *ibid*, 113-124.

<sup>20</sup> *Laws of Korbanot* 10:10-11.

<sup>21</sup> Rambam of course believes that eating in a way of freedom is part of the meal. Cf. *Laws of Chometz Umatzah* 7:6-7).

*Korbanot* only pertains to *Kohanim*, and not to the owner of the offering.<sup>22</sup> Rav Chaim further notes that על השבוע for the *Korban Pesach* required, just like other *Korbanot*, then the Rambam would also have required על השבוע for the *Chagiga* of the fourteenth of Nissan. Therefore, it is clear that for the Rambam the law of על השבוע for the *Korban Pesach* cannot stem from the same law of other *Korbanot*.

How then does the Rambam understand the requirement for על השבוע?

One possibility is that the Rambam based himself on Nazir 23a which discusses homiletically how one person can eat the *Korban Pesach* as a *mitzvah* and another as a sin:<sup>23</sup>

אמר רבה בר בר חנה אמר רבי יוחנן מאי דכתיב כי ישרים דרכי ה' וצדקים ילכו בם  
ופשעים יכשלו בם משל לשני בני אדם שצלו את פסחיהו אחד אכלו לשום מצוה ואחד  
אכלו לשום אכילה גסה זה שאכלו לשום מצוה וצדקים ילכו בם וזה שאכלו לשום אכילה  
גסה ופשעים יכשלו בם

**Rabba bar bar Hanna said that Rabbi Yohanan said: What is the meaning of that which is written: "For the paths of the L-rd are right, and the just walk in them, but transgressors stumble over them" (Hosea 14:10)?** How can the same path lead to such different outcomes? This is **comparable to two people who roasted their Paschal offerings** on Passover eve, in the proper manner. **One ate it for the sake of the mitzva, and one ate it for the sake of excessive eating. This one, who ate it for the sake of the mitzva, has fulfilled: "And the just walk in them," while that one, who ate it for the sake of excessive eating, is described by the end of the verse: "But transgressors stumble over them."**

The Gemarra only mentions 'excessive eating,' but Rashi notes that in addition to 'excessive eating' it could also be one who eats the *Korban Pesach* when hungry. Reish Lakish challenges whether one who eats excessively has not fulfilled the *mitzvah* of *Korban Pesach*:

אמר ליה ריש לקיש האי רשע קרית ליה דלא קא עביד מצוה מן המובחר פסח מיהא  
קא עביד אלא משל לשני בני אדם זה אשתו ואחותו עמו וזה אשתו ואחותו עמו לזה  
קדמנה לו אשתו ולזה קדמנה לו אחותו זה שנקדמנה לו אשתו צדקים ילכו בם וזה  
שנקדמנה לו אחותו ופשעים יכשלו בם

**Reish Lakish said to Rabba bar bar Hanna: You call this individual wicked? Even though he had not performed the mitzva in the**

<sup>22</sup> Chiddushei Rav Chaim Stencil 25. He also notes (Chiddushei hagrach Pesachim 70a) that if in the Mechilta the eating of the Pesach satiated was due to it being a *Korban* there would be no reason to exclude the Matzah and Maor, therefore proving that the rule of על השבוע must be for a different reason. It is worth noting that Henshke, D. 'Mah Nishtanah: The Passover Night in the Sages' Discourse (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2016) believes that the Mechilta is phrased in that way because it is post-churban and is coming to clarify that only the *Korban pesach* required satiation, not Matzah or Maror.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Also Horayot 10b. I am indebted to Zoldan, Y. 'Eating the *Korban pesach* Satiated,' *Maalin Bakodesh* 13, 5767, pp. 71-85 for raising the possibility of this source for the Rambam, although he did not suggest it as a way to resolve this particular question.

**optimal manner** when he eats this Paschal offering, **he has at least performed** the mitzva of the **Paschal offering**.

From here, someone who gorges himself or eats because of hunger fulfills the *mitzvah* in principle but not in spirit. Both the Rambam and Reish Lakish refer to eating the *Korban Pesach* satiated as *מזוה מן המובחר* thereby strengthening the claim that this is the basis for the Rambam's approach. If this Gemarra is the Rambam's source, then he states that *על השבוע* is *ideal* because it ensures that the *Korban Pesach* is not eaten due to hunger or excessive eating, but for the sake of performing the *mitzvah*.

A second possibility for understanding the Rambam, is based on how the Rambam understood the *mitzvah* of eating other *Korbanot*. To understand this argument we need to have in mind a number of points:

1. For the Rambam it is a positive *mitzvah* to eat the Pesach on the fifteenth.<sup>24</sup>
2. Regarding *Korbanot* (קדשי קדשים) Rambam holds it is a *mitzvah* from the Torah for the Kohanim to eat the *Korbanot*.<sup>25</sup>
3. For *Korbanot* of a lower status (קודשים קלים), according to Rambam, the owners of the *korban* are not obligated to eat the offering,<sup>26</sup> and it is unclear the nature of the *mitzvah* for the Kohanim.<sup>27</sup>

Rambam saw *Korban Pesach* as unique in that the owners are required to eat it as a separate *mitzvah* from the eating of other *Korbanot*. Therefore, Rambam had to make clear that it too required *על השבוע*.<sup>28</sup> Rambam maintains the unique nature of the *Korban Pesach*.<sup>29</sup>

To summarise there are two ways to understand the Rambam:

1. The Rambam required *על השבוע* to ensure that the *Korban Pesach* was eaten to fulfill the *mitzvah* and not because one was hungry.
2. Since Rambam held that *Korbanot* of a lower status (קודשים קלים) are not eaten by the owners, Rambam felt that for *Korban Pesach*, which was a separate *mitzvah* there should be a specific rule.

<sup>24</sup> *Korban Pesach* 8:1.

<sup>25</sup> Laws of *Korbanot* 10:1-2. Sefer Hamitzvot Positive Commandment 89.

<sup>26</sup> Contra Ramban Glosses to Sefer HaMitzvot(1).

<sup>27</sup> See the discussion in <http://www.torahbase.org/%D7%90%D7%9B%D7%99%D7%9C%D7%AA-%D7%A7%D7%93%D7%A9%D7%99%D7%9D-%D7%AA%D7%A9%D7%A2%D7%95/>.

<sup>28</sup> This is in contrast to Rashi who holds that *Korbanot* of lower status are eaten by the owners, which is why he saw the rule of *על השבוע* tied to the regular laws of all *Korbanot*. Cf. the discussion by Rav Osher Weiss, <https://www.torahbase.org/714/>.

<sup>29</sup> See Bazak, A. "The Uniqueness of the *Korban Pesach*,"

<https://www.etzion.org.il/he/%D7%A4%D7%A8%D7%A9%D7%AA-%D7%94%D7%97%D7%95%D7%93%D7%A9-%D7%99%D7%99%D7%97%D7%95%D7%93%D7%95-%D7%A9%D7%9C-%D7%A7%D7%A8%D7%91%D7%9F-%D7%94%D7%A4%D7%A1%D7%97>. Henshke, D. 'Mah

Nishtanah: The Passover Night in the Sages' Discourse (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2016) notes that the Mechilta Derashbi proves that the *Korban Pesach* should be eaten separately from other food, even Kodashim, to ensure it is eaten alone. This is as opposed to regular Kodshim which can be eaten together even with Chullin. Cf. m. Zevachim 5:3.

If we follow the second reason, the *Korban Pesach* had to be eaten as a *korban* distinct from the laws of regular *Korbanot*; Rambam felt was imperative to the experiencing of the Exodus. Rav Chaim that the *Korban Pesach* needs to be eaten on its own, separate from other food because the *Korban Pesach* was eaten specifically on this night in Egypt.<sup>30</sup> However, I want to focus on the first reading of the Rambam. Why would it be that for Rambam that the Gemarra in Nazir was so important? What is unique about the *Korban Pesach* which required this unique way of eating for the sake of a *mitzvah*?

The Maharal notes that the Exodus is about liberating the spiritual from the material.<sup>31</sup> While Egypt was a fantastic builder of societies and structures, it was only focused on the material. Their sexual licentiousness is a sign of this materialism. According to the Maharal *Am Yisrael* is the opposite of Egypt. We are also a great nation, yet our focus is on the spiritual to such an extent that we even *relate to the material through the spiritual*. When Israel complains about leaving Egypt the people protest “If only we had died by the hand of the *L-rd* in the Land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots, when we ate our fill of bread (לֶחֶם לְשׂוֹבַע) For you have brought us out into this wilderness to starve this whole congregation to death.” (Shemot 16:3) The people remember the materialism of Egypt, and have not yet become truly free from its grasp.

The Exodus was about the spiritual being freed from the dominance of the material. Through this lense we can understand the Rambam in a new light.

It is ideal to distinguish the eating of the *Korban Pesach* for the sake of a *mitzvah* since it is in the very act of eating that we are declaring the ability to merge the spiritual with the material. If we follow the second reading of the Rambam, eating the *Korban Pesach* על השבוע is distinct from other *Korbanot* because the *Korban Pesach* was the very beginning of our freedom. Through it we began to merge the material with the spiritual.

In the glorious days of yore when we ate the *Korban Pesach* at our *seder*, we relived the *Korban Pesach* as it was eaten in Egypt. According to the Rambam we ate על השבוע to ensure that it was eaten for the sake of the *mitzvah*, for the sake of the spiritual.

<sup>30</sup> Chiddushei Hagaon Rav Chaim Peachim 70a. Rav Shmuel Halevi Wosner (Responsa Shevet Halevi 1:158) argues against this possibility of reading Rambam in this way. According to Rav Wosner the basis for the Rambam cannot be the difference between Kodshim and Kodshim Kalim, since there is a positive commandment for owners to eat the Kodshim Kalim that come to atone. Although this point is difficult to justify because even Rav Wosner admits that while this is true for Rashi, regarding Rambam there is a dispute. Rav Wosner bases himself on Minchat Chinuch to Sefer HaChinuch *mitzvah* 102, who argues that this is also the position of the Rambam. Instead, according to Rav Wosner the position of the Rambam is that any *mitzva* of eating *Korbanot* requires על השבוע in order to establish its importance. (According to Rav Wosner, this also holds for Matzah or Maror but technically it only possible for one thing to be eaten על השבוע and therefore the Torah only mandated על השבוע for the *Korban pesach*. This serves to explain the Mechilta De'Rabbi Yishmael Bo - Masechet Depascha 6, quoted above. Its purpose is to teach us that you can eat Matzah and Maror and then eat the *Korban pesach* satiated.) According to this approach the eating of anything serves the purpose to bring one to satiation. The novelty for the Rambam, is that for the *Korban pesach* the sages instituted that this satiation should specifically be carried out with meat and via the Chagiga of the fourteenth. According to this opinion, too, the Rambam is in line with Tosafot and Rashi. The *Korban pesach* must be eaten על השבוע as a means of defining the eating as special. The Rambam, however, does not believe it has to be carried out with the Chagiga, in principle, but that it is a Rabbinic decree to do so and this explains the wording of the Rambam.

<sup>31</sup> Maharal, Gevurot Hashem Ch. 4.

We do not simply celebrate our redemption through food, but it is through food, and specifically the way in which we eat the *Korban Pesach* that we are redeemed. This should guide us in all of our material and spiritual pursuits until we can, once again, merit the harmonious merging of material and spiritual in a rebuilt Jerusalem.



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## Growing Through Covid-19 and the Exodus

*Jonathon Simons*

I am writing this article just after Manchester has been moved into Tier four and a few weeks after the announcement of a vaccination for the Covid-19 virus which has been so devastating. (Update we are now in lockdown!) I am now looking towards Pesach this year wondering if it will be a repeat of last year or we will be finally clear of the virus and its effects and be able to spend time with our families at the *seder*.

I write this article cautiously and I encourage anyone who reads it to read it through before passing judgement. I do realise that this is a sensitive issue for many and there was much angst and distress regarding extended families spending Pesach together over lockdown last year. There were stories of grandparents and families who always spent Pesach together now not being able too, people spending Pesach alone. There were many that understandably ignored the rules of the lockdown because of the pain of being away from their loved ones was too great.

We are all adverse to pain but what I want to posit in this article is that by trying to avoid pain or painful decisions we miss out on a chance to grow or to experience something new.

If we think about it for a moment, much of the Pesach story is about pain. The Jewish people in slavery were made to feel unbearable pain and suffering.

The *pasuk* in Shemot 1:14 says,

וַיִּמְרֹצוּ אֶת־חַיֵּיהֶם בַּעֲבֹדָה קָשָׁה בְּחֹמֶר וּבַלְבָּנִים וּבְכָל־עֲבֹדָה בַּשָּׂדֶה אֶת־כָּל־עֲבֹדָתָם אֲשֶׁר־עָבְדוּ בְּהֶם בְּפֶרֶךְ׃

Ruthlessly they made life bitter for them with harsh labour at mortar and bricks and with all sorts of tasks in the field.<sup>1</sup>

The Hakatav veHakabalah cites the Midrash Rabbah explains that the word בפרך means that the Egyptians gave the men women's work and vice versa.

He further notes Pithom and Ramses would sink into the ground straight after being built. The Jewish people couldn't even have the satisfaction of a job well done.

The Midrash is replete with other examples of the *Mitzriim* causing so much unnecessary suffering to the Jewish people. So much so that one of the reasons as to why the Egyptians were punished for doing Hashem's will is that they did not have to do it with such cruelty.

Despite the indescribable psychological cruelty and pain of the experience in Egypt it is possible that it was intended to help the Jewish people grow. For instance, the slavery prepared them to accept Hashem as their G-d. Further, The slavery also created a particular moral awareness. One of the first *mitzvot* when leaving *Mitzrayim* was about how to treat slaves.

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<sup>1</sup> Shemot 1:14 with HaKtav VeHaKabalah ([sefaria.org](http://sefaria.org)).

However, if Hashem intends us to grow through suffering He does not do so without measure. To understand this I turn to the link between *Yetziat Mitzrayim* and the story of Yosef. The word *karpas* relates to Yosef's coat.

וישָׂאֵל אֶתְּבֹרַךְ אֶת־יוֹסֵף מִכָּל־בָּנָיו כִּי־בֶן־זִקְנִים הוּא לוֹ וַעֲשֵׂה לוֹ כְּתֹנֶת פָּסִים:

Now Israel loved Joseph best of all his sons, for he was the child of his old age; and he had made him an ornamented tunic.<sup>2</sup>

*Ketonet passim* contracted sounds the same as *karpas*. Our sages teach us that the brothers' jealousy of the coat led to the *karpas* - caused Yaakov's family to move to *Mitzrayim*.

Yosef's life was marked by much suffering. He was hated by his brothers and cast into a pit and sold by them into slavery. He was falsely accused by his master's wife of impropriety and thrown into jail. In those days jail was a pit sunk into the ground with no chance of escape. The Midrash explains that Potifar's wife visited Yosef in the pit daily even holding a knife to his throat to make him look at her. All he had to do was to succumb and she would have him set free. He put his faith in the butler to mention him to Pharaoh which cost him even more time in jail. Yosef though is known as *Yosef HaTzaddik* (The Righteous). His difficulties in life made him into *HaTzaddik*.

It is difficult for us to look at these events from the Torah and relate to them. To do this we must have 20/20 vision which is extremely challenging when living with adversity. So I propose that we only look at a small section from Yosef's life.

In Vayeshev the Torah speaks about the sale of Yosef:

וַיֵּשְׁבוּ לֶאֱכָל־לֶחֶם וַיִּשְׂאוּ עִינֵיהֶם וַיֵּרְאוּ וְהִנֵּה אֲרֶתֶת יִשְׁמַעֲאֵלִים בָּאָה מִגִּלְעָד וּגְמֵלֵיהֶם נִשְׂאִים  
בְּכֹאת וּצְרִי נֹלֵט הוֹלְכִים לְהוֹרִיד מִצְרַיִם:

Then they sat down to a meal. Looking up, they saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead, their camels bearing gum, balm, and ladanum to be taken to Egypt.<sup>3</sup> (Bereshit 37:25)

Rashi mentions that the Ishmaelites whom he was sold to were carrying balsam and nice smelling things as opposed to the foul-smelling pitch which they usually carried, so that Yosef would not have to put up with the smell as he went down to *Mitzrayim* and it was a kindness of Hashem that this occurred.

If we think about it there were better ways for Hashem to be kind to Yosef. Perhaps by not letting Yosef be sold into slavery in the first place. This was the beginning of almost 20 years of suffering for Yosef.

It is akin to someone being in a road traffic accident and breaking every bone in their body, the paramedics rushing to the scene giving the poor person a pillow to rest his head as they work on him. To then have an onlooker exclaim. "Thank Hashem for his kindness for the pillow under your head you must be so comfortable!"

<sup>2</sup> [Bereishit 37:3 with Connections \(sefaria.org\)](https://www.sefaria.org/Bereishit-37-3-with-Connections).

<sup>3</sup> [Bereishit 37:25 with Connections \(sefaria.org\)](https://www.sefaria.org/Bereishit-37-25-with-Connections).

We would think that it would be kinder for Hashem not to cause the accident and it's accompanying suffering at all.

So this begs the question why does Hashem seek to minimise Yosef's suffering in such a minor way. One reason given is that Yosef was only allotted the suffering he had in order to grow, any other suffering no matter how small was not needed and thus Hashem did not give it to him.

The message that we learn is that **everyone** in life has some sort of pain or discomfort given to them by Hashem, the only reason it is there is to help us grow as people. We don't often, if ever, see what we have been protected from since it was not necessary for us to experience it.

As a teacher if I didn't challenge my students I would be considered remiss in my duties as a teacher. Many students like the familiar and are quick to give in part of being a teacher is to guide them through their challenges in order to succeed. Growth happens when we have something to push against.

Yosef needed his challenges but at the same time not more than was allotted to him. If you look at his life, he was never negative about any of his experiences but the point is here that Hashem does not give us any more challenges than we need in order to grow.

So back to Pesach, we don't know at this stage if we will be rid of the Covid-19 virus. Who knows what rules there will be. Will we be able to spend Pesach with our loved ones?

For us this does cause great emotional suffering but within that challenge there is huge opportunities for growth. There is an opportunity to do things differently, to think outside of the box, to experience something new. Challenges are not given to us in order to work around or cheat. They are there to make us think differently, to become better people and to see life in a new way.



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## Yosef And The Four Cups Of Wine<sup>1</sup>

*Mord Tabor*

Have you ever thought why we drink the four cups of wine at the *seder*? The usual explanation focuses on the four expressions of redemption in *G-d*'s promise to Moshe in Shemot 6:6-7

1)'ve-hotzeiti' - I will remove you from the burdens of Egypt;

2)'ve-hitzalti' - I will save you from their bondage;

3)'ve-ga'alti' - I will redeem you with an outstretched arm; and

4)'ve-lakachti' - I will take you to be my people and I will be your *G-d*. The four cups represent these four redemptive, comforting expressions.<sup>2</sup>

However, there is another curious interpretation suggested by R. Yehoshua ben Levi.<sup>3</sup>

According to his opinion the four cups of wine relate to the four times the word 'cup' is mentioned by Pharaoh's jailed butler as he recounts his dream to Yosef in prison. What is the relevance of Pharaoh's butler to *seder* night, our night of freedom?! While the butler's dream leads to the eventual release of both the butler and Yosef, and the eventual development of the entire story of slavery, it is still a far cry from *seder* night and leaving *Mitzrayim*? If the four cups symbolise our freedom, in what way are they tied to the story of Yosef?

I want to suggest that actually, Yosef can teach us about freedom and slavery in important ways.

We can only wonder what Yosef's attitude was towards Egypt. He lived there pre-slavery and he experienced a meteoric rise to become second in command. He rescued the Egyptian economy during seven years of drought, enriched the crown and fed the nation. By all accounts, Yosef was a celebrity in Egypt. On the surface, it would seem that Yosef should only view Egypt positively – indeed Egypt saved his family!

Yet, a fascinating development can be seen in Yosef the longer he is in Egypt – particularly through the names he gives his sons. He names his first son Menashe, meaning, "*G-d* has made me forget completely my hardship and my parental home."<sup>4</sup> Gone are the troubles of his youth, the fights with his brothers, the sibling rivalries caused by his dreams of grandeur. Gone, too, are the dreams of Avraham Avinu and the special promise from *G-d* with the family. Yosef is an Egyptian, with a

<sup>1</sup> Based on shiur by R' Howard Joseph.

<sup>2</sup> Bereishit Rabbah 88:5, Ramban & Sforno on Shemot 6:6-7.

<sup>3</sup> Others say it is R. Shemuel ben Nachman.

<sup>4</sup> Bereshit 41:51.

new Egyptian name, wife and family. He seems totally absorbed in his responsibilities with his earlier trials and tribulations of an earlier life in Canaan long forgotten.

However, the name he chooses for his second son is Ephraim, meaning, "*G-d* has made me fertile in the land of my affliction."<sup>5</sup> Has Yosef not gained grandeur in Egypt? Why is Egypt the land of his affliction? Does it refer to his earlier servitude and imprisonment, or has his view of Egypt begun to change? The fact that it is the name given to his second son would suggest the latter.

This is reinforced when we consider the burial of Yaakov and Yosef. When Yaakov dies, Yosef accompanies the body back to Chevron for burial. Yosef, the most powerful man in Egypt, however is accompanied by a detachment of royal guards. It is unclear whether their purpose was to protect him or ensure his return.<sup>6</sup> In all likelihood it was both – Pharaoh sent an 'honour guard,' but the savvy politician Yosef understood what their real orders were.

Finally, when Yosef was on his deathbed, he makes a shocking request of his brothers: "when *G-d* brings you out of this land, you will carry my bones from here with you."<sup>7</sup> Why this request? What did Yosef know? All was peaceful and prosperous in Egypt for his family! What did he see differently from his royal perspective? Why would *G-d* have to take them out of Egypt, a land in which they were now living in comfort and security?

The answer is clear: Yosef realised that he too was a slave. Despite the trappings of wealth and power, ultimately this was not his land. The more he rose in prominence, the more pronounced his sense of alienation. He was slave by virtue of his position; the "trappings" were actually a "trap."

While the rest of the family lived in security and tranquillity, Yosef, the dreamer, again had a vision of the future. The Torah does not record the brothers' reaction to his request for transfer of his remains to Israel. However, they had never really understood his demands and visions and it is likely they considered this another crazy dream? "Why should we ever want to leave this land that has welcomed us and in which we are prospering?" At any rate a few sentences later the Torah begins the description of the bondage. Yosef envisaged the future here too, he never really forgot his slavery in Egypt.

Returning to our question, R. Yehoshua ben Levi is reminding us that Pesach is not just for the poor and the oppressed; Pesach is for the Yosef's of our people too. While appearances may seem peaceful, Jews must always be watchful. How well do we all know this? We have all come from lands in which our communities lived for centuries. While there were periodic disturbances in these lands, we thought of ourselves as relatively secure. We had friends and even compatriots in high places, close to the King or government officials. Yet, our position proved tenuous. Change came quickly. Our friends disappeared; our compatriots were dismissed. Who would have thought that communities that were thousands of years old would so quickly be dislodged and

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<sup>5</sup> Bereshit 41:52.

<sup>6</sup> Chizkuni, Bereshit 50:4.

<sup>7</sup> Bereshit 50:25.

disappear? Today only a few Jews remain in the great Jewish communities that existed not so long ago.

When we drink the four cups of wine, we remember not only the slaves who were freed from their bondage and oppression, but also Yosef who, in his own way, was also a slave to Pharaoh in Egypt. We remember that bondage does not always come in the guise of real slavery. Sometimes we are slaves without realising it. However, we also recall that he too was freed by Moshe when his bones were taken out during the Exodus. He finally was placed to rest in the homeland he knew was the only homeland that the people of Israel ever had or ever will have.

LE-SHANA HABA'A BI-YERUSHALAYIM.



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## Passover? What An Odd Name For A Festival

Daniel Tichbi

The festival of *Pesach* has various names: *Chag Hamatsot* (festival of unleavened bread),<sup>1</sup> *Chag Ha'aviv* (festival of spring);<sup>2</sup> or *Zman Cheyrouteinu* (festival of our freedom).<sup>3</sup>

However, to us it is best known as *Pesach* (פסח) or *Passover*. The Torah itself seems to reserve the name *Passover* only for the 14<sup>th</sup> of Nissan (the eve of Passover) and the first night<sup>4</sup> with reference to the *Passover* offering (*Korban Pesach*).<sup>5</sup> The use of the name *Passover* for the entire festival goes back to the times of King Josiah.<sup>6</sup> The Mishna and Talmud also regularly refer to the festival as *Passover*.<sup>7</sup> Jewish tradition established *Passover* as the name by which this festival is known, at least since the times of the Rishonim.<sup>8</sup>

But what is so significant about this term that it dominates over all the other names? After all, was *Pesach* not the time when we gained our freedom from slavery? Or is there anything more memorable about the holiday than the eating of the *matzah* which is a *mitzvah* of the Torah on the first night?

While the basic meaning of *Pesach* (פסח) means to skip,<sup>9</sup> some believed that it means to protect<sup>10</sup> and others tied it to compassion.<sup>11</sup> However, there is also some dispute as to what is being 'skipped.'

Rabbi Shmuel HaKohen of Modena, Italy bases the meaning of the word *Passover* on the Torah verse in which Hashem told Avraham Avinu that his descendants would be enslaved for 400 years.<sup>12</sup> In fact, the Jews were in Egypt for only 210 years. Therefore, *Passover* denotes that Hashem passed over (*pasach*) the remaining 190 years.<sup>13</sup> Interestingly, this interpretation embodies the liberation from slavery aspect which is captured in the name *Chag Zman Cheyrouteinu*. However, the more common interpretation of the term *Passover* refers to the skipping of the Jewish houses on whose doorposts blood from the *Passover* lamb offering had

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<sup>1</sup> Shemot 34:18.

<sup>2</sup> Devarim, 16:1 which our sages interpret as a commandment that Pesach should always be celebrated in spring.

<sup>3</sup> Shemot 13:14.

<sup>4</sup> Vayikra 23:5-6.

<sup>5</sup> Yoshiyahi. See also Rav Bin Nun's approach who maintains that *Pesach* and *Chag Hamatsot* in the Torah are not one holiday that begins with the *Korban pesach*, but two connected holidays. *Pesach* also appears in the Torah and the Prophets on its own without *Chag Hamatsot*. The full article is available at <https://www.etzion.org.il>.

<sup>6</sup> II Chronicles, Chapter 35; see also II Kings 23:21.

<sup>7</sup> Pesachim 10:5.

<sup>8</sup> Josephus Antiquities 2:313; 3:248 – also notes the festival is called *Pesach*, although he seems to follow the idea that there is a festival or *Pesach* that is merged with the festival of Matzot. See also Book of Jubilees 49.

<sup>9</sup> This is the approach of RaHSbam, Rashi and see also the Mechilta.

<sup>10</sup> Rabbi Yonatan, Chapter 4 of Tosefta Sota and the book of Isaiah.

<sup>11</sup> Onkelos and Rashi.

<sup>12</sup> Bereishit 15:13.

<sup>13</sup> *The Sephardic Heritage Haggadah*, Artscroll, p.129.



been smeared as a sign, in the night of the tenth plague: the killing of the Egyptian firstborns. That very night Israel's firstborns were saved from destruction.<sup>14</sup>

However, if the name Pesach comes from skipping over the door posts, this only constitutes one particular detail about one particular plague. Although it is an important detail and nobody would want their firstborn to be killed but in view of the big picture, how does it address what the festival is about? It does not refer to redemption, freedom, independence or the birth of our nation; especially in our days with the absence of the Holy Temple and consequently the lack of the Torah commandment of the *Passover* offering, what is so fundamental about this term that the entire holiday should be named after it?<sup>15</sup>

To answer this question let's have a look at the larger idea behind the name *Passover*. It seems that the holiday is intrinsically connected to the idea of the firstborn. Even before the tenth plague Hashem calls Israel his firstborn child.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, the verse continues: "And if you refrain from sending him out, behold, I will kill your firstborn child." There is a direct comparison between the people of Israel and the Egyptian firstborns. *G-d* is saying to Pharaoh that if he harms *G-d's* firstborn, *G-d* will harm Egypt's firstborns.

But what does it mean that we are a firstborn nation? There were certainly nations existing before the creation of our people. Rabbi David Fohrman, in his book *The Exodus You Almost Passed Over*, explains the fundamental idea of being firstborn. He argues that the Exodus story is not simply a story of the past but that it is about our future. It tells us why we are here on earth and what we are meant to achieve as a firstborn nation.<sup>17</sup>

In all the first nine plagues, Israel was automatically shielded from the effects of the plagues. For example, when the Egyptian livestock was struck, animals belonging to Israelites were automatically unaffected,<sup>18</sup> and darkness only affected the Egyptians.<sup>19</sup> However with the 10<sup>th</sup> plague Israelites were suddenly not immune. This was only achieved by bringing the *Passover* offering and placing the blood on their doorposts. However, this is very strange - does *G-d* need a GPS location system? It sounds blasphemous to suggest *G-d* required blood on the doorposts to distinguish between the Egyptian and Israelite houses.

Indeed, the *Korban Pesach* served a different purpose. It somehow triggered the transition from a nation of slaves to the nation of *G-d*. It demonstrated Israel's willingness to be *G-d's* firstborn; i.e., to play a special role in the family of nations and convey *G-d's* values and oneness to the world. A firstborn can often serve as a bridge between the generations. It can take the values of the

<sup>14</sup> See for example R' Samson Raphael Hirsch, *Der Pentateuch*, the interpretation of the term *Pesach* (פסח) in Shemot 12:11.

<sup>15</sup> By the way, Rav Kook did not like the translation "skipping over". He preferred another understanding of the term. He translated the term "passing over" as "leaping over" or "hovering over." This means that Hashem actually visited the Jewish homes in that night. While the Egyptians were punished, the Jews were visited too but experienced something different. They perceived the awareness of Hashem's presence and protection. *Passover* suggests that *G-d's* care and presence were revealed to us that night (Aaron Goldscheider, *The Night that Unites, Passover Haggadah*).

<sup>16</sup> Shemot 4:22-23.

<sup>17</sup> Chapter 18, *Birth Night, All in the family*.

<sup>18</sup> Shemot 9:4.

<sup>19</sup> Shemot 10:23.

parents and live them in a child's world serving as a comprehensive example to the other younger children. In fact, any child could really adopt this role. This is not limited to the biological firstborn. The stories of Yaakov and Esav or Yehuda, Yosef and Reuven show that it is independent of birth order. So too, Israel which did not emerge chronologically as the first nation in the world is nonetheless welcome to assume the role of a firstborn. The binding of a lamb to the beds for three days in sight of the Egyptians who worshipped them and the subsequent slaughtering and smearing of the blood on the doorposts in defiance of Pharaoh, was a rebellious act that powerfully proclaimed Israel's allegiance to *G-d*. It was an action that helped transform a nation of slaves into a nation of firstborns whose job it is to showcase something *G-d's* other children can emulate. And that is possibly why the Children of Israel were not automatically safeguarded from the tenth plague. Maybe the tenth plague was the moment all firstborn had to be threatened so *G-d* "took possession" of Israel as His own firstborn. But Israel had to perform an action to collectively earn the favour to be saved and to be granted the privilege of being a *G-d's* firstborn among all nations in the world.

Therefore, it is only fitting that we name the holiday *Passover* as it commemorates the day that we committed to serving the Creator as a firstborn in the family of nations. *Passover* is not looking at the events in terms of history but in terms of destiny. The holiday touches on the very mission statement of Israel. The important thing to keep in mind is that being a firstborn is not about the privileges that go with it but the responsibilities. A firstborn is meant to help parents and children connect more effectively. A firstborn that ignores the existence of those other children – merely focusing on its exclusive relationship with the parent – subverts his mission and becomes a failure. The mission of Israel only makes sense because *G-d* is intensely interested in a relationship with all humanity, and it is up to Israel never to betray its mission by losing sight of that.



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## Firstborn - Subject, Object Or Inspiration?

*Simon Weinberg*

Our journey through the Pesach story - of our enslavement and servitude, and of our redemption and ultimate acceptance of the Torah - defines our people, our culture, our entire religion. It formulated us as a nation, established our eternal faith in Hashem, and gave us a Divine pathway to follow through life<sup>1</sup>.

When we sit on *seder* night and work through the ten plagues, they climax with *Makkat Bechorot*. We spill a drop of wine for each plague, accepting the pain the plagues caused the Egyptians as part of our redemption. The problem is that *Makkat Bechorot* seems so much worse than we acknowledge on *seder* night, that small spilling of wine aside. Why does our basic understanding of it not appreciate its magnanimity?

### Our Lack Of Context... And Time

Part of it is simply because we do not take the time to think about it properly. Every family in Egypt was hit, every family suffered a loss; the Torah states that so clearly in Moshe's warning to Pharaoh (Shemot 11:4-6):

Moshe said, "Thus says the *L-rd*: Toward midnight I will go forth among the Egyptians," and every firstborn in the Land of Egypt shall die, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sits on his throne to the firstborn of the slave girl who is behind the millstones; and all the firstborn of the cattle. And there shall be a loud cry in all the Land of Egypt, such as has never been or will ever be again;

Pharaoh's reaction confirms the widespread impact of the plague:

In the middle of the night the *L-rd* struck down all the firstborn in the Land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on the throne to the firstborn of the captive who was in the dungeon, and all the firstborn of the cattle. And Pharaoh arose in the night, with all his courtiers and all the Egyptians—because there was a loud cry in Egypt; for there was no house where there was not someone dead.

This is a history-changing, dramatic and, above all, horrific event. Countless people lost their lives, countless families lost children and parents; they might have been taskmasters and oppressors, but they were still human beings not all of whom would have been evil, and all we do is spill some wine. There has to be more to the plague itself than we admit on a basic level.

The other issue is that, if we do find the time to think about it, we still think about it in the vacuum of it being the last of ten, and we do not think about it in itself. When we sit and recite the plagues

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<sup>1</sup> This is the focus of so much of our religious ritual - think Kiddush on Friday night, the third paragraph of the Shema, and so on.

on *seder* night, and even when we sit and hear them read in synagogue on Parashat Vayera and Parashat Bo, we encounter them in a fleeting moment where, even if we are paying attention at that point in time, we have moved onto the next thing before we have realised. We see the plagues, very simply, as a way of allowing Pharaoh to release us from slavery, so we could walk out of Egypt with our heads held high. The real problem is that Hashem is an all-powerful, all-knowing, and a merciful G-d - if we dwell on them long enough, each of the plagues was horrific in itself in terms of its impact on the Egyptian's lives and livelihoods, and the final plague in particular. Did all of the firstborn in Egypt really need to die-off overnight to allow us to walk away?

Clearly not. All of the plagues, and *Makkat Bechorot* in particular, have a much wider justification and purpose. Since it was the most important, we need to consider *Makkat Bechorot* itself, its prelude and consequences.

### ***Makkat Bechorot* - The Expected Redemption**

First, *Makkat Bechorot* was planned. As Moshe leaves Yitro and Midian behind to return to his people in Egypt, Hashem speaks to Moshe, instructing Moshe what he will say to Pharaoh when back in Egypt. No other plague is mentioned in this instruction - just *Makkat Bechorot* (Shemot 4: 22-23):

Then you shall say to Pharaoh, "Thus says the L-rd: Israel is My firstborn son." I have said to you, "Let My son go, that he may worship Me," yet you refuse to let him go. Now I will slay your firstborn son."

*Makkat Bechorot* will be the great sign that the redemption has taken place and the Jews are free to go. If it was pre-ordained, its role had to be wider than merely punitive or the straw that broke the camel's back in terms of Egypt's resistance to Hashem's plagues. What was it for?

### **The Firstborn Of Egypt - Victim, Weapon Or Both?**

There is a rabbinic Midrash that may help to answer my question. We recite Tehillim 136 every Shabbat morning, and it became known by our sages as Hallel HaGadol<sup>2</sup>, or the Great Hallel, due to the expressive praise and thanks given to Hashem for all He did for us on the route out of Egypt. We read the following in Psalm 136:10, לַמָּכָה מִצְרַיִם בְּכֹרֵיהֶם כִּי לְעוֹלָם חֶסֶדּוֹ (Who struck Egypt through their firstborn, His steadfast love is eternal).

The simple reading is that Hashem struck Egypt through the firstborn, in *Makkat Bechorot*, by killing them all. However, the Midrash<sup>3</sup> reads it slightly differently: not that Hashem struck Egypt's firstborn (although that did happen), but that (i) Hashem struck Egypt, and (ii) when Hashem did strike Egypt, it was "with/through [Egypt's] firstborn" (as the Hebrew allows for an expanded reading - ordinarily we may say in Hebrew למכה בכורי מצרים, however the syntax can be read as striking Egypt by way of their firstborn). As set out above (Shemot 11:4-6), Moshe warns Pharaoh of the impending plague and that the firstborn will be killed. The Midrash interprets this as meaning that the Egyptians knew what was coming, and knew that it would only

<sup>2</sup> Pesachim 119.

<sup>3</sup> Pesikta de'Rav Kahana.

happen if Pharaoh continued to refuse the Jews their freedom. The Midrash on those *pesukim* believes that Egypt's firstborns had had enough that night.

We know that, by this stage, Egypt was on its knees, and by plague eight and the impending arrival of the locusts, Pharaoh's advisors were begging him to let the Jews leave to stop further plagues coming (Shemot 10:7), 'Pharaoh's courtiers said to him, "How long shall this one be a snare to us? Let the men go to worship the *L-rd* their *G-d*! Are you not yet aware that Egypt is lost?"'

Midrash Tehillim 137:6 tells us that the firstborn (amongst everyone in Egypt) knew that Moshe's warning of *Makkat Bechorot* was not empty, and Hashem would follow through with the threat.<sup>4</sup>

The Midrash also points to the fact that it was not just Pharaoh, but general stubbornness in Egypt, that had caused the destruction so far, and the looming loss of a generation of firstborn was due to that stubbornness. According to the Midrash, this is what happened:

- The firstborn recognised that their monarch and deity was to blame, but also to blame was Egyptian society and social structure; the firstborn begged their parents to let the Jews go (presumably because a groundswell of opinion amongst more experienced generations would force Pharaoh's hand), to prevent this final plague happening and the firstborn losing their lives.
- However, so entrenched was Egypt in its ideals, and despite the destruction they had already experienced and now expected, the firstborn were told that it was preferable for Egypt to let all the firstborn die if it meant the Jews remained enslaved. Think about that.
- The Midrash is saying that parents would prefer to see their own children die rather than release the nation's slaves.
- Fresh from that rejection by their parents, the Midrash goes on to tell how the firstborn then marched on Pharaoh's palace, which turned into a full scale rebellion and riot. Why? Pharaoh refused to budge, again. The Jews were staying, and, in Pharaoh's eyes, if Hashem followed through, Pharaoh was willing to sacrifice the firstborn of his nation to keep his slaves.
- The firstborn responded by killing their parents and, later, those in power surrounding Pharaoh and his palace; and yet the plague still happened - Pharaoh was unmoved. This Midrash suggests that at least 60,000 died that night in Egypt - not from the plague, but from the effective civil war that preluded it. The firstborn went on the attack, and society imploded.

Later that night, the firstborn went from aggressors to victims. This Midrash explains that Tehillim 136 reflects that in the careful wording it uses, making clear that *Makkat Bechorot* had two stages (i) political unrest leading to civil war taking many thousands of lives, and (ii) the agents of that political unrest becoming victims in the part of the plague we know more about. Bottom line? Both stages were driven by Hashem.

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<sup>4</sup> See also Shemot Rabbah Bo 11:5.

So many of the *Makkot*, and their impacts, show Hashem's intervention in science and nature. *Makkat Bechorot* takes that involvement further - Hashem also intervenes in politics. What happened that night was a localised struggle between the familial elite - the firstborn - and the political elite, but it was all dictated by Hashem. We see this in the whole of Megillat Esther, with Hashem being the hidden puppeteer, but Hashem does it with the *Makkot* as well, without any attempt to hide that political involvement.

## The Role, Status And Fear Of The Firstborn

If we see *Makkat Bechorot* as a punishment, it might seem unfair to the firstborns; they were not the only section of society that persecuted Jewish people. What about all the others that persecuted the Jews? Why were they targeted in this climactic plague?

It is worth looking at the firstborn's role in Egyptian society and why a plague targeted them specifically. The general consensus is that in Egypt, and in ancient society generally, the firstborn were the elite - the upper class, the aristocracy. For us in today's society<sup>5</sup>, the firstborn doesn't take on a particular role anymore, but in ancient society, where the focus was much more localised on family and agriculture, the firstborn were invaluable to every family and were given responsibility and power to match. By definition, they got older first, were the first to go out to work, and therefore the first in a family unit beyond the parents to have value and be productive contributors to the family (and society as a whole). In a society where agricultural manual labour is the center of the economy and of central value to family life, being a firstborn carried responsibility but also greater political mobility and power. The firstborn likely had absolute power within each family unit, ruling over younger siblings - slaves were important to such a society because it allowed even those subjugated by Egypt's elite to exercise their power and dominion over someone even lower than they were, and the Jews were at the bottom. In essence, the firstborn defined living conditions for the rest of society.

Why did Hashem target the firstborn? The answer is that the power of the firstborn in Egyptian society and culture represented the worst of that society and culture. *Makkat Bechorot* was a punishment for that culture and it struck at its heart. The targeting of the firstborn struck at a society in which the use and abuse of power was widespread - following the firstborn's lead. The firstborn's power in Egypt represented a society where political might and influence was used against the Jews. The Torah is explicit that every family was impacted by *Makkat Bechorot*, and every household lost a firstborn, from Pharaoh's house to the family of the servant and handmade (see above), reflecting that society as a whole was flawed. Rashi on Shemot 12:30 based on the Midrash goes further, stating that immorality -one of the deepest statements of arrogance, irresponsibility and misuse of power - was so common in Egypt that children died who were not known to be firstborn, but were firstborn due to their lineage stemming from forbidden relationships.

The firstborn were singled out because of the failures they represented in Egyptian society. They were killed and made the scapegoat, but their loss saw Egyptian political structures and family units turned upside-down across the nation and across the economy - that is, there was

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<sup>5</sup> In Halacha, the bechor does of course inherit double. See Choshen Mishpat 277:1.

devastation in every single Egyptian family unit, all of which had a status above the Jewish slaves they were about to set free. By removing the firstborn as the top level of power within Egyptian society, that entire society, and its failures, crumbled as a consequence.

## The Role Of Hashem's Climactic Plague

By Hashem attacking the bechor, the symbol of Egyptian exploitation and misuse of power was also attacked. The entire structure of Egypt and its society was condemned and taken apart. For us today, that is why so many *mitzvot* relate to *Makkat Bechorot* specifically - the references in Parashat Bo describing the *mitzvah* of Tefillin and the inclusion of "*kadesh li kol bechor*" within our Tefillin, the firstborn of our children having to be redeemed, the firstborn animal having to be offered as *korban*, and so on. Our focus in these *mitzvot* is not just on our departure from Egypt, but *Makkat Bechorot* specifically, because of the impact on not only Egyptian culture and society, but worldwide - Egypt was of course preeminent in the ancient world, and Hashem's attack on it was intended to be iconic of changing times and value systems.

To repeat the *pasuk* from earlier (Shemot 4: 22-23):

*Then you shall say to Pharaoh, "Thus says the L-rd: Israel is My firstborn son." I have said to you, "Let My son go, that he may worship Me," yet you refuse to let him go. Now I will slay your firstborn son."*

*Makkat Bechorot* was not just about Egypt and destroying one culture of firstborn responsibility, but also about putting the responsibility of firstborn status on the Jews instead. The Tur notes that, to capture the themes of *geulah* between Shema and Shemoneh Esrei in Shacharit and Maariv, we could just mention our departure from Egypt, but we specifically have to mention *Makkat Bechorot*. No other plagues; just that one. What makes it so iconic and symbolic?

Rav Soloveitchik, in his series of essay on Pesach entitled "Festival of Freedom", says Judaism has a different view of the *bechor*: it is not about the *bechor* using physical power and value as it was in Egypt, but, for us, a *bechor* has greater responsibility and mission - any benefit given to a *bechor* in the Torah is to be used for that purpose. *Makkat Bechorot* marks the change in society from the Egyptian view of a firstborn, to that of Judaism.

The Jewish view of a "*bechor*" also changed within the Torah at the Golden Calf, when we know that the firstborn actually lost their rights as a traditional *bechor* - in Judaism, a "*bechor*" effectively no longer means someone who was actually born first, but a person committed to a spiritual legacy as part of a firstborn nation (rather than an individual), as Hashem says to Moshe above: "Israel is my firstborn". For us, being a "*bechor*" should be about how we live, how we relate to Hashem, how we treat others and exercise what ability (and power) we might have; it is not a question of birth anymore, but a question of our place within our firstborn nation and the individual responsibility we take on as part of the greater whole.

## A change in worldview

*Makkat Bechorot* is not just punitive, but about a shift in how we should view power. In Egypt, power was misused to abuse those less fortunate. Hashem uses *Makkat Bechorot* to replace the

Egyptian system of the firstborn with the Jewish system of the firstborn, to develop and grow holiness and sanctity. *Makkat Bechorot* took place to create (or restore) social justice, and to make normal the use of power mercifully and selflessly for the larger good. A Jewish firstborn is holy, has to be redeemed, and has a sense of mission, and Jews as a nation are the “*bechor*” of Hashem, a firstborn “chosen” not due to us being better than any other nation (the common misconception as to what “chosen” means), but because of a commitment made by our ancestors to live by Hashem and the Torah, and to work constantly to improve the world and treat others fairly, regardless of our or their lineage.

In our Jewish lives, but particularly on *seder* night, it is important we remember that context. Rather than just celebrate our freedom, we should remember the responsibility that freedom places on us, and commit to pursue a world of social justice and freedom for everyone.



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## Deep Dive Into The *Makkot*

Vikki Weinberg

I have often wondered what the reasons were behind each of the plagues (*Makkot*), each one seems a little random and not necessarily connected to the preceding one or to each other. Is Hashem throwing everything He has at Egypt or is there something deeper to be learnt from each *makka*? Do the specifics of each *makka* contain something more profound?

The Haggadah teaches that the miracles that Hashem performed with the *Makkot* can be multiplied numerous ways, leading to the conclusion that there were perhaps as many as fifty miracles in Egypt and two hundred and fifty miracles at the sea. This suggests that the *Makkot* should not just be seen at their face value and we should delve deeper into the miracles of the *Makkot* and what they are trying to teach us.

As we all know there are ten individual *Makkot*, but we see attempts in the Haggadah to not see them as individual plagues but rather to group them together.

There are several divisions and groupings of the *Makkot* in the Haggadah, and below we will look at two of them and try to use them to help us to understand the deeper messages behind the *Makkot*.

### Rabbi Yehuda's Three Groups

After we have sung/mumbled the ten *Makkot* at the *seder* table and our little finger is all sticky with wine, we come to the familiar grouping proposed by Rabbi Yehuda: "*Datzach, Adash, Bachab*." This groups the *Makkot* into the following three groups:

Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
1.Blood	4.Wild Animals	7.Hail
2.Frogs	5.Pestilence	8.Locusts
3.Lice	6.Boils	9.Darkness + First Born

Is this simply a mnemonic memory trick or is there another reason for this grouping?<sup>1</sup> If we look closer at the three groups and the narrative in the Torah around them we can see several similarities:

- The first two of every group have a warning (1+2, 4+5, 7+8) the third one in every group does not (3,6,9).<sup>2</sup>
- Further to this, the warning in the first one in each group was in the morning (1,4,7), a time is not specified for the warning for the second one in each group (2,5,8).

<sup>1</sup> Rashi and the Abarbanel explain that the reason for Rabbi Yehuda's grouping is to show that this is the correct order of the *Makkot*, rather than the different ordering which can be found in Sefer Tehillim in psalms 78 and 105.

<sup>2</sup> Shemot 7:17, 7:27, 8:17, 9:3, 9:17, 10:4. Cf. also Ritva.

- There is a commonality in where they take place<sup>3</sup> – The first two in Group 1 came from the water (1+2), the first two in Group 2 from the earth (4+5) and the first two in Group 3 from the sky/heavens (7+8).

Nechama Leibowitz explains that the first *makka* in each group, plagues 1,4,7 are prefaced by Hashem saying why he will bring this particular *makka*.<sup>4</sup> For the first group this is to prove the existence of Hashem - 'in order that you should know that Hashem is G-d'<sup>5</sup>. The second group demonstrates Hashem's role in human events - 'in order that you should know that I am G-d in the midst of the land'<sup>6</sup>, and the third group demonstrates Hashem's mastery over nature - 'in order that you should know that there is none like me in all the land.'<sup>7</sup>

The grouping by Rabbi Yehudah is therefore showing us that while one of the purposes of the *Makkot* was to destroy Egypt, another purpose of the *Makkot* was for the Egyptians and also Bnei Yisrael to know and realise that Hashem is G-d. In ancient Egypt, the Pharaohs were worshipped and treated like gods, the *Makkot* were to make sure that everyone could see that Pharaoh is NOT a god and there is a power greater than him, Hashem.

What about the significance of where the *Makkot* took place? The Maharal points out that, according to Rabbi Yehuda's groupings, each group takes place in a different space - Water, Earth, Heaven. Rabbi Joe Wolfson builds on this further linking this back to Bereishit and creation, explaining that the same commonality can be found in terms of what was created on each day - days 1 and 4 relate to the sky/heavens, days 2 and 5 to water and days 3 and 6 to the earth.<sup>8</sup> By linking the *Makkot* with creation, this grouping may be showing us that the *Makkot* symbolised the reversal of creation; Hashem was destroying a nation. The Egyptians were challenging Hashem's authority and Hashem threatened to return them to the abyss and darkness existing before the world was created.

## Two Groups Of Plagues

Another grouping detailed in the Haggadah during *maggid* is as follows

With a mighty hand: this is the **dever** – **pestilence**. As is written: 'Hashem's hand will be against the livestock in the field, the horses, donkeys, camels, cattle and sheep – a very heavy pestilence' (Shemot 9)

And with an outstretched arm: this is the **sword (death of the firstborn)**, as is written: And an unsheathed sword in his hand, stretched out over Jerusalem.

This appears to be implying that we should see the plagues as two - Pestilence and Death of the firstborn, and not as ten.

Why would these two be singled out as being the two primary plagues?

<sup>3</sup> Shemot 7:19, 8:1, 8:20, 9:6, 9:23, 10:13.

<sup>4</sup> Studies on the Haggadah from the teachings of Nechama Leibowitz.

<sup>5</sup> Shemot 7:17.

<sup>6</sup> Shemot 8:18.

<sup>7</sup> Shemot 9:14.

<sup>8</sup> www.joewolfson.com.

When I discussed this with my oldest daughter Sophia she said that these two plagues were the ones that directly ended in death -of animals and humans- and so were the key ones for showing that Hashem is the one in charge of life and death.

Rabbi Joe Wolfson, offers another explanation by casting our minds back to to another King - King David.<sup>9</sup> In the Book of Shmuel we learn that King David wanted to count *Bnei Yisrael*.<sup>10</sup> Although his advisors questioned this, as counting people is generally not something that is meant to be done, the text says '*vayechazak*' David.<sup>11</sup> His resolve was hardened and he wanted to count the people.

As a result he incurs the wrath of Hashem who offers King David a choice of three punishments – three years of famine, three months of being chased/killed by enemies, three days of pestilence in the land. After not wanting to choose Hashem chooses the punishment of pestilence.

There are several parallels to our story of the *Makkot*: A King does not listen to his advisors, and his resolve is 'strengthened.' Perhaps the text wants to suggest that King David has done something akin to Pharaoh.

There may be several reasons why people may be counted for legitimate reasons, for example in Ki Tisa when Moshe counts the people in order to know the contribution to the *Mishkan*.<sup>12</sup> However, the count here performed by King David seems to be purely to know the strength of his kingdom, he seems to have fallen prey to the key challenge of kingship, that which Shmuel warned about when the people asked him for a King in the first place, remembering that the King is not the most powerful, Hashem is. For this he was punished with pestilence.

Looking further at King David, his other primary sin which is detailed in the book of Shmuel is that with Bat Sheva and her husband Uriyah.<sup>13</sup> This contributes to instability in the family, and ultimately in his children rebelling against him, several of his sons (including his firstborn) die while he is alive.

When King David came close to thinking that he was the highest being, that he was above the law, he was presented with the punishments of Pestilence and Killing of the firstborn, the two plagues singled out in this grouping above.

This final parallel is showing us the dangers of becoming that of Egypt, of getting so caught up in our own success that we forget about Hashem, forget who is in charge of this world. Unlike the Egyptians, King David repents for he knows that Hashem truly rules the world. This is perhaps the mark of *Bnei Yisrael* more than anything else.

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<sup>9</sup> [www.joewolfson.com](http://www.joewolfson.com).

<sup>10</sup> Shmuel II, Chapter 24.

<sup>11</sup> Shmuel II, Chapter 24:4.

<sup>12</sup> Shemot 30:11.

<sup>13</sup> Shmuel II, Chapter 11.

The purpose of the *Makkot* was to destroy Egypt and enable Bnei Yisrael to go free, but they also contain many deep messages for us and the world. They teach the world that Hashem is G-d, He created the world, and it is He who is ultimately in charge of life and death.



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