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True Freedom

By Rabbi Yosef Adler

The questions from the paragraph of Ha Lachma Anya are well known: 1. Why does the Haggadah open with this reference to Matzah? 2. Why do we extend an invitation for people to join us - "Kol Dichfin Yeitei VeYeichol"? This obligation is applicable every day and even more so on all of the Chagim, not just Pesach.

Rambam writes, "KeSheHu Ocheil VeShoteh Chayav LeHa'achil LaGeir LaYatom VeLa'Almanah Im She'ar Ha'Ani'im Ha'Umlalim. Aval Mi SheNo'eil Daltot Chatzeiro Ve'Ocheil VeShoteh Hu UVanav Ve'Ishto Ve'Eino Ma'achil UMashkeh La'Ani'im ULeMarei Nefesh Ein Zo Simchat Mitzvah Ela Simchat Kreiso," "While eating and drinking, one must feed the stranger, the orphan, the widow, and other poor unfortunates. Anyone, however, who locks the doors of his courtyard and eats and drinks along with his wife and children, without giving anything to eat and drink to the poor and the desperate, does not observe a religious celebration but indulges in the celebration of his stomach" (Rambam Hilchot Shevitat Yom Tov 6:18). Feeding one's family while ignoring the poverty stricken is not a Simchah of a Mitzvah but only a Simchah of one's stomach.

Furthermore, the night of the Seder is the one night of the year when no one should be in need of any provisions for the Seder, as the Mishna in Pesachim states, "Ve'Afilu Ani Lo Yochal Ad SheYaseiv VeLo Yifchetu Lo Mei'Arba Kosot Shel Yayin Afilu Mil HaTamchui," "Even a poor person can't eat until he reclines and he can't lessen then four cups of wine even from the charity-plate" (Pesachim 10:1). Everyone is to be provided with all the necessary provisions for the Seder. Why then the necessity to extend this informal invitation at the beginning of the Seder?

In addressing the second question, the Rav suggested that a slave lacks the capacity to acquire and possess anything personally as the Gemara in Pesachim says, "Kol Mah

SheKanaH Eved KanaH Rabo," "Anything a slave bought, his master bought" (Pesachim 88b). Whatever a slave acquires is automatically transferred to his master. Now that we have reached the Festival of Freedom, an individual can believe that any of his personal possessions belong to him exclusively. However, we must realize that even though we escaped the bondage of Paraoh, we are still slaves in the service of Hashem, as it is written, "Ki Li Bnei Yisrael Avadim," "Because Bnei Yisrael are servants to Me" (VaYikra 25:55).

In order to demonstrate this idea that we recognize that all our personal possessions truly belong to Hashem, we suggest: "Kol Dichfin Yeitei VeYeichol" - let anyone who is in need join and share our meal and the provisions I have accumulated, for this meal truly belongs to Hashem and I have no personal ownership over them." It could even be seen as self-reflective, inviting, as it were, yourself to the meal, acknowledging that you are a guest of the Owner.¹

This idea can also address the first question, explaining why we emphasize at the very outset Ha Lachma Anya, referring to Matzah, describing it as the bread of the poor. Matzah actually has a dual symbolism.

Rabban Gamliel suggest later in the Haggadah that Matzah is a symbol of redemption because as the Jews were preparing to leave Egypt, they were in such a rush that their bread did not have a chance to rise. But Matzah is also a commemoration of servitude, since the Jews ate Matzah throughout their slavery in Egypt. As poor people, they never had the luxury (or leisure time) of allowing their bread to rise. Once again, we remind everyone that even though we observe the Festival of Freedom and may have accumulated enormous wealth, we eat the bread of the poor and recognize that we are still in servitude to Hashem.

Rav Yoel bin Nun adds another idea. Matzah is the bread of all slaves and poor people throughout the region. Only the free and rich ate Chametz, leavened bread. One could then ask why, in order to observe Pesach, the Torah does not legislate that we must eat Chametz and prohibit the consumption of even a morsel of Matzah. Why do we eat only Matzah and remove all Chametz products from our possession? To teach us that although we observe the Festival of Freedom, our ancestors did not attain true freedom until they reached Har Sinai and received the Torah. On the Yom Tov of Shavuot, Zeman Matan Torateinu, we will offer a special Korban Shetei HaLechem that was made into Chametz, whereas all other Korbanot remained unleavened. We eat Chametz when we are truly free, and Shavuot. But until then,

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on Pesach, we continue to eat matzah - Ha Lachma Anya Di Achalu Avhatanya.

Rambam's text of this paragraph begins "BiBehilu Yatzanu MiMitzrayim," "With great haste, we left Egypt". This obviously is a reference to the Pasuk "Ki BeChipazon Yatzata MiMitzrayim," "For you departed from the land of Egypt hurriedly" (Devarim 16:3), and Targum Yonatan translates it as "Arum BiBehilu Nafketun Mei'Ara DeMitzrayim".

The Rav asked, Why is the idea of Chipazon, haste, so critical that according to Rambam it opens the Maggid section of the Haggadah? One of the laws governing the status of a slave is that he is exempt from Mitzvot Asei SheHaZeman German, time-bound positive commandments.

A slave is oblivious to time. The essential character of the organic world is the cycle of birth, life, and death. The experience of time has three aspects: retrospection, an ability to re-experience the past, exploration, anticipating things yet unborn, events not yet in existence, that are still in the future, and appreciation of the present moment as a possession granted by Hashem. Without retrospection, there can be no Sippur Yetzi'at Mitzrayim. The Seder itself is reliving the past. Without a historical experience, this type of time experience is lost. Memory is more than a storehouse; it is a reliving of what is remembered. In exploration, we move from reminiscing to anticipation. To live in time to be committed to a great past and a promising future. This awareness also contains moral awareness, a readiness to mold a future which, in turn, suggests a freedom to make decisions, i.e., a moral commitment to intervene. The Haggadah starts with hindsight, "Avadim Hayinu LeParoh BeMitzrayim," "We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt" and concludes with foresight, "Nishmat Kol Chai Tevareich Et Shimcha Hashem Elokeinu," "The Neshamah of all living things bless Your name Hashem our God".

The above can only be achieved by those who value the present, the third aspect, namely, appreciation, prizing each moment as precious. In each fraction of a second one can realize or destroy visions. Halachah, too, is very time-conscious; the difference of one minute before or one minute after sunset can make the difference of the severest punishments for performing Melachah on Shabbat or Yom Tov or for eating on Yom Kippur. One minute can determine whether we have fulfilled the Mitzvah of Keri'at Shema or violated the prohibition of Notar in Korbanot. This time-awareness is a singular gift of free human beings, who can use it or abuse it, while to the slave it is meaningless. Free human beings who look at a watch want to slow time, while slaves couldn't care less because their time belongs not to them but to their master. Since they cannot manage their time they become

insensitive to it. Slaves feel that day and night are the same. As the Torah states, "BaBokeir Tomar Mi Yitein Erev UVaErev Mi Yitein Bokeir," "In the morning you will say 'if only it was evening' and in the evening you will say 'if only it was morning'" (Devarim 28:67). What was not done today will be done tomorrow. There is no great excitement about future opportunities, and for this reason, any time-bound Mitzvah is not for slaves.

VaYasev Elokim Et Ha'Am

By Rabbi Shlomo Adelman

Rav Chaim Palagi (1788-1868--Chief Rabbi of Turkey) explains in the name of his Rebbi, the Rosh Yosef, why Chazal gave us the Mitzvah of Heseibah, reclining, on the night of the Seder (Haggada Chaim LeRosh). The Pasuk states (Shemot 13:18), "VaYasev Elokim Et Ha'Am," Hashem turned the people around. Chazal learn from this Pasuk that on the Seder night one should eat BeHeseibah, while leaning to the left. In addition, the Midrash (Parashat BeShalach 20:18) states that from here Chazal learn that even a poor person should recline on the night of the Seder, for this is what Hashem did for Bnei Yisrael in the desert. We see here that the word Heseibah has two meanings: "turning around" and "reclining".

We must understand why we derive the concept of "Heseibah," reclining, from the Pasuk, "Hashem turned the people around." The Ktav Sofer (Avraham Shmuel Binyamin Sofer 1815-1871) explains that it is the obligation of every single person to recline on the night of the Seder and to adorn his table with gold and silver. This reminds us of Cheirut, freedom, to glorify the miracles Hashem does for us. In addition, we relate how we began as slaves in Mitzrayim, and Hashem took us out and gave us an abundance of wealth. A rich person tends to be glad and has a heart full of joy, so he reclines in the manner of the wealthy. A poor person, on the other hand, may not have what to eat. He can barely afford Matzot and he has no fine utensils to display. Still, he is obligated to recline and feel like a king.

Chazal teach that when a person contemplates all the miracles that happened in Mitzrayim, his heart will be full of trust in Hashem. Bnei Yisrael were in a grave situation in Mitzrayim. The Mitzrim were chasing them with chariots, but in a short span of time everything turned around completely. The Mitzrim drowned at sea and Bnei Yisrael were saved and even collected the riches of the Mitzrim. Although Bnei Yisrael hadn't yet received the Torah, Hashem saved them because in the future they would receive the Torah. We see how Hashem never forsakes those who fear Him. This is why we recline at the Seder, to show that our hearts are full of trust that Hashem will never forsake us.

With this idea we can understand the words of the Midrash. "VaYasev Elokim Et Ha'Am." Hashem turned the nation around and had Bnei Yisrael go in the opposite

direction. Even a poor person is obligated to eat while reclining because the act of reclining serves as a lesson to help us understand the ways of Hashem. In one single moment everything turned around, MiShibud LeGe'ulah!

Fear Versus Destruction

By Shimmy Greengart ('21)

One of the highlights of Maggid is the Ten Plagues. We read through all of them, and then do some fancy arithmetic to increase the number. We start with 10, then 60, then 240, then 300. This leads to the impression that all the Makkot are just indistinguishable numbers, but that is not true. The impact of Dam, where large parts of Egypt's water supply turned to blood for a week, was not nearly as large as that of Makkat Bechorot, where a big chunk of Egypt's population dropped dead.

Another example of Makkot that aren't quite the same are Barad and Arbeh. Barad brought a hailstorm, while Arbeh brought a plague of locusts. Unlike Dam and Makkat Bechorot, these are fairly similar. Both destroy large chunks of Pharaoh's crop supply and both terrify him enough to call Moshe back to remove the plague, but they have significant differences.

Barad is the terror of the unknown. Egypt is a very dry country, so any kind of rain is exceedingly rare, and lightning even rarer. It is also a very hot land. A giant, nation-sized lightning-filled hailstorm is completely unprecedented. As if to make things even more extreme, Barad is also one of the more supernatural plagues, with fire inside the hail. The first thing that Hashem has Moshe tell Pharaoh about the plague is that nothing like it has happened from the day Egypt was founded until now (and Egypt is about 3000 years old at this point). When Pharaoh asks Moshe to remove the plague, he says, "VeRav MiHiyot Kolot Elokim UBarad," "that there may be an end of God's thunder and of hail" (Shemot 9:28). This divine lightning and hail are too much for him, terrifying him. He never mentions the destruction they caused, only the fear.

If Barad is the fear of the unknown, Arbeh is the fear of the well-known danger. Egypt was no stranger to locusts. The first evidence of locusts comes from there, so Pharaoh would know the danger well. Whenever a swarm appears, it immediately starts eating everything green it can get to, multiplying like crazy. Whenever it eats everything in an area, it flies away to wherever the winds will take it. Plagues of locusts (as the largest groups are called) can devastate entire countries, and can get so thick that they block out the sun. Compared to Barad, Arbeh is a much more natural plague: it involves a plague of locusts riding to Egypt on the wind, eating everything in sight. The only difference between this one and a normal one is size: the Makkah covers the entire nation at once. While Moshe does tell Pharaoh that the plague

is nothing like anything seen before in Egypt, he says so at the very end of his description, not at the beginning like with Barad.

Pharaoh's reaction to Arbeh contains much less fear. He merely requests that Moshe remove "HaMavet HaZeh," "this death" (Shemot 10:17). He knows locusts, so he isn't afraid of them, merely acknowledging that if the plague isn't stopped, all of Egypt will die from famine. But more than that, there is an intense reaction before the plague. Regarding Barad, Pharaoh received the warning, and some of his more God-fearing servants removed their slaves and animals from the fields. They cannot really understand what this plague is, so if they believe in Hashem, they will take precautions, and if they don't, they won't. But every Egyptian knows the death brought by a plague of locusts. So Pharaoh's advisors immediately turn on Pharaoh and demand that he let the Jews go: "HaTerem Teida Ki Avedah Mitzrayim?" "Do you not yet know that Egypt is lost?" (Shemot 10:7). Half of Egypt's food supply has already been destroyed. Pharaoh in the end does not let us go, when he realizes that the Jews have no intentions of returning. But this is the closest he has come so far.

When we read through the plagues in the Haggadah, they might seem pretty similar, but they aren't. They each operate in a totally different way. Even Barad and Arbeh, which have identical results - destroying half of Egypt's food supply - are different. Barad brings the terror of the unknown, Arbeh brings the destruction of the known. We can't lose sight of the individual plagues from the list.

Chad Gadya: What's the Connection to Pesach?

By Kivi Davis ('23)

At the very end of the Seder, the last song of Nirtzah in virtually all Haggadot, is Chad Gadya: the story of the poor goat bought for 2 Zuz that was eaten by a cat that was bit by a dog that was hit by a stick, so and so forth, up until HaKadosh Baruch Hu comes and kills the Malach HaMavet. This seems like a very random story to put at the end of the Haggadah that mainly focuses on Yetzi'at Mitzrayim. At this point, it is very late and most people just want to go to bed already. Why add a long story about a goat that seems to have nothing to do with the Seder or the holiday of Pesach at all?

The Aruch HaShulchan, Rav Yechiel Michel HaLevi Epstein, answers this question in his Haggadah, Leil Shimurim. Chad Gadya is all about the story starting at Mechirat Yosef all the way until Mashi'ach BiMeheirah BeYameinu. The goat we are talking about is the goat that the brothers of Yoseif killed to trick Ya'akov, their father, into thinking that Yoseif was dead. The Aramaic word Zaben, which most Haggadot translate as to buy (my father bought

for 2 Zuz), also means to sell. The word Abba not only refers to a father but is also Lashon Chashivut, language that connotes importance. When Yoseif rose up in Mitzrayim to become the 2nd in command, all the Mitzrim called him Avreich, as it says in the Pasuk, "VaYikre'u Lefanav Avreich," "And they called out in front of him, Avreich" (BeReishit 41:43). Targum Onkelos translates Avreich into aramaic as "Abba LeMalka." The brothers sold Yoseif, they sold him for 20 silver pieces, which divided among the 10 brothers is 2 Zuz a piece. That's what "DeZaben Abba BeTrei Zuzei" means, Yoseif HaTzaddik was sold for 2 Zuz.

Rav Epstein continues that the cat that ate the goat is a reference to the brothers based on the Gemara in Berachot. The Gemara says, "HaRo'eh Chatul BaChalom BeAtra DeKaru Lei ... Shinara Na'aseh Lo Shinui Ra," "One who sees a cat in a place where they call it a Shinara (as opposed to a Shunara), it is a sign that he will undergo a change for the worse" (Berachot 56b). The brothers of Yoseif were Tzaddikim but they underwent a change for the worse with the whole incident with Yoseif.

Taking this even further, the Aruch HaShulchan brings up the Midrash in Shemot Rabbah that says, "Ein HaKadosh Baruch Hu Rodeh Et HaResha'im Ela BeMateh. VeLamah? Lefi SheNimshelu LaKelavim, SheNe'emar 'VeYashuvu La'Erev Yehemu KaKelev.' KeSheim SheDarko Shel Kelev Lilkot BeMakel ... Amar Lahem HaKadosh Baruch Hu Paraoh Rasha Hu ... Hakeh Oto BeMakel," "Hashem only disciplines the wicked with a staff. Why? Because the wicked are compared to dogs it says 'And they return each evening crying like dogs' [Tehillim 59:15], just like the dog gets struck with lashes ... Hashem said to them 'Paraoh is wicked, strike him with your staff'" (Shemot Rabbah 9:2). The stick that hit the dog that bit the cat is referring to Moshe's staff that hit Paraoh with the Ten Plagues after Paraoh was very harsh to the Jews.

Next comes the fire. The Gemara in Yuma says that the Yeitzer HaRa to do Avodah Zara is considered fire. Bnei Yisrael gave in to this Yeitzer HaRa and worshiped Avodah Zara, which burnt Moshe's staff that saved us from Paraoh. We know that the Torah is a Nimshal for water, and anyone who is "thirsty" should learn Torah. The Torah is the water in Chad Gadya that quenched the fire of Avodah Zara.

In BeReishit Rabbah 2:4 we know that the Greeks combatted Torah with an ox, their god. The Greeks told Bnei Yisrael, "Kitvu Al Keren HaShor She'Eini Lachem Cheilek BeiLokei Yisrael," "Write on the horn of the ox that you have no part in the God of Israel". Then comes the Shochet who shechts the ox. The Chashmona'im were Kohanim, who usually shecht oxen in the Beit HaMikdash, but here they shechted Antiochus and the Greeks and their ox.

The Malach HaMavet in Chad Gadya is a reference to the Romans who burnt down the Beit HaMikdash. Just like the Malach HaMavet destroys what is in its way (like by Makkat

Bechorot), so too, the Romans destroyed what was in their way, namely the Beit HaMikdash. Chad Gadya ends off with HaKadosh Baruch Hu killing the Malach HaMavet. This is obviously a reference to the coming of Mashi'ach and the building of the third Beit HaMikdash.

Rav Epstein concludes his Haggadah with the statement, "HaRachaman Yezakeinu BeVi'at Go'eil Tzedek UBeVanav Beit HaMikdash BiMeheirah BeYameinu Amein". May we be Zocheh to see the ending of Chad Gadya, Hashem shechting the Malach HaMavet, the coming of Mashi'ach, speedily in our days.

Thanking Hashem

By Yis Kamnitsky ('22)

Towards the end of the Seder during Nirtzah, there is a paragraph called "Vayehi BaChatzi HaLailah" which talks about all the miracles Hashem did for us at night throughout history. Many ask, "why is this here and why do we need/care to list all of these things that Hashem did for us throughout all of history?" To answer this question, we will examine a Machloket between Beit Shammai and Beit Hillel about Hallel at the Seder. Beit Shammai say that at the seder we should say the first paragraph of Hallel at Maggid and then start with Betzeit Yisrael (second paragraph) in Hallel after the meal and benching. Beit Hillel say that at the seder we say the first two paragraphs of Hallel during Maggid and start with Lo Lanu during Hallel after the meal and benching.

Two main questions emerge from this Machloket. The first question is why do we need to say part of Hallel during Magid. The second is what are Beit Shammai and Beit Hillel really arguing about. An answer to the first question is that right after we hear what Hashem did for us, we should say Hallel immediately - after we hear the story - and should not wait until after the meal to start to thank Hashem. An answer to the second question - what Beit Shammai and Beit Hillel are arguing about - is that Beit Shammai say, since you need to thank Hashem right after Magid, you should only say the first paragraph, which thanks Hashem in very broad ways, while we should save the paragraph about Yetzias Mitzrayim for after the meal. This way, we can connect it to the fourth cup which is the cup of Hallel. Beit Shammai want to show the importance of the fourth cup, the cup of Hallel, so they say to keep the paragraph of Yetzias Mitzrayim for after the meal. However, Beit Hillel say that in Maggid, right after we hear about Yetziat Mitzrayim, we should say the paragraph of thanking Hashem for taking us out of Mitzrayim. So, according to Beit Hillel, what is the significance of Hallel and the cup of Hallel after the meal if we don't even mention Yetziat Mitzrayim then?

The Rav says that anytime we have to thank Hashem for one thing we also have to thank Hashem for all that he does. For example, during Birkat HaMazon we begin by thanking Hashem for food but then we proceed to also thank Him for Eretz Yisrael and other things as well. Similarly, in Birkat HaGomel it says, “HaGomel LeChayavim Tovot SheGemalani Kol Tov,” “The one who rewards the undeserving with goodness, has rewarded me with abundant goodness.” We thank Hashem for all that he does for us and not just for the thing we are saying the Bracha for. So too in regards to Pesach: at the Seder we thank Hashem for all other things that He does and not just Yetziat Mitzrayim. Hillel says we split it up and say the paragraph thanking Hashem for Yetziat Mitzrayim before the meal. This way we can show that not only are we saying Hallel for Yetziat Mitzrayim, but we are thanking Hashem for all that he does. To emphasize this, we do not say the paragraph thanking Hashem for Yetziat Mitzrayim after the meal with the cup of Hallel.

Rav Adler explains that what the Rav said about Hallel answers our original question about why we say the paragraph of “Vayehi BaChatzi HaLailah.” Since we are thanking Hashem for Makat Bechorot and how he did it for us at night, now we have to thank Hashem for all He did for us at night throughout history. That's why we have this paragraph. I believe this is very important, especially for this hard time, because hopefully at the Seder we can realize all the Bracha Hashem gives to us even in the bad times. We should not only thank Hashem for Yetziat Mitzrayim but also for all that he does for us - even the small things. If we really thank Hashem for everything, hopefully next year, we can all be together in Yerushalayim for the seder.

Chodesh Ha'Aviv: The Importance of Spring

By Ariel Kryzman ('23)

Adapted from the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe and Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

As we all know, we always celebrate Pesach during the spring, as it says: “*Shamor Et Chodesh Ha'Aviv Ve'Asita Pesach LaHashem Elokecha Ki BeChodesh Ha'Aviv Hotzi'acha Hashem Elokecha MiMitzrayim Lailah,*” “Observe the month of Spring and offer a Passover sacrifice to Hashem your God, for it was in the month of Spring, at night, that Hashem your God freed you from Egypt” (Devarim 16:1). We even call Pesach the Chag Ha'Aviv and add an extra month to the year to observe Pesach during the spring. The question is why do we put such an emphasis on Pesach happening during the Spring? Sure, that was the time when Yetzi'at Mitzrayim took place, but is there a deeper meaning to why Hashem took Bnei Yisrael out of Egypt during the Spring?

To answer this question, we must look at the culture of the Egyptians. The Egyptians had a dependence on nature. Their culture was based on the forces of nature and natural phenomena, and humans who were able to control this nature. For example, there is very little rain in Egypt, but the Egyptians created an irrigation system that turned Egypt into an oasis surrounded by desert. This circumstance led to the Egyptians' idol worship, which was characterized by two features: worshiping the forces of nature and worshiping people who used natural forces for themselves. They also worshiped Pharaoh, who symbolized the Egyptian ideal of the god-man. The Egyptians viewed the world as a collection of natural forces (of which the human element was one), they also had the mindset of “*Kochi Ve'Otzem Yadi Asah Li Et HaChayil HaZeh,*” (Devarim 8:17) that all of their wealth came from their own success. The Egyptians' view led to their extreme paganism, justification of enslavement of foreigners, and cruelties towards the weak in society.

The Egyptians' cultic activities rose to a high during the spring. Spring is the time of the reawakening of nature. When Hashem told Bnei Yisrael that he would take them out of Egypt, he said that they must “[w]ithdraw and take for yourselves a lamb for your families and offer the Pesach (sacrifice)” (Shemot 12:21). They had to “withdraw” from the idolatry of Egypt and offer an Egyptian idol, the lamb, as a sacrifice to Hashem. Bnei Yisrael had to show their Emunah openly and without fear. Moshe promised that when Bnei Yisrael would give the Korban, Pharaoh would urge Bnei Yisrael to leave Egypt during the Spring, at the height of the powers of nature. Bnei Yisrael accepted that there wasn't an assortment of forces of nature, rather there is the one Hashem who rules over the world.

Pesach teaches us to “withdraw” from the idolatries of the land, in whatever form they are disguised. We should do this without fear, even during the time of “spring” when prosperity, technology, and the deification of human achievement are at their height. Unlike the Egyptians, we must remember that prosperity and human achievement come from Hashem.

Maror, the Epitome of Freedom?

By Yoni Zelfkowitz ('22)

As the famous song goes: “On Pesach, we celebrate with Matzah and Maror on the Seder plate, Ma Nishtana, four cups of wine, we eat the Afikoman and we all recline.” One may argue that one of the most memorable moments of the Seder is the eating of the Maror: seeing the faces of family members gradually growing red from all the Chazeret piled onto the already semi-bitter piece of Romain. To quote my classmate Elisha Markovitz, “Maror is less than

yummy.” However, what this obligation of Maror comes to represent is often overlooked.

As pointed out by my Rebbe, Rabbi Chaim Jachter, throughout Torah life, in order to truly grasp Torah and Torah life more deeply, we must learn to extract golden apples from their silver mesh: “Tapuchei Zahav BeMaskiot Kasef” (Mishlei 25:11). From the time we were little children learning about the holiday of Pesach for the first time, we all have heard the Drashah that the Maror, due to its bitterness, is supposed to remind us of the bitter slavery Bnei Yisrael experienced in Mitzrayim. This Drashah would constitute the silver mesh. In what other way can we understand the message of Maror to constitute the golden apple? One way of truly grasping at this golden apple would be to say that Maror may actually represent Cheirut after all. Maror is defined by Rashi as “Kol Esev Mar Nikrah Maror VeTzivam Le’echol Mar Zecher LeVayemareru Et Chayeiheim,” “Every bitter herb is called Maror. He commanded them to eat something bitter as a reminder of ‘And they made their lives bitter’” (Shemot 12:8, Rashi s.v. UMatzot Al Merorim). Rashi is clearly highlighting that Maror is, in essence, defined by anything intensely bitter. In fact, the Arizal mentions that the word “Maror” has the same gematria as that of “Mavet” (death). This parallel between the two is exactly what leads to the Geulah. Why were we only in Mitzrayim for 210 years? The answer lies in the fact that it was so bad for those 210 years that it was like those 400 years of suffering were condensed into a time of 210 years. Therefore, the sense of bitterness of Mitzrayim was not only integral to slavery but also to the Geulah. The Geulah happened so much earlier because of this condensation. Rav Matisyahu Salomon notes that when we talk about Maror we focus on Avodah, or work. We even mention it four times in the small paragraph on Maror. He notes that the word Avodah is connected to Avodat Hashem. The Avodah of the Maror was so intense and its extremely bitter nature actually prepared us to have an easier time connecting and doing well with our Avodat Hashem: all the blood sweat and tears for Avodat Hashem. So, Maror really represents our growth from Avodah to Avodah - the Avodah in Mitzrayim to our Avodat Hashem.

Lifting Us Up

By Rafi Cornick ('22)

At the beginning of Hallel, which we say at the end of Maggid, we say “Mekimi Mei’Afar Dal Mei’Ashpot Yarim Evyon,” “He raises the needy from the dust and lifts up the poor from the refuse heap” (Tehillim 113:7). When we approach Hashem, we are often afraid, or at least uncomfortable, because we think that God is too holy for us, or that we are not nearly holy enough for Him. In order to communicate with God, we think that we have to make a

choice between bringing Hashem down to our level or thinking that we are on His level of greatness.

When we daven to Hashem we must recognize that although Hashem is much holier than us, we have an incredible opportunity to speak to Him. Hashem accepts our Tefilot no matter who we are.

The Malbim comments that the Pasuk means that not only does Hashem “Mekimi Mei’Afar Dal,” “raise the needy from the dust,” but He also “Mei’Ashpot Yarim Evyon,” “lifts up the poor from the refuse heap”. Malbim understands this on a literal level, saying that the Hashem raises the needy, and the second half of the Pasuk is someone even needier than the first half, and “Lo Levad SheYakim Oto, Ki Gam Mei’Ashpot Yarim Evyon Lehosho Berum Olam,” “He not only raises [the poor man], he ‘lifts him up’, meaning he returns to an honorable stature among men.” This can also be understood with our reading. Hashem will not only raise us to His level if we’ve reached some ‘Beinoni’ type status, but He will even raise us up from the lowest of the lows to the highest high. Finally, this type of phrasing is seen used elsewhere, in Shmuel I 2:8. We see in context there that Chanah is praising Hashem for blessing her with a child. She speaks of Hashem’s great power, saying that He is “Meimit UMechayeh,” “The killer and the giver of life” (2:6), He is “Morish UMA’ashir,” “the maker of rich and poor people” (2:7), and finally “Meikim Mei’Afar Dal Mei’Ashpot Yarim Evyon” (2:8). If physically poor and rich people are referred to in the preceding Pasuk, what can be the purpose of this one? It must be referring to Hashem’s ability to raise one’s spiritual level purely based on his or her wanting to communicate with Him.

When we say “Mekimi Mei’Afar Dal,” we are saying that we do not need to make the choice between bringing God to our level or thinking that we are on His level. Instead, Hashem sees us trying to connect with Him and immediately brings His heart to us, to listen to our davening.

Movement of the People

By Noam Barenholtz ('21)

Being high on the Borei Olam reminds me of Bob Marley, so I thought I would turn to him for a bit of Pesach guidance. His song “Exodus” defines the title word as a “movement of [Hashem’s] people.” (I’ve taken some liberty with the quote.) This is all well and good as a general definition, but was Yetziat Mitzrayim really a popular uprising in the same way the Haitian Revolution or the Arab Spring were? As we shall see, Pesach really was a movement of the people, but it was one that involved many smaller, personal revolutions, as opposed to a massive popular front.

Although Bnai Yisrael seem like passive recipients of Hashem’s miracles throughout Yetziat Mitzrayim, we

started and finalized the process of salvation. Hashem calls on Moshe to lead Bnai Yisrael out of Egypt only after they “groan because of the slavery and cry out, and their cries go up to God because of the slavery” (Shemot 2:23). The redemption began because we cried out: we remembered Hashem,¹ and He remembered us. Now, it’s true that then ten Makot seem to be a story of Hashem versus Mitzrayim, leaving us out of the story as active participants, yet Chazal also give us a role to play here. “Why did Hashem bring Makat Choshech?” Rashi asks (Rashi, Shemot 10:22 s.v. VaYehi Choshech Afielah). He answers that some Reshaim in Bnai Yisrael did not want to leave Egypt, and they died during the three days of Choshech. Choshech was the second to last Makah, and Bnai Yisrael could no longer let Hashem’s miracles rain (or hail, or swarm) down on them. Of course, only those opposed to the Yetziah were dying now (and not those who were simply apathetic), but the time was fast approaching when Bnai Yisrael would have to make a decision.

This time came on the tenth of Nisan. On this day, Bnei Yisrael were to take the Korban Pesach and guard it until the 14th, when they would slaughter it. Why the four day wait? The Midrash (Mechilta DeRabbi Yishmael 12:6) provides two answers, each of which are key to understanding our redemption. The first, based on a Pasuk in Yechezkel, states that we, with nary a Mitzvah to our name, were unworthy of salvation, so Hashem gave us the blood of the Korban Pesach and the blood of Milah so we could be redeemed: “Ein Notelin Sechar Ela Al Yedei Maaseh,” “One cannot assume reward except through action.” Bnai Yisrael needed to take action in order to leave Egypt, specifically the kind of action that separated them from the Egyptians. Milah was an irrevocable stamp on their body distinguishing them as a nation, and the Korban Pesach, the sacrifice of Egypt’s god, meant they were spurning Egypt, gods and all. You can’t Shecht someone’s god and expect things to remain friendly. The second answer states that Bnai Yisrael could not, at first, respond to Moshe’s message of redemption because they were entrapped in Avodah Zarah. By taking the Korban Pesach, they were rejecting “Gilulei Mitzrayim” (Yechezkel 20:7) and accepting Hashem. The Exodus could not have taken place without Bnai Yisrael choosing for it to take place. In fact, the Halachot of Korban Pesach reflect this fact. A “Ben Neichar,” a foreigner, is forbidden from eating the Korban. Rashi explains that a “Ben Neichar” in this context means “someone who has made his actions foreign to his Father in heaven,” including both a non-Jew and an apostate (Rashi, Shemot 12:43 s.v. Kol Ben Neichar). Rabbi Fridman calls Pesach night “a time of choosing,” where everybody must decide where his or her allegiances lie.

¹ It is unclear if Bnai Yisrael were crying out to Hashem or just merely crying out, but the point remains the same. The Geulah would not have happened without our starting it.

Chazal teach that Hashem destroyed Sedom and saved Lot on Pesach. Lot had to make that same decision we made before we left Egypt. Lot was unsure at first: “VaYitmamah,” “And he delayed” (BeReishit 19:16), but the angels flung him out of the city and ordered him to never look back. He dared not waver, lest he end up a pillar of salt, which, trust me, is not a fun situation to be in. Just like us, Lot was not entirely worthy of salvation, but he accomplished the final commitment that made all the difference. Lot’s wife, not so much.

The Geulah of Pesach does not just involve the collective movement of a nation, but the personal redemption of all of its members. That is why we can tell the Wicked Son that he would not have been redeemed from Egypt. A more apt quote from “Exodus” may be this: “Open your eyes and look within / Are you satisfied with the life you’re living?”

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