

# THE HAGGADAH COMPANION

PESACH 5777



אור הצפון  
NORTHERN LIGHTS

A Project of the  
Minneapolis Community Kollel

2930 Inglewood Avenue South

St Louis Park, MN 55416

952.926.3242

[agoldberger@mnkollel.org](mailto:agoldberger@mnkollel.org)

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SEE THE  
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BOOKLET FOR  
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על  
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לעילוי נשמת צבי בן זאב

# PREFACE

By Rabbi Avigdor Goldberger

Every so often you see something and it hits home.

This happened to me one Shabbos, while I was looking at the sefer Tiv Hatorah by R' Gamliel Rabinowitz. He noted the verse in Parshas Pekudei, which stated that the Jewish People made the Mishkan just like Hashem had commanded.

R' Rabinowitz asks, who made the Mishkan? Wasn't it Betzalel and his team of craftsmen? Why does the Torah give the credit to the entire nation?

Here's his answer: Indeed, the entire Jewish people get the credit. They all contributed to the building of the Mishkan, through donations, labor or other forms of support. Betzalel gets no more credit than anyone else; it was a project of the entire nation.

The import of this wasn't lost on me. Sometimes, we're liable to think, the Kollel finished a mesechta, the Kollel welcomed new families, the Kollel created this learning program, the Kollel published a Haggadah Companion, etc., etc.

It's not true.

There's only the community and everyone who contributes each in their own way: Attending, befriending, supporting, and more.

So, here's the Haggadah Companion that we all published for this Pesach. Use it at your Seder, or any other time throughout Yom Tov, to add a bit more understanding and depth to your Pesach.

It is my hope and prayer that we, as a community, are able to enjoy the full bracha of all that we accomplish for Hashem here in Minneapolis!

Chag Kasher V'sameach!

# OVERVIEW

By Rabbi Avigdor Goldberger

Spring!

The very word has inspired countless poets, authors and dreamers. It revives and invigorates the winter-weary; something we know all too well here in Minneapolis.

Yet, writes R' Shimshon Refoel Hirsch in his striking prose:

*How poor would humanity be if we greeted spring in the same manner as does the human heart which is untouched by the Divine radiance of Judaism: composing odes to spring, roaming the forest and field, inhaling the fragrance of flowers, listening to the sound of the trees whispering to each other- the beetles whirring- the cooing of the birds in flight or in the nests built by love...*

*...How poor would we be if spring came each year only to an unthinking and unfeeling Nature...*

True, spring inspires all, but if we relegate that inspiration to a few weeks in April, we'll be left with a cold, cruel, reality. Blossoms fade, trees die, birds migrate, and animals go into hibernation, and in a few months, we'll once again be huddled in our heated homes staring out the window at a bleak and windswept landscape.

Where did all the beauty go? What did it accomplish?! Better put, as Koheles tells us, everything ends up in the same place- the dust of the earth. Isn't it foolish then to celebrate the empty thrill of a fleeting hope?

Pesach is our answer.

When spring comes, and the air is full of inspiration and freshness, we don't merely sit outside and vacuously take in the scene. Instead, we invite family and friends into our homes, to take the feelings of freedom and rejuvenation that the season arouses and apply it to the eternal.

We are to experience Nature and apply its lessons to our lives:

- The same force that preserves the buds, shoots, insects, and animals over the winter preserves every single one of us during the tough times.
- The life-giving force called Nature gives life to the flora and fauna which compulsorily follow its laws; the life-giving force we know as Hashem sustains those of us who choose to follow His instructions for mankind.

- The same way one would scoff at the farmer who expects a harvest when he hasn't sown; we should scoff at the idea of achievement without effort.
- To quote R' Hirsch: *He who desires springtime must have the courage to exert himself for it. He must have the fortitude to "pass the winter" in loyalty to Hashem; he must not fear it, because of his loyalty to Hashem, he loses his independence that "property," "power," and "food" provide for him... He must know of only one seed that can contain his hopes, and this seed is called: Fulfillment of duty in loyalty to Hashem.*

So, when spring finally comes to Minnesota- and it will- we should use the season as a catalyst to create something which will last long after the blossoms decompose- a renewed commitment to Hashem and an earnest planting which will bear a rich crop; not just in this world, but in the World to Come as well.

Let's take this message to heart, for, as Rav Hirsch writes,

*How poor would we be if in the mind of man with his spirit thirsting for light, with his heart yearning for life, with his soul seeking love, life, peace, and joy, the spring were to fade...*

*...How poor would we be if for the entire span of our life from cradle to grave there fell to our lot only lost love, buried life, peace which had fled, and withered joy; all of which- having been lost- could never return to us in this life! – How poor if we knew to celebrate only the springtime of nature, but not the springtime of our own life!*

# Cups of Salvation

By Rabbi Yisroel Meir Ebstein

One of the major components of the Seder is the mitzvah of the four cups of wine. What do the four cups represent, and what do they add to the primary mitzvah of the Seder, expounding on the story of the Exodus?

A well-known explanation comes from the Rashbam in Pesachim (99b). The four cups of wine correspond to the four expressions of redemption, which Hashem uses in describing the coming Exodus to Moshe Rabbeinu (Shemos 6:6-7). “*V’hotzeisi*” - I will take you out, “*V’hitzalti*” - I will save you, “*V’ga’alti*” - I will redeem you, “*V’lakachti*” - I will take you as a nation.

Rabbeinu Bachaye explains that each one of these terms were referring to successive steps of the redemption from Egypt. First was the cessation of the terrible oppressive labor. Second was Pharaoh sending us out of Egypt. Third was the Splitting of the Sea, and the final step was the Giving of the Torah.

Each step is to be appreciated by itself, for technically Hashem could have given us the bare minimum, basic freedom from the Egyptian oppression, and we would already have much to be grateful for. However, Hashem continued and took us out of the land. Even after we left Egypt, there was still a legitimate fear of the Egyptians having second thoughts. Hashem erased that possibility with the drowning of the Egyptian army in the sea. The final step of the redemption arrived when Hashem gave us the Torah. As our Sages teach us (Avos 6:2), true freedom is only found in those who devote themselves to the study of Torah.

The Medrash in the beginning of Parshas Va’eira has a slightly different twist. The four cups correspond to Hashem’s redemption from the four decrees which Pharaoh imposed on the Jewish People: 1) the backbreaking labor, 2) to throw the baby boys into the Nile River, 3) he slaughtered

Jewish babies to bathe in their blood in an attempt to heal him from his leprosy, and 4) not to give the Jewish people the necessary straw to make the bricks.

According to this Medrash, we have four cups of wine to commemorate the redemption from these four decrees, which weren't yet the final redemption from Egypt. Herein lies a tremendous lesson to be learned and instilled within ourselves and our children. Although we are in exile, and we yearn to be redeemed, we must still appreciate and thank Hashem for all the smaller redemptions, the many times Hashem has saved us and preserved us within our current exile.

Based on the interpretation of the Medrash, R' Mattisyahu Salomon explains that which we say in the Haggadah at the end of V'hi She'amda. "In every generation, they rise up against us to destroy us, and the Holy One, Blessed be He, saves us from their hands." Hashem redeems us from our enemies in every generation, as we await the great and final redemption yet to come. Continues R' Mattisyahu, perhaps this is the reason that at this juncture in the Haggadah of V'hi She'amda, we raise our cups of wine- as a sign of gratitude and thanks for the smaller redemptions we are privileged to receive in every generation. "I will raise the cup of salvations, and I shall invoke the name of Hashem." (Tehillim 116:13)

When we drink the Four Cups, let us internalize the realization that Hashem bestows us with bountiful kindness, beginning with the Exodus from Egypt, continuing through the generations, and culminating with the Final Redemption, may it come speedily, in our days.

# Bread of Unity

By Rabbi Aryeh Cohen

On Pesach there is a commandment to eat matzah, to commemorate the bread of our affliction, as well as the fact that we left Egypt in such a hurry that we didn't have time to let the dough rise. One may ask, why then does the Torah prohibit so strictly any leavened products? When we eat the matzah, why is it necessary to forbid everything else? There is a mitzvah to eat maror, bitter herbs, to remind us of the bitter slavery, yet The Torah does not prohibit all other vegetables? How does not eating chometz connect us with the Exodus from Egypt? Not only do we not eat it, we search and destroy it from our homes. We don't want to have anything to with it. What is the understanding behind this?

Before we answer, let us take a look at the words of R' Zalman Sorotzkin in his Oznam LaTorah. In Parshas Bo, (Shemos 12:1) we are given the mitzvah of sanctifying the new moon and starting the lunar year with the month of Nissan, the month of our redemption. R' Sorotzkin comments that until that point, the months were counted from Tishrei, when the world was created. Now that we were being redeemed, becoming a nation, and ultimately receiving the Torah, we must have a different beginning, one that reflects our spiritual status as a Torah nation, as opposed to reflecting our physical beginnings.

The next verse says, "Speak to the entire congregation," a term that had not been used to describe the Jewish People until that point. Now that we became a Torah nation, we were united into one congregation through the fulfillment of the mitzvos. The people strongly felt that unity as they brought the Pesach offering together- "and the entire congregation of Israel will slaughter the offering." (Ibid., 12:6)

R' Sorotzkin says there was another goal in the people coming together to offer the Korban Pesach, to publicize their belief in the coming redemption. The verse says, "you shall eat the meat on this night" (Ibid. 12:8). They received the

mitzvah two weeks before the actual date of its fulfillment. Why does it say, on *this* night? He explains that just as we have an obligation on the Seder night to see ourselves as if we left Egypt, to change the past to the present; our ancestors had to make the future into the present. Beginning with Rosh Chodesh Nissan, they had to believe with perfect faith that Hashem would redeem them. This was part of the merit that would enable them to leave Egypt. This was difficult. They had to overcome the slave mentality that they had been entrenched in for so long. But they believed, and the redemption came. We must work on our belief in the final redemption the same way!

We see this confidence in the redemption later in the verses, which describe how the people were to eat the Korban Pesach with their clothes and belongings all ready to go. "You shall eat it in haste, it is a Pesach offering to Hashem." (ibid., 12:11) R' Sorotzkin asks, how can it be referred to as a Pesach- Passover- offering if the 'passing over' of the Jewish homes didn't happen yet? He explains that the 'passing over' here refers to something else. The Jewish people were concerned. Hashem had revealed to Avraham in the Covenant Between the Parts that his descendants would be enslaved for 400 years, and it had only been 210 years since the Jews had descended to Egypt? Moshe answered that the intensity of the slavery, as well as the decline of the Jewish People, had hastened the redemption, and Hashem saw that He needed to 'pass over' the remaining 190 years. That is why the belief that they showed through keeping the mitzvos they were given was so important, to secure the merit to be redeemed early.

In verse 15 is the mitzvah of matzah. Matzah is baked quickly to ensure that the dough doesn't rise and become chometz. The Jewish people needed to be redeemed quickly so that they wouldn't 'become chometz' and sink too deeply into the Egyptian impurity. R' Sorotzkin explains that the rising of the chometz from the production of air pockets symbolizes disunity and separation, caused by a foreign idea. Matzah, where the ingredients stick closely together, symbolizes unity.

At the time of the Exodus, unity was essential. Any strife, which could have been easily sparked by those who doubted in Hashem, would have endangered the merit needed for a hasty redemption. Therefore, any chometz, any disunity, had to be removed from the nation.

The Yom Tov of Pesach is to be celebrated "as an eternal decree." (ibid., 12:17) The prerequisites for the Exodus from Egypt remain the same for redemption from our current exile. Every year, when we rid our houses of chometz, and eat the matzah, let us come together in unity as a Torah nation, to fulfill the mitzvos and believe in the coming redemption. It worked back then, and it'll work again!

# Servants in Training

By Rabbi Sender Breiner

In the first of the Ten Commandments, we are told, “I am Hashem your God who has taken you out of the land of Egypt, from the ‘house of slaves’”. Rashi quotes Chazal who point out that these words- ‘from the house of slaves’, can be misunderstood that we were slaves of slaves. This is not true, as the verse in Devarim (7:8) states, “And he redeemed you from the house of slaves, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.” We were slaves to a king, not slaves to slaves. Hence the verse means- ‘from the house of Pharaoh to whom you were slaves.’

What lesson are we supposed to learn from this historical fact? If this is taught in the beginning of the Ten Commandments, it is surely significant to our observance of the Torah.

To understand this, we need to understand the reason for our slavery in Egypt in the first place. The Shelah HaKadosh writes that our slavery in Egypt was preparing us to be true servants of Hashem. Hundreds of years of intense labor ingrained in our DNA the nature of being totally subservient to a master. After the long slavery in Egypt, we were finally ready to accept the Torah and become true servants of Hashem.

This is why it is significant that we were slaves to a king and not to slaves. A slave whose master is also a slave is in a degrading position. On the other hand, a slave of a king, although completely subservient to his master’s requests, is somewhat in a position of nobility. The status of a slave is relative to his master’s status. When we were slaves in Egypt, we were slaves to the king of the leading world power of the time, which ingrained in us a sense of noble loyalty. This was preparing us to one day become servants of the King of kings- Hashem Himself.

Chazal tell us that the Jews in Egypt knew that one day they would be

redeemed from Egypt. Their belief that one day Hashem would redeem them gave them the courage to continue and not despair. Perhaps they also knew that their slavery was preparing them to ultimately be true servants of Hashem. Being 'servants in training' gave them the strength and courage to endure hundreds of years of slavery.

The verse says, (Shemos 2:23) "And it happened during those many days, and the king of Egypt died, and the Children of Israel groaned because of their work and they cried out. Their outcry because of the work went up to God. God heard their moaning, and God remembered." Since the groaning of the Jews followed the death of Pharaoh, it seems that the death *caused* them to groan from their work. Why would his death cause them to groan and cry, surely it should have caused them to rejoice? Rashi explains that the 'death' of Pharaoh was not literal. Rather, it means that he was stricken with tzara'as- leprosy, and to cure himself he slaughtered Jewish infants and bathed in their blood.

The Vilna Gaon explains the verse literally. As long as the king was alive, civil law restrained the Egyptians from torturing the Jews. Once Pharaoh died, the Egyptians treated the Jews as they pleased, imposing more labor than ever before. Therefore, the Jews groaned from the work and prayed to Hashem. As the verses indicate, this cry to Hashem led Him to set the redemption process in motion.

According to what we explained above, perhaps we can add another layer of understanding to this verse. As long as Pharaoh was alive, the Jews felt somewhat of a purpose in their labor. It was ingraining in them a sense of servitude to a king, which was preparing them to accept the yoke of Torah and mitzvos at Mount Sinai. However, once Pharaoh died and the Jews were under the rule of the regular Egyptians, there was no purpose for their labor. This caused them to groan and cry out to Hashem for the redemption.

In the Ten Commandments, Hashem is telling the Jewish People that through our experience in Egypt, we are well-trained for the task He is assigning to us- total devotion to fulfilling the Will of the Master of the world. Now that we have been given the tools for success in our Divine service, we must live up to Hashem's expectations. We must also be aware of the noble and lofty position we have been elevated to. "The servant of a king is also considered a king." (Shevuos 47b)

It is both exhilarating and sobering to consider the greatness we merit as Hashem's servants. This Pesach, let us learn the lessons of the slavery and our salvation and dedicate our lives to serving the King of kings.

# The Exodus: Ultimate Gratitude

By Rabbi Yaakov Eliyahu Mandelbaum

It is not only at the Seder that we have a mitzvah to remember the Exodus from Egypt. There are many more mitzvos (50!) where the Torah says, “zecher l’yetzias Mitzrayim,” in remembrance of the Exodus from Egypt. Another prominent mention of the Exodus is in the first of the Ten Commandments, “I am Hashem your G-d, who took you out of Egypt.”

R’ Aharon Leib Steinman asks, why does Hashem introduce Himself, so to speak, as the One who brought us out of Egypt? The first commandment should rather begin, “I am Hashem your G-d, who sustains you and bestows abundant kindness upon you every second of the day.” This would seem to be a more personal and direct connection with every Jew, in every generation, long after the events of the Exodus from Egypt.

R’ Steinman explains based on a parable of the Chovos HaLevavos. There was once a man who came upon a foundling baby. The man took the baby into his home, and he and his family raised this child as one of their own children. As the child grew up, he learned that he had been adopted at a very young age, but he didn’t think much about it. After all, the only life he knew was with his caring adoptive family.

This kind man was always looking for what he could do to benefit others, and one day he heard of someone who had been arrested while in a foreign country on spurious charges, and was now being held in advance of what was sure to be a show trial. The man sprang into action, and worked tirelessly to secure the release of the hapless prisoner. His efforts paid off,

and the prisoner was freed. Upon his return home, this person made frequent visits and brought lavish gifts to express his profound gratitude to the man who had saved him from a bitter fate.

The adopted boy, who by now was a grown man, reflected on the effusive gratitude of his fellow beneficiary, and thought about his own life. Why wasn't he overcome with gratitude in the same way?

Says the Chovos HaLevavos, the difference is that the prisoner was rescued when he was already an adult, and capable of understanding the tremendous kindness that was done for him. The adopted baby couldn't comprehend at first what was being done for him, and by the time he was older, he was used to it. Being cared for by this man's family was simply his normal life.

Says R' Steinman, this is why there is so much emphasis on remembering the Exodus from Egypt. We receive constant kindness from Hashem, but that began from before we could be conscious of just how much we receive. The miracles of the Exodus, however, took place before the eyes of a people who were very aware of just how much Hashem was doing for them by extracting them from their bondage. This resulted in a more acute feeling of gratitude to Hashem, and an increased desire to express that gratitude by fulfilling Hashem's mitzvos. We certainly need to show our gratitude for everything Hashem does for us, but the strongest feelings of gratitude were motivated by the Exodus from Egypt.

This idea reinforces the importance of our Pesach Seder, and transmitting the story of the Exodus to our children. Generation after generation learns of the great kindness we received when Hashem freed us from slavery, and feels the same debt of gratitude to Hashem. And generation after generation comes to understand our obligation to express that gratitude, by keeping Hashem's Torah and mitzvos. This Pesach, let's take our place in that great chain of gratitude linking back to the Exodus, and ensure that it continues for the next generation!

# Enduring Commitment

By Rabbi Yakov Skolnick

“And ‘it’ stood fast for our forefathers and ourselves, for not only one has nation sought to destroy us, rather in each generation they rise up against us to totally obliterate us.”

What is ‘it’ that keeps us alive against all odds? The Haggadah referred in the previous paragraph to the Bris Bain HaBesarim, the Covenant Between the Parts, in which Hashem promises to Avraham that although his children will need to go into exile, Hashem is there with them and ultimately will redeem them.

The question is, if you look in the Torah when Hashem makes this bris, it seems to be referring specifically to the exile in Egypt. The verse says (Bereishis 15:13-14), “I will send your children into a land that is not their own, and they will enslave them and oppress them for four hundred years. And the oppressing nation, I will judge, and they will leave with great wealth.” There are many statements of our Sages explaining how the verses refer to the exile in Egypt, and the ten Plagues which befell the Egyptians. If that is the case, Hashem has already fulfilled His covenant with Avraham. How does the author of the Haggadah see in the Covenant Between the Parts, that Hashem will redeem us from our current exile?

To understand this, we need to explore another confusing point. Hashem had decreed that the Jewish People would be exiled for 400 years, yet the exile in Egypt lasted only 210 years. Is it possible that Hashem didn’t keep his word? And why would Hashem take them out before the right time?

The Bais HaLevi, based on the Midrashim, explains as follows. Hashem saw the spiritual downfall of the Jews in Egypt, and perceived that it’s now or never. If the Jews would not be redeemed early, they would not last the full four hundred years; they would be totally assimilated into Egyptian

society. Therefore, Hashem took us out before the decreed time.

This, though, created a problem. As hard as exile is, it serves a purpose; the hardship is supposed to make us turn to Hashem and be more committed to Him. Since we were unable to remain in the Egyptian Exile for the full extent, we would now need to be exiled again to accomplish the desired goal of exile.

In essence, the redemption from Egypt was but a temporary respite. We would need to be exiled again to complete the rest of the four-hundred-year exile, albeit in quality rather than quantity.

This, explains the Bais HaLevi, is what we mean that the Bris Bain HaBesarim, the covenant with Avraham, is what keeps us alive in our current exile. In actuality, the time has yet to arrive for Hashem to complete his promise to give us a full redemption from the four-hundred-year exile. Since we were taken out early and eventually exiled once again, we are living in part of that four-hundred-year exile. When we take a look at the miraculous redemption from Egypt, which was not even a permanent redemption, and did not fully complete Hashem's promise to redeem us, we can be assured that Hashem will continue to keep His promise, and eventually bring the ultimate redemption in an even more, miraculous way.

This year as we raise our cups of wine and sing "V'hi She'amda," let us realize that the promise Hashem made to Avraham is not just a historical fact; rather it is a living, enduring commitment made to *us* living in *our* exile, that soon Hashem will bring an end to all of our suffering.

# Maintaining Our Identity

By Rabbi Adam Crystal

“And they became a nation,” this teaches that the Bnei Yisrael were distinct there.”

Throughout the long exile in Egypt, the Jewish People remained a distinct people. The Medrash tells us they held on to their names, their language, and their own mode of dress. They lived in unity and would not speak negatively about their fellow Jews.

At the same time, the Torah describes the Exodus from Egypt as “one nation from within another nation,” (Devarim 4:34) indicating that the Jewish People were in many ways indistinguishable from their Egyptian hosts. At the Red Sea, the angel of Egypt claimed, “These are idol-worshippers and those are idol worshippers,” why should the Jews be considered worthy of miracles more than the Egyptians? Indeed, the Jews were steeped in idolatry, to the point that when they were taken out of Egypt, they were on the verge of falling to the 50<sup>th</sup> level of impurity, the event horizon of no return. Hashem rescued them from oblivion at the last possible moment.

How do we sort out this contradiction? Did the Jewish People maintain a strong identity in Egypt, or were they well along in the process of assimilation to the surrounding culture?

The Meshech Chochma writes that indeed, in regards to what we know to be mainstays of our identity- belief in Hashem and his Unity, and thus the rejection of idolatry, the Jewish people fell far short. As a result, their spiritual stature suffered greatly.

What they did have was something we might consider peripheral, but says the Meshech Chochma, in exile it is crucial. They held tightly to their names, language, and dress- the social barriers, the outward reminders that they were a distinct people. This is what prevented them from being swallowed up by Egyptian culture, despite their shortcomings in what are normally essential beliefs of our people.

In contrast, our Sages tell us about the Babylonian exile that the Jewish people were undeserving of the same miracles that Hashem provided when we left Egypt. They kept the main body of the Torah, yet they adopted Babylonian names and language. In the end, there were many who intermarried with non-Jews. They were missing those safeguards against assimilation that are so important in exile.

The Meshech Chochma points out that a major component of the laws of Pesach are the many safeguards and barriers. Not only may we not eat chometz, we may not be in possession of it, and before Pesach we make an extensive search to ensure our homes are totally chometz-free. This underscores the message that we learn from the Jews in Egypt: the importance of barriers, of maintaining during our exile all the many prohibitions our Sages put in place to prevent intermingling and assimilation with our host society.

Today, unlike in Egypt, we have perhaps an even greater safeguard: the study of Torah, especially to delve intensely into the depths of the Oral Torah. If we occupy our minds and our interest with the study of Torah, that will serve as a mighty fortification against the onslaught of the surrounding culture, and its modern idolatry of materialism and self-indulgence. Then we can stay true to who we are, a distinct people devoted to Hashem, His Torah, and His mitzvos.

# Lifting Us From the Depths

By Rabbi Dovid Biron

The more one expounds on the great miracles of the Exodus, the more praiseworthy he is. However, there are three parts of the Haggadah which are crucial to the fulfillment of our commandment to relate the story of the Exodus. “Rabban Gamliel says, whoever does not expound these three things has not fulfilled his obligation- Pesach, matzah, and maror.” The Haggadah continues, the reason our fathers ate the Pesach offering in the time of the Temple was to commemorate the sparing of the Jews during the Plague of the Firstborn.

This requires explanation. Is indeed, the Pesach offering, and ultimately the name of the holiday, rooted in such a seemingly trivial detail in the great story of the Exodus from Egypt? Of all the myriad miracles throughout the ten plagues, why is the most significant the fact that Hashem skipped over the Jews’ homes when He struck the Egyptians? Could we not have found more remarkable miracles?

Rabbi Uren Reich, Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshiva Gedola of Woodlake Village, offered the following explanation.

There is a fascinating Medrash in Shir HaShirim. The verse there states, “*lo yadati nafshi samasni.*” (6:12) In a literal sense, this would mean “I did not know my soul placed me there.”

The Medrash explains this verse with a parable. A princess left her palace and became hopelessly lost. Far from her royal family, she befriended a group of peasant girls, who would spend their time collecting fallen stalks.

Many years later, the royal chariot passed through the field where she was gathering that day. The king spotted his long lost beloved daughter, and immediately sent his minister to retrieve her. The bewildered girl, who now found herself in the king's wagon, heard her friends call out to her in wonder.

"Just yesterday, you were gathering the fallen stalks among us, and now you sit in the royal chariot?"

The girl's response is shocking. "You are wondering about me? I, too, wonder about myself."

Says the Medrash, the Jews in Egypt were enslaved with brick and mortar; coarse, unrefined labor. They were perceived as the lowest rung of Egyptian society; a contemptible degraded people. Then they were freed, redeemed and raised up to princely status. The nations of the world cried out in utter disbelief: "A mere moment ago, you were enslaved with brick and mortar. Now you are freed, and royalty no less?"

The Jews responded, "*lo yadati nafshi samasni.*" - I did not know my soul set me in the chariots of nobility. You marvel about us? We, too, are marveling the same."

Earlier in the Haggadah we elaborate on the pain and suffering afflicted upon the Jewish People by the Egyptians. The Haggadah quotes a verse in Parshas Ki Savo (Devarim 26:6), "*Vayarei'u osanu hamitzrim vaye'anunu...*" Simply translated, this verse reads, "And the Egyptians did evil to us, pained us, and enslaved us harshly." However, the wording of the beginning of the verse appears somewhat obscure. According to the simple explanation, it would seem more befitting to say, "*vayarei'u lanu*", and they did evil to us. *Vayarei'u osanu* implies they deemed us evil.

The Egyptians enslaved the Jews with cruel oppression. But they did far worse. They libeled us. They mocked and degraded us. "They *made us evil*." And we actually began to believe them. We lost confidence in our greatness, and viewed ourselves as lowly. This, in turn, triggered a tremendous demise in the spiritual level of the Jewish People.

The Arizal writes, had Hashem waited but one more instant before redeeming us, we would have sunk to the point of no return. The Rambam writes as well (Laws of Idolatry, 1:3), that the root of monotheism planted by Abraham was just about decimated. The Sages teach that the prosecuting angels cried out by the splitting of the sea, "these and these are idol worshippers."

However, Hashem saw otherwise. He passed over the homes of the Jewish people, situated between two Egyptian neighbors, as if to proclaim:

there's a great difference between the two of them. Though to an ordinary observer they may seem much the same, both sunken in idol worship and contamination, they are in truth of little commonality. Hashem perceived that this nation could raise itself up to the loftiest levels of holiness in a mere seven weeks. From a coarse, unrefined people, would yet emerge a kingdom of priests, a holy nation, worthy of standing at Mount Sinai, and proclaiming "Naaseh Venishma"- we are ready to accept everything Hashem will give us. And indeed, in a kiruv feat unsurpassed through the ages, Hashem took a people in a spiritual slumber, bereft of mitzvos, and brought out from them phenomenal latent powers.

This shook the nations to their very core, as the verses in the Song at the Sea describe. The nations heard and trembled. The residents of Canaan melted in fear. They were crying out in bewilderment: You? Of all people? You who were known for infamy as the lowliest elements of Egyptian society?

The Jewish People at the time didn't know how it happened either. But Hashem knew the difference between the Jews and their Egyptian oppressors. For He knew that at the very depths of the Jewish soul lies immense spiritual powers. Every Jew carries within him the capacity to connect to Hashem, in a manner that no gentile is remotely capable of.

Hashem passed over our homes on the way to smite the Egyptian homes, for He knew where we can go, and what we can achieve. That, is the essence of Pesach, and it is no question that we title it such.

On the night of Pesach, we will sit at the Seder like kings, at a table adorned with the finest, and surrounded by our most precious commodity, our children. May we merit the Divine assistance to truly instill within them the understanding that we are unique. That as Jewish children, they can attain true greatness, and lofty levels of purity. Then, we will have empowered them to strive to reach their potential, and then we will have truly fulfilled our obligation of "You shall relate to your children."

Chag kosher v'sameach.

# The Sweet Side of Maror

By Rabbi Uriel Gross

One of the most baffling mitzvos of the Seder night is the eating of maror. The author of the Haggadah tells us that we partake of maror to remind ourselves about the bitterness of slavery. This seems to be out of place on the night when everything focuses on freedom. Moreover, at the end of Maggid, we thank Hashem for allowing us to experience this night, and for the eating of matzah and maror. Even if we must eat maror, why is this a focal point that we stress as a reason to thank Hashem?

The Gemara says in Kesubos (66b), in the name of Rabban Yochanan Ben Zakai: “Praised are you Yisrael, that when you fulfill the will of Hashem no nation can rule over you, and when you don’t fulfill the will of Hashem, you are given into the hand of a lowly nation”. The question is obvious; why is it praiseworthy that when we don’t fulfill Hashem’s will, we are made subservient?

*A wealthy man owns a vast array of real estate; a winter and summer house, an orchard, a garden, and much more. He decides to divide his assets among his children during his lifetime. To one, he gives the winter house, to another, the summer house. To one he gives the garden, and to a fourth, the orchard. Yet to the son whom he loves most, the one with whom he shares a special connection, he gives nothing. Instead, the wealthy man tells his son, “You stay with me!” If one of the other sons would rebel against their father, nothing could be done; the son already received, and owns, the portion from his father. However, if the beloved son would rebel, he would be thrown out*

*of his father's house. His special bond with his father means that he is still dependent on his father's will.*

The Maharal explains that this is the difference between us versus the other nations of the world. Hashem has seventy heavenly angels that He appointed over the seventy nations, as He doesn't wish to deal with them directly. To each nation, He gives the rights to their individual angel to grant them what they need. However, with regard the Jewish People, Hashem says, "You are the one I love. You are the descendants of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov. You are my special portion. You stay with me." He doesn't just give us our needs and let us go. He gives us a direct connection, and our needs are constantly provided by the ultimate Source of Blessing.

However, this blessing comes with grave responsibility. This truth that we have a special bond with our Heavenly Father means that if we don't fulfill Hashem's will, we are affected in a much stronger way than the other nations. Being that we are still in Hashem's "house", among those who eat at His Table, if we rebel, we get thrown out. Therefore, even in our state of punishment, we are praiseworthy, because this, too, is an expression of our close and personal relationship with our Father.

The Maharal explains that this is a central theme of the Seder night. If we are to celebrate our freedom, our becoming Hashem's Nation, we must internalize that everything that happens to us, even the pain and suffering, is all a reason to celebrate. It is all part of being close to Hashem. On this night we eat matzah and celebrate the high points of our freedom. But we must also celebrate the low points, as well. All the troubles we constantly go through as a People are also a direct result of our being Hashem's Chosen. Yet we must realize that every bit of it is worthwhile since it means that we are the people Hashem chose to bond with directly! This is the message of the maror by the Seder. Even though we find ourselves in Exile, within the deepest darkness, we must see the underlying light - that we are being dealt with by Hashem as children - and this itself is reason for celebration! Just as Hashem says, "What will be with the father who exiled his son from his table, woe to the son who was exiled", may we see the fulfillment of the promise, "And the sons will return to their borders," speedily, in our time.

חייב אדם לראות את עצמו  
כאלו הוא יצא ממצרים

# Visualization

By Rabbi Yaakov Kaufman

The Alter from Kelm, Rav Simcha Zissel Ziv, writes in his sefer, Chochmah U'mussar: "I was always perplexed; how can one be obligated to view himself as if he had left Egypt? Only a select few in a generation can reach such a lofty level. How can it be an obligation on every person?"

The Alter explains this obligation with the following Gemara. The Gemara in Meseches Megillah (14a) says, "The removal of Achashveirosh's signet ring (with which Haman sealed his evil decree) was greater than the 48 prophets and seven prophetesses who prophesied for the Jewish People." All the admonitions of the prophets were not able to return the Jews to the right path, whereas the removal of the ring spurred them to teshuva.

In the generation of the prophets, the word of Hashem was clear, and the Jewish people understood the concepts of how Hashem relates to the world, on a deep level. At the time of Purim, the era of prophecy was ebbing away, and the Jews were no longer on the same level in their intellectual understanding of Hashem's presence. What sparked them to do true teshuva? Through the miracle of their salvation on Purim, they actually experienced and felt the power of Hashem. During the time of the Prophets, they had an intellectual connection. They did not experience and feel Hashem's power in the same way. This Gemara is telling us an essential foundation of human nature. If we want to improve our awareness of Hashem and make it real, it can't just stay in our head. The best way to do it is to experience and feel Hashem's power in the world in the world around us; to see it before our eyes.

The Ramban at the end of Parshas Bo explains the role that the Mitzva of remembering the Exodus plays in our daily lives. By mentioning and remembering the great miracles of the Exodus, one is reminded that Hashem runs and controls the world constantly. On the night of Pesach, our task is to deepen that recognition that Hashem is the One who runs the world.

With the Seder, our Sages created an excellent vehicle to strengthen that

recognition. The rest of the year we mention and remember the Exodus from Egypt. Through the Seder and its mitzvos, we take it much further. We taste the bitterness of the slavery by eating maror. We eliminate chametz and eat matzah, for there's no time to let the dough rise as we leave Egypt. We recline and drink wine in celebration of our new-found freedom. And we relate the story of the Exodus in full detail. We are creating an experience where we can imagine and visualize ourselves leaving Egypt. Using the power of imagination and visualization has a far greater effect on us than an intellectual mention or memory.

The Alter concludes, when we read in the Haggadah that "a person is obligated to see himself as if he left Egypt," it does not mean one must actually feel like he just left Egypt. Rather, the obligation is to visualize and imagine what it would be like to leave Egypt. When we begin to use our power of visualization this way, we can easily extend it to see the Hand of Hashem in every part of our lives.

This Seder night, let's open up our imaginations to the incredible experience of leaving Egypt, and have an inspiring Pesach!