

Pesach- Potency of Prayer

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles
Summary by Channie Koplowitz Stein

The main theme of Pesach is the story of our redemption and of our unflagging faith in Hashem. The sub-themes of prayer, of speech and communicating with Hashem provide a strong background for the major theme. Ramban explains that we were redeemed only through the power of our prayer, for we had already fallen into a state of unworthiness.

The Sam Derech tells us that Yitzchak blessed Yaakov by recognizing his special voice (*hakol kol Yaakov*). Since then, the cries of *Bnei Yisroel* no longer need to be specific, for Hashem always listens. Like a mother who gives her attention and fulfills the wordless needs of her crying child, so does Hashem care for us as well.

Hashem told Avraham Avinu that his progeny would be enslaved for four hundred years. However, the Jews were redeemed after only two hundred ten years. The most often quoted reconciliation is that we begin counting the years of enslavement from the birth of Yitzchak. The Maaseh Rokem posits that the span of four hundred years was meant to be nebulous. Its end would be determined by when *Bnei Yisroel* would call out to Hashem. It happened that the beginning of the four hundred years coincided with the birth of Yitzchak. Had *Bnei Yisroel* cried out sooner, the beginning of the enslavement could have been calculated back to the time of the original prophecy.

And yet, once *Bnei Yisroel* cried out, the situation in Egypt got even worse. Rav Schwadron explains that the amount of suffering was preordained. *Bnei Yisroel* suffered so intensely in the 210 years that they had already suffered the entire amount Hashem had planned for them in 400 years. When our own challenges seem unbearable, perhaps it is because Hashem is hastening our deliverance.

The Tiferet Shimshon notes that most of the terms used to describe the prayer of *Bnei Yisroel* were wordless cries or groans. Hashem doesn't need to hear words in order to understand the pain in a person's heart. He is with us, feeling our pain, as the verse states, "*Itcha Anochi betzarah*. I am together with you in his troubles."

Pesach is a contraction of *Peh Sach*, the mouth speaks. When we were freed from our bondage, the power of speech was unshackled as well. Further, the entire ritual of the *Seder* is conducted through questions and answers, and he who increases telling the story of our exodus from Egypt is praiseworthy.

After *Bnei Yisroel* left Egypt, Hashem had them turn around and backtrack to *Pi Hachirov*, which our Sages identify as *Pitom*, one of the storage cities that *Bnei Yisroel* had built. Formerly *Bnei Yisroel* experienced forced silence there. But after having left Egypt they were free to connect to Hashem through speech and prayer. The *Chochmat Hamatspun* says that Hashem brought them back there,

because he wanted to hear the voice of His children call out to Him. Then he would split the sea. Indeed, the purpose of all the challenges and troubles Hashem puts before us is to bring us closer to Him.

When Hashem took us out of the oppressions of Egypt, He redeemed us from both physical oppression and from psychological oppression of Egyptian culture as well. Rabbi Schorr teaches that the charge to continuously see ourselves as if we personally left *Mitzrayim* refers to our tendency to be seduced by the mindset of the prevailing culture. Today's culture involves us in its materialism or its technology at the expense of our spiritual growth. If we ask for Hashem's help, we too can free ourselves from the shackles that bind us to these oppressors.

Sichot Baavodat Hashem points out that the night of the *Seder* is especially conducive for our prayers to be heard. Not only is the holiday called *Peh sach*, the mouth speaks, but *matzoh*, the necessary "bread" of the *Seder* is called *lechem oni*, the bread over which we speak many words.

Before the *Mah Nishtanah*, the *Hagadah* tells us, "Here the son asks," Here we can ask our Father in heaven for whatever we need. Certainly, when we eat the *matzoh*, we can ask that Hashem answer our prayers, and when we mention the child who cannot ask, we can ask Hashem to open our own mouths so that we can pray for spiritual growth.



Who Knows One

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Leah Kohn

The theme running through the *Hagadah* is exile turned into redemption. The Torah describes the beginning of the enslavement in Egypt, "*Vayimoruru et chayehem b'chomer uv'levenim*. They embittered their lives with clay and bricks." *Bnei Yisroel* had to collect the material that was needed to build. It was a very difficult situation.

The verse can also be understood on a spiritual level. The Egyptians embittered the Jews' lives by forcing them to constantly be busy with *chomer* (materialism) so that they had no energy left to devote to spirituality.

It follows that the exile had two consequences, the physical aspect and the spiritual consequences of it. The first exile was exceptionally difficult. In subsequent exiles we were able to look back and see how we coped and how Hashem helped us in the end. In addition, the influence of the Egyptian culture was so strong that our sages compared taking the Jewish people out of Egypt like taking a baby out of the womb of his mother. Just as the baby is totally dependent on its mother for everything, the Jewish people were so

influenced by the culture of Egypt that it was very difficult to leave. Every year, we celebrate our redemption from Egypt. But the reality of Egypt did not end when we were redeemed. Our sages say we are obligated to see ourselves as if we left Egypt. We are not asked to pretend something that doesn't exist. We are still in the process of getting out of Egypt today and every Pesach is meant to bring us closer to freedom from what Egypt was about.

The Sefat Emet writes that we tend to view exile as a very difficult experience on a physical level. However, that is only the external expression of something that is happening inside. The main exile is the soul that is imprisoned in the body. Before Adam sinned, the body and soul worked together as a team. When Adam wanted to do something that accorded with the will of Hashem the body followed without struggle. After the sin, the soul had to contend with the body. It was no longer free to do what it wanted.

Shir Hashirim discusses the relationship between Hashem and the Jewish people. It says, "*Kol dodi dofek*. I can hear the voice of

my beloved knocking." There's a knock that is seeking to change reality. It is the spiritual power inside the Jew that knocks on the door and asks to be let in. This is the voice of the soul awakening man. The embitterment the Jewish people felt because of the slavery was because life was focused on building in the physical arena without letting the spiritual voice express itself. The soul was imprisoned in the body of the people and from this perspective exile still exists. There are many areas where the soul wants one thing and the body resists. Just as the Jews were in exile on a national level, the same exists for each individual. The soul is in exile within the body, which doesn't let it express itself to its fullest.

The verse in Tehilim states, "*Karva el nafshi ge'ala*." We ask Hashem to come close to our soul and redeem us. Although we pray for redemption on a national level, we must pray that Hashem redeem our soul on an individual level. The physical exile is only an expression of our spiritual exile. If we will pray for our souls to be redeemed, we can then in turn bring the eternal redemption closer.

Pesach Seder Parenting

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Hershel Reichman

On Pesach, parents have a special *mitzvah* of, "*Vehagadata livincha*," to tell over to our children the story of our exile in Egypt and our redemption. The Torah speaks about four different categories of children. This teaches us that Pesach is a time to focus on all our children no matter how they think or behave. Pesach commemorates the birth of the Jewish people. The key to Jewish continuity is our children. Without our children following in our ways our nation will inevitably disappear. We have to focus on our children. The *mitzvah* of, "*V'shinantem livanecha*," to teach our children Torah ensures our continuity. Pesach is a special time to speak with them about the great miracles Hashem did for us.

The four children the *Hagadah* speaks about

fall into two categories. There is the *chacham*, the *tam*, the *rasha*, and the *sheino yodea l'sheol*. The wise child can be taught the laws of Pesach. He can be dealt with like an equal. However, the other three are not Torah scholars and need a special approach. I asked Rav Aharon Soloveitchik which of the four children we should emphasize at the Seder and he said the *sheino yodea lishol*. One should talk to the child who doesn't know how to ask because the *Hagadah* says, "At *petach lo*," talk with the one who does not know how to ask.

It's important to make Pesach an exciting time for our children. One should avoid expressing anything negative such as how hard or expensive the holiday is. We should show

enthusiasm and try to involve our children in the preparations. Take the boys to the matzah bakery and have them participate in the baking and the buying of *matzot*. Take the girls along to shop for the special foods for the holiday. Get the children excited about cleaning the house. It should be fun and enjoyable because we are doing it in honor of Pesach. Express excitement about finding the *chametz*. On *bedikat chometz* night, give the children flashlights and have them join you in the search for *chometz*. The next morning when you go to burn the *chometz*, take the children along and have them help throw the *chometz* in the fire. The goal of *V'hegadata livincha* is to make our children excited about the *mitzvot* of Pesach. This will ensure Jewish continuity.