

Lessons Learned From Lavan

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

“Go and learn,” the *Haggadah* exhorts us, “What Lavan the Aramean attempted to do to our father Jacob! For Pharaoh decreed only against the males, Lavan attempted to uproot everything.” The *Haggadah* then links Yaakov’s sojourn with Lavan to his descent to Egypt years later.

What can we learn from Lavan and his actions? How was our descent to *Mitzrayim* a result? How do we deduce his evil intentions throughout when they are barely alluded to in his conversation with Yaakov? Lavan deceived Yaakov and gave him Leah instead of Rachel. Had he married Rachel first, Yosef would have been the firstborn, and there would have been no jealousy, as the brothers would have recognized Yosef’s status. They would not have tried to get rid of him. Yaakov and his family would not have followed him to Egypt, and we would not have subsequently been enslaved.

There is also a deeper explanation of how Lavan tried to uproot everything. Rabbi M. Wolfson describes that Yaakov knew by divine inspiration that Rachel would die young, so by marrying Rachel first, he would then be able to marry Leah after Rachel’s death and complete the symbolic marriage of Hashem to *Kneset Yisroel*. For the bond to be perma-

nent, the characteristics of both Rachel and Leah were necessary to be included in the character of *Am Yisroel*. Yaakov would then have been able to bury both of his wives near him in *Mearat Hamachpeila*, and the connection between *Hashem* and *Bnei Yisroel* would be unbreakable and manifest to all. Both the revealed and hidden aspects of the relationship would be known to all, and there would have been no concealment, no descent into Egypt, and no exiles. But this could only be accomplished if Yaakov did not transgress the Torah prohibition against marrying two sisters while they both lived. Our forefathers lived by the dicta of the *Torah*, although it was not yet given, and the future of their descendants was dependent on this. Lavan, by his deceit, tore the very fabric of future Jewish history. By undermining the permanent relationship between *Hashem* and *Kneset Yisroel*, he tried to uproot it completely and created a gap between appearance and reality. While *Hashem* always watches over us, there would be times of concealment, when we would be distant and in exile, starting with our descent to Egypt.

Although the dark times seem bitter, we must recognize that they are opportunities for growth, says the *Yalkut Lekach Tov*. Rav Levenstein quoting the Vilna Gaon highlights

some of these times. Yaakov left his father’s house penniless, but he returned from Lavan’s house wealthy, just as his descendants left Egypt. The Egypt experience also made us a great and sensitive people, for we now knew how a stranger feels in a strange land. Therefore, says *Halekach Vehalebuv*, there is a custom to kiss the bitter *maror* before we eat them, to acknowledge the good that often grows from the bitterness.

The entire purpose of Hashem’s taking us out of Egypt and our re-enactment of the event every year is to imprint upon us that we are a separate nation, children of the King. According to *Halekach Vehalebuv*, the four cups of wine represent the four kinds of separation we are grateful for. The wine of *Kiddush* separates the light from darkness. We thank Hashem for bringing us out of the darkness of Egypt into the light of *Torah* values. As Jews, we have the capability to elevate the physical to a spiritual level. As we eat our Passover meal and recite both a *Hamotzi* and *Bircat Hamazon* and then drink the third cup of wine, we praise Hashem Who gave us this ability to fulfil his *mitzvot*. Finally, we come to the fourth cup that separates the *Sabbath* from the rest of the week as we raise our cup in anticipation of our final redemption, for the *Sabbath* day is filled with the aura of the world to come.

The Symbols of Pesach

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Shimon Isaacson

The Mishna in *Masechet Pesachim* teaches that according to Tanna Kama, *charoset* is not a *mitzva* yet we still must have it on the seder plate. Rabbi Elazar ben Rab Tzadok disagrees and says it’s a *mitzva*. The Gemara asks, if the *chachamim* were correct and *charoset* is not a *mitzva*, what is its purpose? The Gemara answers, it’s for *kappa*, medicinal purposes. Rashi explains that the *maror* has a sharp poison which can have an ill effect and the *charoset* mitigates it. Tosfot says there are worms in the *maror* and the *charoset* causes them to die or fall off.

The Gemara asks, if *charoset* is a *mitzva* as Rabbi Elazar says, what is its nature? Rav

Levi says that it commemorates the apple tree. Rashi explains that the women of Egypt would entice their husbands who were exhausted from slavery to have children. The babies were born in the fields under the apple trees and were miraculously fed by Hashem until they grew old enough to return home. As a remembrance to the self-sacrifice of the women and the miracles that took place, we eat *charoset* which contains apples. Rav Yochanan says it’s a remembrance to the mortar that *Klal Yisrael* used to form bricks to build the pyramids in Egypt. In keeping with both opinions, Tosfot says the *charoset* has to have a tart flavour to remind us of the apples and a thick texture to remember the mortar.

The Rambam says in his commentary on the Mishna that *charoset* is a mixture that looks like straw and is meant to remind us of the mortar in Egypt. One should take dates, soak, cook, and pound them, add vinegar and unrefined spices, until it becomes a mass reminding us of the mortar. Why does the Rambam give us a recipe?

The Rambam continues and says, Rabbi Elazar says *charoset* is a *mitzva* and one should make the blessing, *Al achilat charoset*. Likewise, the Mordechai says one must eat a *kezayit* of it and make a *bracha*. However, the Rambam says the *halacha* is like the *chacha-*

Continued on page 2



The Symbols of Pesach

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Shimon Isaacson

Continued from page 1

mim. There is no formal *mitzva* and we don't make a *bracha*. In *Yad Hachazka* written 30 years later, the Rambam writes that *charoset* is a *mitzva m'divrei sofrim* in remembrance of the mortar in Egypt. You take dates and raisins and pound it. Then you add vinegar and spices and you bring it to the table on the night of *Pesach*. The *Lechem Mishna* questions this contradiction. In addition, if the Rambam assumes *charoset* is a *mitzva* like Rabbi Elazar says, then there should also be a *bracha*, but he mentions no *bracha*. The

Eretz Hatzvi explains that there really is no contradiction. In the *Peirush Hamishnayot*, the Rambam writes that according to Rabbi Elazar it's a *mitzva* and one must make a *bracha* but that is not the *halacha*. It's a *mitzva* but there's no *bracha*. Why? The Tur explains that it's *tofel* (secondary) to the *maror*. We dip the *maror* in *charoset* and make a *bracha al achilat maror*. In principle there may need to be a *bracha* but the *maror* exempts it.

Perhaps we can say something simpler. In order for a *mitzva* to require a *bracha*, it must

have a clearly defined *maase hamitzva* (action) so the *bracha* can attach itself to it. If there's a *mitzva* of eating the *charoset*, then certainly there should be a *bracha*, but the Mishna and the Rambam give us a recipe and tell us to bring it to the table on the night of *Pesach*. There's no formal *maase hamitzvah*. The idea is that *charoset* is one of the many props that create the atmosphere of what the *seder* night is supposed to be about. It's there to create an ambience, to allow us to better relive the experience of *yetziat Mitzrayim*.

The Pesach Experience

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Yitzchak Cohen

The Torah says, "*Vihagadata livincha bayom hahu lemor bavur zeh asah Hashem li bezaisi mi'Mitzrayim*. You shall tell your son on that day because of this we left Egypt." Rashi explains that we were redeemed in order to fulfill the *mitzvot*. *Bavur zeh* refers to the *mitzvot* that are mentioned in the previous verses, namely *korbon Pesach*, *matzah*, and *maror*. We left Egypt in order to relive and perform these *mitzvot* year after year. The Ohr Hachaim teaches that *zeh* is the numerical value of 12 referring to the 12 *mitzvot* of *Pesach*. These are the three *mitzvot* previously mentioned, telling over the story in the *Haggada*, the seven days of *Pesach*, and the *mitzva* of *kiddush*.

The *mitzva* of *V'hagadata livincha* is not just to recite what is written in the *Haggada* but as the Chinuch explains, it is a foundation in *emunah* in Hashem. We were there. We witnessed the miracles, the way Hashem manipulated nature, and the way the 10 plagues affected creation. We saw the revelation of Hashem's greatness, His Divine Providence, which made it impossible to deny His existence.

Matza is called the bread of faith. One source

for this is in *Gemara Brachot*. Rav Yehuda says the Tree of Knowledge was wheat because a child does not attain the intelligence of recognizing his parents until he can eat cooked wheat. *Matza* is made from wheat and it gives us the ability to discern our Father in heaven. This is *emunah*. *Emunah* does not mean a person must be proficient in all of *Torah*. It means recognizing Hashem.

If a man hits his parents and causes him to bleed and there were witnesses and warning, he is liable for the death penalty. The *Gemara* in *Chullin* asks, how do we know that the man actually hit his father, perhaps he was a stranger? The *Gemara* gives a logical reason. *Beit din* rely on *rov*. The majority of people born come from parents who were married properly and therefore the man must be his father. Did you ever ask yourself, is my father really my father? Sensing it in the heart is enough. Why isn't that satisfactory for the *Gemara*? *Beit din* really doesn't know if it's the father. Therefore, they must come up with a logical answer to take away the doubt. We have no doubts that our parents are our parents. This is *emunah*. We have no doubt that Hashem is our Father. The *matza* helps us strengthen this faith.

The Ramban explains the verse, "*Bavur zeh asa Hashem li*." *Zeh* refers to the Splitting of the Sea, when the Jews exclaimed, "*Zeh keli v'anveihu*. This is my Hashem and I will glorify him." There was such a clear revelation that they were able to point to *Eloket*. *Emunah* should bring us to a level where we can almost see and feel Hashem. This was *yetziat Mitzrayim*. *Targum Unkelos* says about the words *zeh keli* that one should make a place in one's heart for Hashem. The *Baalei Mussar* learn that the night of *Pesach* should be a night where one can preserve one's *emunah* within oneself forever.

There are many *mitzvot* that we do all year round as a remembrance to the Exodus such as *tefillin* and *mezuzah*. *Yetziat Mitzrayim* is an experience that impacted us forever and that we must relive every day. The Taz says we make a *birchat hanissim* on the *Haggada* because the miracles didn't just happen in the past. We must reexperience it every day.

On *Pesach* we subjugate the I, the *kochi v'otzem yadi*. I don't exist when it comes to Hashem. It's a night of elevation, to get closer to Hashem, and that is why there's a *mitzvah* of telling over the story of the Exodus.