



## Pesach: Wine and Wheat Whispers

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles

The *hagadah* tells us, “*B’chol dor v’dor chayav adam lir’ot et atzmo ki’ilu hu yatza M’Mitzrayim.*” In every generation a person must see himself as if he was redeemed from Egypt. How do the wine and the *matzah*, so central to the seder ritual, help us to achieve this frame of mind? Further, why is Moshe, whose mission was to redeem us, only mentioned once in the *Hagaddah*, almost parenthetically, “And they believed in Hashem and in Moshe His servant.”

Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan cites the Arizal who says that the purpose of Pesach and the *seder* is to rectify the sin of Adam. The ultimate rectification occurred at the receiving of the Torah, only to be lost again with the sin of the golden calf. We learn this from the wine and wheat of the *matzah*. We consume four cups of wine and three *matzot* during the course of the seder. The numerical equivalent of *kos yayin* is 156, multiplied by four equals 624, the numerical value of *cheirut*, freedom. *Lechem oni*, the biblical term for *matzah* equals 208, multiplied by three, equals again 624. While the *matzah* represents the immediate physical freedom of our redemption, the wine represents our spiritual freedom, of recognizing Hashem as the source of all freedom, culminating in our acceptance of *Torah* at Sinai.

Many commentators suggest that the “forbidden fruit” was the fruit of the vine. Hashem forbade Adam from eating it only until *Shabbat*, for He wanted Adam to use it for Kiddush. By eating it before its time, Adam subverted its purpose and blurred the line of absolute knowledge of right and wrong, which had been clear prior to his sin. Mankind’s punishment was, “With the sweat of thy brow will you eat bread.” The enslavement in Egypt, the difficult toil and sweat, were meant to be expiation for the sin, followed by the bread from Heaven without toil, the manna. But with

the sin of the golden calf we again fell into the post Eden state. We now use wine for the blessing at the end of *Shabbat*, for the *Havdalah*, emphasizing the idea that knowledge is the faculty of discernment and differentiation between objects.

We find the themes of *Havdalah* reflected in the structure of the seder. *Halekach VeHalebuv* explains that we begin the *seder* with the first cup of *Kiddush*. The first phrase of *Havdala*, “Between the holy and the profane” refers to the sanctification of time. This is followed by the second cup, “Between light and darkness” representing the light of our redemptions versus the darkness of our enslavement and exile. It is then followed by, “Between Israel and the nations.” How are we different from other nations? We have undertaken the mission of elevating the physical world to the spiritual realm. We drink our third cup of wine after the meal, bordered by the Hallel, our praise to Hashem, half before and half after we eat. Finally, we differentiate between the seventh day, the *Shabbat*, and the six days of creation. We drink our fourth cup of wine with *Nirtzah*, commemorating our earlier redemptions in anticipation of the final redemption.

The six millennia of this world will usher in the seventh millennium, the final *Shabbat*, the times of the Messiah. At that time, we will regain the pure knowledge and clear perspective that Adam compromised by eating of the Tree of Knowledge before its time.

Our patriarch, Abraham almost achieved this level of perfect knowledge. However, in one small moment of doubt, he asked God, “How do I know that I will inherit the land of Israel?.” With this question, he destined his descendants to slavery. It was only with our liberation that we regained that clear and absolute knowledge, only to compromise it again with the sin of the golden calf. It is this pure and

absolute knowledge that we had immediately after our liberation from Egypt, when we had been “shown to know that the Lord is God; that there is nothing else beside Him.”

We are required to pass on this knowledge to our children at the *seder* by telling the Passover story. Testimony, however, is generally delivered only to others who were not present for the event. Bnei Yisroel were in a bit of a dilemma the first year of celebration; all the children who were old enough to understand the message were themselves witnesses both to the slavery and to the liberation. As the Belzer Rebbe points out, only Moshe was able fulfill this *mitzva* that first year by telling his children who had been in Midyan of the strong hand and the outstretched arm with which Hashem redeemed us from Egypt. Moshe, the humblest of all men, certainly removed himself as an active player, attributing all to Hashem. Now, when we retell the story, we pay tribute to Moshe by emulating his example and giving him only the role of God’s faithful servant, reserving the role of Master Actor to God Himself.

*Matzah* represents this humility. As Rebbe Nachman of Breslav explains, there is really minimal difference between actual bread and *matzah* save for the air in bread. Air represents the puffing up of one’s ego and the sense of self. This desire for independent decision making led to Adam’s original sin, and it is this *chametz* that we must rid ourselves of – both in our homes and in our selves. Bread, once you mix the ingredients together, will rise on its own. *Matzah*, on the other hand, must constantly be worked on to retain its character. So too man must constantly work on himself to remain true to his purpose.

May we eternalize the messages of the wheat and the wine and merit to emerge from the darkness of exile into the light of redemption.

## Pesach

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Leah Kohen

The Torah says we must remove the *chometz* from our homes, “*V’lo yira lecha se’or b’chol gevulecha.*” (And no leaven shall be seen in your possession throughout all your borders.) Why is the thorough elimination of *chometz* necessary?

Material wealth and possessions makes us vulnerable to three evil pitfalls that prevent us from attaining freedom, indulgence in physical desires, jealousy and the pursuit of honor. When we become slaves to these vices we depend on things that are not in our control to make us feel happy. On Pesach we celebrate our redemption as symbolized by the *korbon Pesach*. As we rejoice in our freedom, we eat *matzah*, the bread of poverty to remind us where we came from and why we were redeemed. *Matzah* represents Hashem taking us out of Egypt *b’chipazon*, in a hurry. There was no time for the bread to rise. The *matzah* emphasizes that our freedom was attained by Hashem, not us. We were not worthy but He redeemed us with mercy. Removing the *chometz* from our homes teaches us that our

possessions are defined by Hashem. Material things are not an end but a means. Eliminating the *chometz* and eating the *matzah* teaches us dependency, humility, and the borders defined around physicality.

*Mitzrayim* comes from the root word *meitzar*, oppressed and limited. The Egyptians were mired in impurity and evil. They succeeded in dragging the Jews down to the 49th level of impurity. Just as an embryo is totally dependent on its mother, the Jewish people couldn’t think independently. They were so enslaved to the Egyptians they couldn’t listen to Moshe. They could no longer climb out on their own. “*Kol dodi dofek.*” (My beloved one knocked on the door.) Hashem had to initiate the redemption. The Nesivos Sholom explains that the Jews were at the point where there was still an ember that could be fanned back to life. But it needed to be done immediately or they would have been lost. On the night of Pesach, Hashem gave them the spiritual taste of freedom. He revealed the joy and closeness of His light. The vessel to contain His revelation

was the *korbon Pesach* and the *brit*. This allowed them to hold on to the inspiration and led them on the journey to freedom. Physical freedom is limited. It might live for a while but then it disappears. Hashem took us out to become His nation and receive the Torah. To the extent we connect to Hashem, to that end we are free.

*Maror*, the bitter herb, symbolizes the labor, the oppression, and the struggles the Jewish people faced. Challenges make us face our true essence and compels us to acknowledge that materialism is not what life is about. The older we get, the more physicality loses its lure. Hashem reminds us that our bodies are not who we truly are. We must connect to our true selves and invest in spirituality. In exile, when we faced travail, we realized it was only our bond to Hashem that would give us the strength to prevail. The *maror*, the suffering, the working hard towards spiritual development is what led us to freedom.

## Lessons from the Splitting of the Sea

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Dayan Shlomo Cohen

Rashi tells us that at *kriat yam suf* a simple maid servant saw what Yechezkel could not see. The Jewish people recognized who was guiding them. They saw the heavenly chariot of Hashem descend from its place of unknowable infinity. They saw His Divine Providence in every the drowning of each Egyptian according to his level of evil. The word miracle, *nes*, literally means a flagpole. Its function is to show you the flag, the monarch who you are following. *Kriat yam suf* accomplished this.

As wicked as Egypt was, and as much as we went through, we were drawn to Egypt because there is a part of us that’s attracted to evil. The Jews needed the experience of liberation, of the Egyptians forces chasing them, and the Jews running away from them. They needed to see the revelation and the miracles. They needed to see how each of the Egyptians drowned in accordance with his level of evil, that no deed goes unnoticed.

This is true in the positive sense too. No prayer ever goes unanswered and no thought of *teshuva* falls by the wayside. The Zohar discusses different chambers of *gehinom* and different levels of suffering. There is a vast difference between a person who thought about repentance, even if he did not do it, and a person who didn’t think about it at all.

In Shir Hashirim, Hashem compares the Jews to the mares of Pharaoh as they entered the sea. The horses acted against their instincts and submitted their will to Hashem. The Jews too had to go beyond self. They had to see how their own salvation and survival moment by moment was a miracle. A miracle tells us that we’re loved. It tells us that Hashem cares enough about us to break the laws of nature. The love Hashem showed us when He took us out of Egypt was echoed by our feelings at *kriat yam suf* where we saw not only miracles, but our individuation and our actualization as a nation.

The most touching part of the song of the sea was, “Hashem is a man of war, Hashem is His name.” The name Hashem signifies mercy. The Almighty’s severity and compassion are really two sides of the very same coin. For the Jews at the *yam suf* there were no questions. The Sefat Emet says we can carry this mindset with us always. When we see something we don’t like we can say, “Hashem *ish milchama Hashem shemo.*” Although I don’t understand it, I believe it is all for the good.

The Gemara compares earning a living and finding one’s mate to *kriat yam suf*. Fighting nature depends on us being above nature. People tend to blame impediments on natural cause and effect. In *Mitzrayim* we learned to see that human failure and the forces of nature are not a consideration. *Parnasah* and *zivigum* aren’t controlled by people or nature. Hashem controls them.