

Pesach: The Journey from
And You Shall Know That I Am Hashem
to The World Will Be Filled
with the Knowledge of Hashem

Part II

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Leah Kohn

If the Jews already recognized Hashem through the plagues why was the miracle of the splitting of the Red Sea necessary? Here too, the *Torah* tells us that it was in order to know Hashem. The punishment meted out to the Egyptians was precisely measure for measure. Those who were very wicked went up and down and suffered a long time till they died. Those who were somewhat wicked went up and down a bit until they died. And those who treated the Jews better, died right away. The Egyptians made the Jews work very hard. In return, Hashem made the water very thick like mortar, so it would be difficult to move with their chariots. All this was not just a punishment but was meant to show the Egyptians who the Jewish people were, "*Beni bechori Yisrael-my son, my firstborn, Yisrael.*" And who Hashem was, the one and only power.

What was the purpose of the miracles for the

Jews? Their faith was not yet perfected. When they saw the sea in front of them and the Egyptians in pursuit after them some of them complained, "Why did you bring us here to die?" Chazal say the Jews didn't really cross the sea. They entered in one place, went around, and came out on the other side. There was no need for the miracle of the splitting of the sea. It wasn't done to save them, but rather to educate them and to strengthen their *emunah*. The fact that Hashem performed miracles for their sake indicated His love for them, that He wanted them to know Him.

There was an incredible spiritual revelation way beyond what they deserved. Even a simple maid at the sea saw with greater clarity what the great prophet Yechezkel could not see. Chazal say that when the Jews sang *Az Yashir*, they accepted Hashem as King. As a result of the love Hashem showed them, they expressed their copious love for Him in return.

And that is why we recite *Shir Hashirim*, the love song between Hashem and the Jewish people, on Pesach.

The Jewish people couldn't attain this level of revelation in Egypt, a land filled with idol worship and impurity. In addition, during the seven days from when they left Egypt until they came to the sea, they grew exponentially in a spiritual sense so that they were now fitting vessels to be able to absorb the great revelation. When they saw the sea in front of them and the Egyptians in back of them, they repented, coming closer to Hashem so that they could now merit the great levels they attained.

Chazal say, "Every year a person is obligated to see himself as if he went out of Egypt." The knowledge of Hashem and the closeness we can attain is endless. It must be like a spiral going up and reaching ever greater heights.

Yearning to be Ourselves Part III

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller

The next *bracha* begins with, "*Al hatzadikim.*" *Tzadikim* are those defined as righteous people. Is righteousness relative or absolute? The Rambam says everyone must make choices. People come from different sociological frameworks, so a good choice for one person could be a bad choice for another. The best choice for the son of a gangster who was brought up thinking that the winner is the one who has the most and the loser is the stupid fool who wasn't strong enough to fight back, might be having some compassion on the loser now and again. The worst choice for a child brought up in an enlightened environment, might be attacking another person verbally. The fact that he may have some compassion doesn't make it better. Your point of choice is where you experience moral conflict. If the majority of your speech, thought, action, and choices are good, you're

on the path of a *tzaddik* and visa versa.

One could ask, shouldn't the *tzadikim* be praying for us? Why would they need our prayers? But in fact, we need them for their example, teachings, and merits that they bring to the world.

"*V'al hachasidim*"- And on the *chasidim*." The root word of *chasid* is *chesed*, kindness. An act of kindness is defined as something beyond the letter of the law. There's a difference between that and fanaticism which is someone who does more, but has somehow lost his connection to *Torah*. Emotion takes over where logic should reign. Chazal tell us, "*Kol hamosef goreah*- One who adds actually subtracts." When you add to the *Torah* it loses its integrity. Saying something is Jewish law when it's not, makes it just your opinion. But

when you go out of your way to perform a *mitzvah*, it strengthens your observance. Rav Aryeh Levin took an existent *mitzva*, that of visiting the sick, and became outstanding in it. He would visit lepers when most were afraid to do so. He was careful, he stood outside the room and spoke to them from there, but he cared enough to go out of his way to be with them.

We ask Hashem to bless the elders of Israel and the righteous converts. We value the elderly for the wisdom they've acquired through life experience. We respect the convert for making the brave leap to join the chosen people.

"*Valeiunu* -and us..." We ask Hashem to bless us together with the righteous people, because the more we are willing to learn from them and

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their teachings, the more we can be counted among them.

The next series of *brachot* speak about the actual redemption. These are the blessings for the restoration of Yerushalayim, the coming of *Mashiach*, and the return of the service in the *Beit Hamikdash*. The word *Mashiach* means the anointed one. Anointment was used as a means to separate one person from the rest of the Jewish people. The High Priest was anointed because his position was to intercede for the Jewish people before Hashem. His separateness

from the rest of us allowed him to be our representative. The early kings such as King David and King Shlomo were anointed. A king's son didn't need to be anointed unless there was some controversy about his kingship. Kings are meant to be a paragon above the people.

Mashiach is meant to be both a leader and an embodiment of who we are. He'll lead us towards being ourselves. The first *Mashiach*, the first person to lead us towards being ourselves who was separate from us, was Moshe. It is written that every subsequent

Jewish leader, if he is worthy, has a certain spark of Moshe within him. The Talmud tells us that from the time the *Beit Hamikdash* was destroyed, Hashem imbues every generation with a person with enough force of soul to potentially be *Mashiach*. But we have to be ready to change internally. Because of this, it says that in the era of *Mashiach* all sorts of things will happen to shake us up to the degree that we will no longer invest our trust in such things as money, political systems, and social systems. We will recognize that we have no one to trust other than Hashem.

Matza: the Essence of Faith Part II

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Hershel Reichman

The Sages note that we begin *Magid* with *Ha lachma Anya*. "This is the bread of affliction that our forefathers ate in Egypt, all that are hungry come and eat." It's as if we are saying, "I'm a free man but I haven't forgotten what it means to be a slave. I know that freedom is a false illusion." People think they are in control, but in fact without the help of Hashem they can do nothing. "Egypt is still a part of me. I haven't left it." Although we were freed, we are still eating the *lachma anya*, slave food. We are absolutely dependent on Hashem's kindness for our very existence.

Freedom doesn't mean the law of the jungle, survival of the fittest. It's helping others in need, "*Kol dichfin yesei v'yeichal*-Let all who are hungry come and eat." Hashem wants us to be a conduit for his blessing to the world. That means sharing His bounty with those less fortunate.

A Jew is a partner with Hashem. He knows that the Almighty is the ultimate source of all success. Our first statement at the *seder* is *Ha lachma anya*. The bread of slavery is not past history. It is also the bread of freedom, the bread of sharing with the less fortunate. Although we were freed, we still eat the bread of slavery to show that we are still subjugated to Hashem. We are still absolutely dependent on him, like a slave in Egypt whose master could keep him alive or eliminate him in a

moment.

A slave to other people is degrading but a slave to Hashem means dignity, elevation, and inspiration. It's getting closer to the source of all reality, goodness, and spirituality. It's elevating the limits of this world to higher spheres. The *lechem oni* of Egypt was redirected to *lechem cheirut*, to divine service to Hashem. This in fact makes us free. For if someone is a slave to Hashem, he's a slave to no one else, not even to his own passions and weaknesses.

On Pesach night, the Jews circumcised themselves and ate the *matza*. These are two signs of subservience to Hashem. The *milah* is a sign on the body, and the *matza* is a symbolic food. In *halacha*, a double sign is absolute proof. Two witnesses are considered reliable testimony. The Jews in Egypt accepted this double sign and became loyal servants of Hashem.

The Shem MiShmuel asks, in *Ha Lachma Anya* we say, "Now we are here, in the future we will be in the land of Israel, now we are slaves, in the future we will be free." Weren't we already freed? And what does it have to do with *matza*? The Gemara discusses a paradoxical description of the Jews relationship with Hashem. In one instance they are called *avadim*, slaves of Hashem. In other

instance they are called *banim*, sons of Hashem. The Gemara explains, if we follow Hashem's will, we will be His children and if not, we will be slaves. Jewish history witnessed various periods of redemption such as the Exodus and the building of the *Beit Hamikdash* and many stages of exile. Whether we are in a state of exile or redemption, we always remain Hashem's nation. But in exile we are slaves and a slave may never see his master. Although he is under his control, he gets his orders from lower channels. A son can go right up to his father. When we are His children, we can enjoy all the spiritual delights of this world and the next. When we are slaves we can only work and function in a limited sense.

Chazal say, "*Tzadik bemunoso yichye*." There will come a time in that dark seemingly unending exile when a Jew will survive on one thing, the absolute faith that our forefathers attained in Egypt. The Zohar calls *matza*, *machal d'hemenusa*-the bread of faith. It's the belief of the slave that there's no one other than his master and the faith of the son who relies on his father.

In exile, we are still at the slave level. At the *seder*, we yearn for the higher level of faith and freedom, for the father to son relationship which we hope to merit soon with the coming of *Mashiach* speedily in our days.