

Haggadah

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller-Gottlieb

We begin *Magid* with *Ha lachma anya* because the *seder* is meant to be a collective experience just as the *korban pesach* was eaten together in a large group. Hashem meant it that way because only Klal Yisrael as a whole can merit redemption. Even if one ends up celebrating the *seder* alone, spiritually we're meant to feel a part of something greater.

The four questions are questions that no child would ever ask. Additionally, most of the questions have not yet happened in the *seder*. So why are they asked? The first question addresses *emunah*. Night symbolizes faith. Day signifies truth. In all other situations that evoke *emunah*, we have to take into ourselves both leaven foods and *matzah*, the essence of simplicity. On this night we are meant to have no self and to see only Hashem's greatness. We are meant to perceive His gift of *orot makifim* (surrounding light), redemption and clarity. The more we internalize this, the closer to redemption we'll be.

In all other experiences we eat any sort of vegetable, but tonight we eat only bitter herbs. Tonight we reject everything that is external. The Maharal says there's no such thing as partial *emunah*. You're either there or not, and tonight you have to be there. *Matzah* is called the bread of *emunah*. It's not that we lift up the *matzah*, it uplifts us. To get to the state of complete faith, there has to be absolute removal of everything that stands in opposition to faith.

Other nights we don't dip and tonight we dip twice. The first time we dip *karpas* in salt water, symbolizing the tears of Egypt. The second time we dip *maror* in *charoset*, signifying the mortar in Egypt. The *charoset* is sweet. We sandwich the bitterness with sweetness. The Maharal says there's no redemption without exile. Until one can say I know what I don't want to be, there's no possibility of opening the door to the future.

On all other nights we eat either sitting or reclining. But tonight we recline in royalty. *Paro* is related to the root word *paruah*, wild. He ruled the people through his essence which was imagination in its most corrupt form, having no borders or sense of accountability. *Mitzrayim* was the ultimate place of limitation. Nothing is more restricted than the little space that's enclosed by the human ego. We were slaves to *Paro* and his subjects in Egypt. We sunk to their level. We closed almost all the gates. And then Hashem took us out with a strong hand and an outstretched arm. A hand is a symbol of fine motor action. Hashem revealed His Divine Providence through the plagues. He showed us that the laws of nature have no binding meaning because they have an author. The *zroeh netuyah* was the great force that turned things completely upside down. If Hashem didn't take us out of *Mitzrayim*, we and our children would still be slaves. We would still be lost in the confusion of freedom without boundaries.

The more one talks about *yetziat Mitzrayim* the more praiseworthy he is, because what you say changes you. The more we talk about

redemption, the closer we are to being redeemable. The greater a person is, the more awareness and mindfulness and detail he can include in his recounting of the Exodus. The five sages in Bnei Brak sat and spoke about *yetziat Mitzrayim* until the students came and said the time has come to say the *shema*. You could talk about exile and redemption but there's a moment of unity when you have to talk about both of them being one. Saying *shema* means accepting the yoke of heaven. It is recognizing that Hashem is the source of all things and that He is taking where we are supposed to go. On this night we move beyond our self imposed limitations, and latch on to Hashem's personalized guidance.

The *Haggadah* takes us to the beginning of our nationhood when our forefathers were idol worshipers. We can't talk about liberation until we talk about the roots of exile. Because Hashem is invisible and seems abstract, the early generations worshiped creation. Still Hashem is great enough that no matter where one comes from, one can find Him. The proof is that Avraham and Nachor who came from the same father, lived very different lives. Avraham found Hashem while Nachor raised a son Betuel who was of such low moral character that he took pride in immorality. Exile gave us a sense of uniqueness and a mission. We saw Hashem's judgment and caring and that He was with us all along. We left *b'rechush gadol*, with many possessions, not just physical gold and silver, but with the awareness of our purpose as the chosen nation.

The Fast of the Firstborn

Based on a Naaleh.com class by Rabbi Michael Taubes

There is a custom for every first-born to fast on *erev Pesach*. The source is a Gemara in Yerushalmi. Rav Yehuda ben Bereisa said, "*Chametz* and *matzah* are prohibited on *erev Pesach*." Rebbe was not a student of Rav Yehuda but he would fast on *erev Pesach* because he was a firstborn.

The Rosh notes that there's a tradition to fast, but the *Shibolei Haleket* writes that some communities did not have this practice. The *Meiri* writes that it is a custom but there's no obligation. The *Baraisa* states that although in general we don't fast in Nissan because it is a joyous month of redemption, the *bechorim* do fast on *erev Pesach*. So we see that it is an old tradition. *Tosfot* refers to the Gemara Yerushalmi that the *bechorim* fast on *erev Pesach* to thank Hashem for sparing them.

The *Shulchan Aruch* notes that whether one is a firstborn from their father or their mother, one should fast. The *Mishna Berura* says that it applies to all firstborns. This was because, in Egypt, even if a family did not have a firstborn, the oldest of the house, even if it was a girl, died. Based on this, the *Shulchan Aruch* writes that there are some who say even a firstborn girl should fast. However the *Rema* says we do not practice this. The custom is that a father of a firstborn son fasts for his child until the age of *bar mitzvah*.

On certain occasions, when a person is required to fast he can break his fast by attending a *seudat mitzvah* such as a *brit* or a wedding. In addition, if one finishes a *mesechta* in Gemara, it's a *mitzvah* to rejoice and make a feast and this too counts as a *seudat*

mitzvah. The wide spread practice is for firstborns to join such a *seudah* and break their fast. Rav Moshe Feinstein explains that it is permitted to plan a *siyum* on *erev Pesach*. We don't fast because people are weak. Rav Ovadia Yosef concurs with this ruling.

Many people fast on *erev Rosh Hashana*. Why is *erev Pesach* different? The *Arugos Habosem* explains that the fast is meant to call attention to the miracle of the firstborns who were saved. We can do this through learning just as well as we can do it through fasting. We remember the miracle in a positive sense. And since the fasting is meant to be out of a sense of joy, we join a *seudat mitzvah* instead.

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 *chachamim*. 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*.