

The Holiday of Pesach – Part II

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller

Our forefather Yaakov was called *nirdaf*, the one who was persecuted. First he was oppressed by Esav, then by Lavan. Esav wanted the birthright. But he sold it to Yaakov and said, "What do I need it for?" Rashi tells us that he knew the birthright carried with it a spiritual heritage. It was not just a material inheritance, but demanded responsibility and accountability from its bearer. What did he need that for?

Yaakov though wanted this level of accountability, of doing things that were so significant that failure equaled death. This tells us who we are as a nation. We want to be truly free, to be spiritual, to carry the responsibility of bringing the world to its destiny.

A non-Jewish mother's goal is to have a happy, well-adjusted, a child fully capable of earning a living. That's it. Jewish mothers want more. We wish our sons to be like Efrayim and Menashe, who despite growing up in a foreign environment developed incredible spiritual capacities. We wish our daughters to be like Sarah, who had was strong, protective and modest. We wish them to be like Rivka who personified *chesed* and Rachel and Leah who signified *malchut* and *binah*. These are huge spiritual goals. We want responsibility and meaning. We want to

fulfill our roles with passion and dedication.

The most feminine of all traits is *malchut*, which is recognizing Hashem's Kingship. It's telling Hashem, "I will be whatever You want me to be. Once I've negated my own limitations before You, I will influence others." The woman in Mitzrayim personified this with their deeds. They gave birth under inconceivable circumstances. They understood the value of life and desired to actualize their mission. They proved their deep faith by bringing musical instruments with them when they left Egypt.

If a woman's life isn't centered on children, her passion should be to bring *simcha shel mitzvah* (the joy of doing *mitzvot*) into everything she does. The way to figure out how to expand your role is by asking the following questions. Who am I? What can I do? What does my life offer? Think big and think creatively. The answer may be different for everyone, but we can share the zeal and meaning.

Why did the Jews in Egypt deserve and need to be broken in exile? After Moshe killed the Egyptian, he saw two Jews fighting. He sought to end the fight and one of them asked, "Will you kill me like you killed that Egyptian?"

Moshe replied, "Now the matter is known."

Rashi explains that he meant to say, "Now it is known why the Jews are still suffering in Egypt, for they have talebearers (*baalei lashon hara*) amongst them." The enemy is negativity.

The heroines of Mitzrayim, Yocheved and Miriam, teach us great lessons. Yocheved's name can be read as *yud, vav* and *kavod*. The *yud* is Hashem's name. The subsequent *vav* is an elongated yud that takes the yud down to this world. *Kavod* is seeing the significance in every person and bringing the honor of Hashem into the world. Miriam can be read as *mar yam*, bitter water. Bitterness is unbearable, but Miriam wanted to change it. She did so with positive words. Chazal say ten amounts of speech descended to the world and women received nine.

Pesach is made up of the words *peh sach*, the mouth that speaks. Pesach is a time to internalize what we express at the Seder: the praise of Hashem, the recognition of the purposefulness of suffering, of seeing Hashem's dominance, of recognizing how much He loves us more than anything else. May the timeless words uttered on this holy night inspire us throughout the year.

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 permanent, 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 relation-

ship 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.

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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.

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.