

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

Continued on page 2



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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 *sefer* night is supposed to be about. It's there to create an ambience, to allow us to better relive the experience of *yetziat Mitzrayim*.

Haggadah

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

We begin *Magid* with *Ha lachma anya* because the *sefer* 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 *sefer* 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 *sefer*. 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.