

The Seder: Exploring the Greatness of Our Sages

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Beinish Ginsburg

The night of the Seder is the night of mesorah (tradition). It is when we pass along the fundamental aspects of our faith to the next generation, which includes our emunah in the authority of the Oral Torah. The Gra writes that whatever Chazal taught us in the Oral Torah is hinted at in the Written Torah. He brings several examples:

The Jews were meant to be enslaved in Egypt for 400 years. Hashem hastened the redemption, and they left the exile 190 years early. The Gra says there is a hint to this in the Torah. In Shemot it says, "And they made our lives very bitter." The notes on top of the verse read kadma v'azla. In Aramaic, kadma means early and azla is translated as "to go." The gematria of kadma v'azla is 190 — the exact number of years that were missing from the exile.

At the beginning of Parshat Vayigash, Yosef accused the brothers of spying. Yehudah came before Yosef and pleaded with him to return Binyamin. Rashi says that Yehudah came forward because he had promised Yaakov that if he would not bring back Binyamin, he would forfeit his portion in the World to Come. The notes above "Vayigash Yehudah..." read kadma v'azla, rev'i'i, zarka, munach, segol. The Gra explains that this means the fourth son went early because he was afraid he would be thrown from the resting place of the chosen nation. This clearly reveals that Yehudah feared losing his Olam HaBa.

The Gemara in Bava Basra brings the story of Rav Papa, who was climbing a ladder when he tripped and almost fell from a step. Rav Chiya then asked him whether he had perhaps been lax in giving charity that month. Why did Rav

Chiya specifically mention the mitzvah of tzedakah? The Gra says the notes on the verse that tells us to help the poor, "Pasoach tiftach," are darga sevir, which means a broken step.

The Torah says, "Ayin tachat ayin." One might think that if Reuven knocked out Shimon's eye, Beit Din should knock out his eye. But the commentators explain that it means he must pay the value of the eye. The Gra says the verse hints that we should go "under" the word ayin. The letters following ayin — yud and nun — are peh, kaf, and samech, which spell kesef, meaning money.

When our sages show us how the Written and Oral Torah fit together, it strengthens our emunah. May this bring us to greater levels of faith and ultimately to the final redemption.

Lechem Oni

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Shimon Isaacson

The Torah refers to the matzah as lechem oni (the bread of affliction). The Gemara explains that it is lechem she'onim alav devarim harbeh, bread over which we say many things. Accordingly, Rabbenu Chananel notes that we recite the Haggadah over the matzah. Just as on Shabbat we say kiddush on a cup of wine to lend formality and significance to the words, the matzot add an aura of importance to the telling of the story of the Exodus.

At the Seder there are many foods and props

we use to help us enter the mindset of re-experiencing the exile of Egypt. It's not enough to retell the story; we have to feel as if we are living through it. We taste the bitterness of the maror dipped in brick mortar-like charoset, point to the shank bone symbolizing the korban Pesach, and drink the wine of freedom. The matzot, too, help us remember how our forefathers rushed out of Egypt and how the dough did not have time to rise.

While the word oni in lechem oni is pronounced oni, the ktiv is ayin-nun-yud, which

spells ani, a pauper. Just as a poor person cannot always afford a whole loaf of bread, we take the matzah and break it in two. In Hilchot Chametz u'Matzah, the Rambam rules that we do not make a blessing on two whole matzot as we usually do on Yom Tov because the law of lechem oni overrides lechem mishneh. In practice, we do not follow this opinion. One matzah is broken at Yachatz, and the two other complete matzot are used for Motzi Matzah.



Redemption Through Faith

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller

Our notion of seder (order) has to do with aesthetics and convenience. Hashem's idea of seder is lifting us from a state of exile to a state of redemption. The Maharal explains that redemption is about reaching self-perfection. On Pesach we were redeemed both from slavery to the Egyptians and bondage to ourselves. Our own will can be enslaving. We often don't know who we want to be, what our goals are, and which path to take to get there. On Pesach we can attain spiritual redemption through self-actualization on Hashem's terms. On this night we can discover who we truly are and who we can become through the fourteen steps, or simanim, of the Seder.

We start with Kadesh where we sanctify the Seder night with wine, a symbol of the secret self. The self that is inaccessible and hidden needs to become the predominant voice for us to merit redemption. We continue with Urchatz, washing our hands, symbolizing our desire to be a n'ki kapaim—one whose hands are clean of dishonest gain and who is learned in the art of precision in serving Hashem. Hands symbolize fine motor action. In halacha, one cannot mean well; one must do well.

For Karpas, we dip a vegetable in salt water. Vegetables are simple food and require very little preparation. When one makes a bracha, one uplifts both oneself and the food by defining something ordinary as holy. This signifies that no matter how distant one feels from Hashem, one can still elevate oneself and return to Him. Salt water represents tears

and torment, teaching us that our suffering sanctifies us.

For Yachatz, we break the middle matzah into two uneven pieces. The key to redemption is a broken heart. The smaller and more humble we are, the more sensitive we are to the pain of others and to the anguish of Galut HaShechina, and the more open and real our prayers are. We put one piece of matzah back and hide the other piece for afikomen. This symbolizes that our lives are divided into two: part one is this world, and part two is the world to come. In this world, time passes swiftly and we cannot hold on to the joy of our deeds nor to their spiritual connection. In the world to come, the hidden world, it will all be there like a feast for us to enjoy forever.

Magid, the central part of the Haggadah, comes next. Who we are is expressed and developed by what we say. The more we talk about redemption, the closer we bring ourselves to that state. We move on to Rachtzah and Motzi Matzah. Matzot symbolize the Avot and wine is about the Imahot. In Jewish law, drinks are tafel—subordinate to food. Similarly, the Imahot accompanied the Avot; they were one persona. The main property of wine is its ability to bring out the inner self. The Avot stood for emet—truth, and the Imahot symbolized our emunah—faith. Although emunah comes from a higher place than emet, emunah needs to be contained in a vessel of emet. Our need to believe and have faith has to be channeled through truth; otherwise, we can come to emunah tefelah—false faith.

The Talmud says women were given nine measures of speech. They are more connected to the physical world and therefore have a greater need to make sense of it by talking about it and uplifting it. Speaking about redemption is an important aspect of emunah.

Maror entails taking bitter herbs. Bitterness means rejection, and our rejection of non-Jewish ideals and philosophy brings the redemption closer. Korech is a sandwich of matzah—redemption, and maror—slavery. Exile is a part of redemption; discovering one's true identity necessitates knowing what one is not.

In Shulchan Orech, the Jews in the time of the Temple partook of the sacrificial lamb, a submissive animal. Our task is to subjugate our will before the will of Hashem. Tzafun is the hidden essence of the Seder, the geulah yet to come. Barech means blessing. On Pesach, the vaults of heaven are open. Our most fervent prayer should be to connect with Hashem.

Hallel and Nirtza bring this holy and emotionally laden night to a close. Nirtza is song. The difference between speech and song is that speech creates a fine border around reality, while song lifts one beyond that. Song is the voice of emunah. Many have the custom to recite Shir Hashirim after the Seder. The Song of Songs bears our souls aloft to the level of supernatural faith, which is ultimately what redemption is all about.