

The Narrow Bridge

גשר צר מאוד

HOLIDAY INSIGHTS

Short Divrei Torah on Pesach

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רפואה שלמה פעסל בת גאלדא / לזכות חילינו

REACHING NEW HEIGHTS

The Lubavitcher Rebbe

On the nights of Passover, the One Above opens every door and every gateway for every single Jew. Regardless of whatever you have done over the past year, on these two nights you can attain the highest levels in a single leap.

PROPER PRIORITIES

Reb Yisroel Salanter

Even when it comes to holiness and religious devotion, one must always consider how his actions will affect the people around him.

This message was truly epitomized in the latter years of Rav Yisrael Salanter's life when he was too ill to supervise the city's matza baking before Pesach. He sent some of his best students to supervise the entire process. Before they departed for the bakery, they asked their teacher which religious stringencies they needed to be careful about in their task. Rav Yisrael just answered them as follows: "The woman who cleans the floors in between each baking is a widow; be careful how you speak to her."

TRUE VALUE

Rabbi Avraham Twerski

The Tzaddik of Sanz used to drink the four cups of wine at the Seder from a glass rather than from a silver cup. Some chassidim thought that there must have been a kabbalistic reason for this, but my grandfather, the Bobover Rebbe, said that the reason was really simple: The Tzaddik had pawned his silver kos to give maos chittim to the needy, so that they could buy provisions for Pesach. (Along the same lines, the Tzaddik had no sukkah decorations, "The finest sukkah decoration is to give the money for the ornaments to the poor.")

HAPPINESS TAKES PRECEDENCE

Reb Yitzchak of Neschiz

A chassid poured out his trouble before R' Yitzchak of Neschiz. The wheat he had guarded for matzos had become chametz and he would be forced to eat the simple "unguarded" matzos on Pesach.

"The eating of shmura matzah ("guarded" matzos) is only an adornment to the mitzvah" said the Rebbe, "but the commandment to rejoice on the festival is itself given in the Torah. It is preferable to eat the simple matzah in joy rather than the 'guarded' matzah in sadness." (Chassidim Mesaprim I 637)

WHO IS LIKE YOUR NATION?

Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev

Once, on the day before Pesach, after noon had passed, Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev went to the marketplace, called over a gentile, gave him a coin, and said, "Bring me some foreign-made snuff." The man was back in a moment with the contraband merchandise.

The Rebbe thanked him and turning to a nearby Jew, said, "Here, take this coin and buy me a loaf of bread from a Jew." The man was shaken and cried out, "Rebbe, it is the day before Pesach and the possession of chametz is already forbidden at this hour!"

R' Levi Yitzchak lifted his eyes on high and said, "Behold, Master of the world, who is like Your nation Israel? The czar has forbidden the sale of this snuff and appointed thousands of guards and inspectors to maintain his decree; he has punished offenders with fines and prison. Yet, nevertheless, huge quantities of the forbidden product are smuggled in. You have written in Your Torah: 'And chametz shall not be seen by you' (Shemos 13:7). You have not appointed a single guard or inspector and, nevertheless, one cannot even get a smidgen of chametz from a Jewish home." (Toldos Kedushas Levi 67)

WHEN TO BE STRINGENT

Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

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This message was truly epitomized in the latter years of Rav Yisrael Salanter's life when he was too ill to supervise the city's matza baking before Pesach. He sent some of his best students to supervise the entire process. Before they departed for the bakery, they asked their teacher which religious stringencies they needed to be careful about in their task.

Rav Yisrael just answered them as follows: "The woman who cleans the floors in between each baking is a widow; be careful how you speak to her."

The following story took place at the Belzer Rebbe's home on Seder night during the War. There were still members of the city yet to be deported by the Germans, and many had gathered in the home of the Rebbe. Since food was scarce, everyone was sharing their plate with the person sitting next to them.

All ears were directed towards the Rebbe as he spoke of faith and redemption. And then, as the Rebbe was about to take a spoon of soup that he was sharing with his mother, she inadvertently dipped her matza into the soup. His students around the table were aghast at the thought of their Rebbe about to eat gebrochts (matza that has come in contact with a liquid, which the Belzer Rebbe was very stringent not to eat during Pesach).

Without batting an eyelid, the Rebbe continued to eat his soup as if nothing had happened.

After the meal, his students approached him to ask how he could have eaten something that he was always so stringent about. The Rebbe's response was simple: "What?! I should keep a custom and embarrass my mother?!"

DRAWING WATERS

Reb Yechiel Meir of Ovstrovitz

Two times a year, Israel goes down to the river. On Rosh Hashanah they go to cast away their sins (tashlich). And before Pesach they go to draw water for the baking of matzos. The actions and the times are significant.

On Rosh Hashanah we repent because of fear, fear of the imminent judgment, and we throw our sins from us. But on Pesach we were chosen as an elect nation against a background of miracles. Then is the time for repentance (teshuvah) because of love. And when one does teshuvah from love, "the intentional sins" are changed into worthy acts in his favor (Yoma 86b). Then we return to the river to gather up the sins which we had cast away and transform them into shining deeds of merit. (Bircas Chaim 11, p. 114)

A HOLY PLACE

Rabbi Efreim Goldberg

In discussing the korban mincha (grain offering), the Torah commands that after a portion of the offering is placed on the Mizbeach, the rest is eaten by the kohanim: "It shall be eaten as unleavened bread in a sacred location; they shall eat it in the courtyard of the Tent of Meeting" (6:9). The mincha offering must be prepared as matza, and not chametz, it is to be eaten specifically "in a holy place," in the azara (courtyard) of the Beis HaMikdash.

Rav Shlomo of Radomsk, in Tiferes Shlomo, advances several homiletic readings of this pasuk, explaining it as an allusion to the consumption of matza on Pesach. First, he writes, the Torah here instructs that we must ensure that we eat matza on Pesach in a sacred place - by making ourselves and our homes sacred. They shall eat it in the courtyard of the Tent of Meeting - we must transform our home into a Beis HaMikdash, a place worthy of the residence of the Shechina, through our refined conduct and spiritual devotion, as it is within such an environment that the matza must be eaten. Therefore, the Tiferes Shlomo writes, as we prepare for Pesach, our preparations must include efforts to elevate ourselves and our homes, to turn the home into a "holy place" that is worthy of having the matza consumed within its walls.

Before Mattan Torah, Hashem spoke to Moshe and had him deliver a message to Bnei Yisrael, which included remembering how Hashem "carried" them out of Egypt "on the wings of eagles" (Shemos 19:4). Targum Yonasan ben Uziel explains this phrase to mean that on the night of the very first seder, when Bnei Yisrael offered the first korban pesach in Egypt just before the final plague, they were carried to Yerushalayim, to the site of the Beis HaMikdash, so they could offer the korban there. This does not mean that Benei Yisrael were actually flown from Egypt to Yerushalayim. It means that their homes, where they partook of the korban pesach, became sacred like the Beis HaMikdash. If we prepare properly for Pesach, and we come to the seder with the proper frame of mind, then no matter where we might be geographically, we are considered, in a sense, as though we serve Hashem in the Beis HaMikdash.

As Pesach approaches, we are given the challenge - and the opportunity - to uplift ourselves and our homes, and turn them into a Beis HaMikdash, a place of purity, sanctity, and devoted avodas Hashem.

Another explanation offered by the Tiferes Shlomo interprets the expression "a holy place" as a reference to the mouth - the place where the matza is actually eaten. In order to eat matza, we must ensure that our mouths are a holy place, that they are pure of forbidden speech, such as gossip, lashon hara and vulgarity. The matza, the special food we eat on Pesach, requires a holy place, a sacred mouth, a mouth that has not been contaminated through prohibited speech. [Pesach is an acronym for "peh sach," a mouth that speaks.]

Thus, our preparations for Pesach must include special attention to the way we speak, cleansing our mouths of any sort of inappropriate words, ensuring that our mouths will be worthy of partaking of the matza on Pesach.

FREE OF ANGER

Reb Pinchas of Radvanka

Becoming angry is more serious than violating the prohibition against chametz in one respect. Chametz, even a particle, is forbidden for one week of the year; anger, even a smidgen, is forbidden throughout the entire year.

HASHEM KNOWS BEST

Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

On Seder night we express our thanks to Hashem again and again for taking us out of Egypt. However, it would be fair to ask, why are we so grateful to Hashem for taking us out of Egypt when He was the One who put us there in the first place?

Imagine the following scenario: A man wearing a white coat runs down the street wielding a baseball bat, he swings and succeeds in clobbering the first person he comes across. As his victim is rolling around on the floor in agonizing pain, his attacker kneels down beside him and says, "Don't worry my friend. You see this coat? I am a leading doctor in the world's best hospital and I'll make sure that you have a full recovery!"

Should the victim feel a deep sense of gratitude to his attacker? Of course not, he would much rather have not been hurt in the first place. Similarly, Hashem should have kept us far away from Egypt where no harm would have befallen us and then there would have been no need to even take us out.

The true answer as to why we are so grateful to Hashem is that our descent to Egypt was the greatest kindness that Hashem could have done for us. For it was there that the Jewish People were formed as a nation; only in that atmosphere and in those surroundings were we capable of being raised up and merit receiving the Torah. As slaves, with no rights or free time, with no strength left in us at all and empty of any spiritual merit to help us, we had no choice but to recognize Hashem's complete role in taking us out from Egypt.

Without any possibility of escaping naturally, we were able to recognize that our entire exit from the darkest place in the world was only due to Hashem's actions. It was for this reason that we were put there in the first place, because, without sinking to the deepest depths of despair, we could never have come to the appreciation that Hashem did everything for us. And if we would not have started life as a nation in such a pit of despair, we could never have fully accepted the Torah and said "Na'ase V'nishma" - "We will do and then we will listen" because we would have lacked the unwavering trust in Hashem that we only developed by coming out of Egypt.

FOCUSING ON OTHERS

Rabbi Elimelech Biderman

On the night of the Seder, every single Yid is like the Kohen Gadol. [The Maharal writes that the white kittel worn by the Seder reflects the stature of every single Yid at that time. "The level and the holiness of every Yid on this night is like that of the Kohen Gadol at the moment when he enters the Kodesh HaKodashim on Yom Kippur."] The avodah of each individual has the power to shake the heavens. Knowing this, the Shomrei Emunim, R' Ahrele Roth, decided to prepare for the Seder as did the Kohen Gadol, by secluding himself. From Rosh Chodesh Nissan, he closeted himself in his room and made it clear to the gabbaim that no one was to enter - he was engaged in preparing for the Seder!

The great night arrived, and he was ready... for the least elevating Seder he had ever experienced. He himself wrote this, later on. That Seder, with all the preparation, simply did not have the same feel as in other years. The Rebbe realized that what had created such inspiration was specifically the flow of "tirdos," the needs of others, the holy distractions of helping them, the toil involved in trying to find a moment of peace to focus on the Seder once again. That created the "chiyus" (life) because that is how the preparation is meant to be: not cut off from the people around us, but with them, part of them, along with them.

HELPING OTHERS

Reb Tzvi Hirsch of Liska

R' Mordechai of Nadvorna to a chassid of R' Tzvi Hirsch of Liska: When you visit your rebbe give him my warm regards and tell him the following: The author of the Shulchan Aruch writes that one should inquire about, and give discourses on, the laws of Pesach thirty days before Pesach (Orach Chaim 429). The Rama adds: "and it is the custom to buy wheat and distribute it among the poor for their Pesach needs." Why has the Rama chosen to place his comment about buying wheat as an addendum to speaking on the topics of Pesach, even to the point of joining it to the above with an "and"? The Rama implies to rabbis that it is more important for them to supply the poor with their Pesach needs than to spend time on their Pesach sermons.

The chassid reached Liska and passed on the thought to his rebbe. A few days later, as the Rebbe sat in his study preparing his Shabbos HaGadol talk, a woman entered, weeping, and told him she had no matzos for the festival. The Rebbe remembered the words of R' Mordechai of Nadvorna, closed his books, called his sons-in-law and together they left to bake matzos for the woman. And when the members of the community saw them on their way, who could refrain from joining them? Everyone left his work and went along, and in a short while the matzos had been baked and they, together with all the other Pesach provisions, were brought to the house of the unfortunate woman.

A TRULY SPECIAL SEDER

Rabbi Avraham Twerski

The Chozeh of Lublin had a chassid, Reb Shmuel of Karov, who lived in abject poverty and had no means with which to buy provisions for Pesach. The Chozeh arranged for a wealthy chassid to send Reb Shmuel provisions for Yom Tov. Reb Shmuel was thrilled and conducted the first Seder with all the kabbalistic trimmings. He felt he was soaring in heaven in the company of the angels.

The next afternoon, Reb Shmuel took a nap and overslept; when he woke up it was already dark. He started the second Seder, but since he wanted to eat the afikoman before midnight, he rushed through the Haggadah, just saying the words without the profound kavanos. He was heartbroken that he did not have the time to think about the kavanos.

After Pesach he visited the Chozeh. "Reb Shmuel," the Chozeh told him, "soaring in Heaven in the company of angels is not a great avodah. But your second Seder? Ah, that was something special."

ACCESS GRANTED

Rabbi Avraham Twerski

"U'pasach Hashem al ha'pesach - Hashem will skip (do without) the opening."

Hashem says to us, "Just begin to do teshuvah, and I will take it from there. Give Me a pesach (opening) of teshuvah even as tiny as the point of a needle, and I will broaden it to a portal that can admit wagons." But in Egypt, Bnei Yisrael had sunk to the depths of impurity. There wasn't an opening of teshuvah even the size of a needle point. Moshe was telling them: "Hashem will skip over the pesach, the need for an opening of teshuvah, and deliver you anyway!"

SAVE THE DATE

Vizhnitzer Rebbe

A man once came before the Ahavas Yisrael of Vizhnitz and poured his heart out. He had arranged a match for his son some time before, but he had no funds with which to meet the many wedding expenses.

The Rebbe asked if they had already set a date for the wedding. "No," replied the man, "I have no wherewithal to pay for anything. How could I set a date?"

"Look," said the Rebbe, "our Torah has demanded of us that not a particle of chametz be found in our home on Pesach, and Pesach expenses are large. Now, imagine that the Torah had not set a date for Pesach and that we would only celebrate it when we had completed our preparations; we would never celebrate it. But since the Torah has established a specific date, a great wonder takes place. All the women manage to clean their homes; all the needs of Pesach are filled. Take a lesson from the Torah. Set the wedding date, and you will see that you will succeed in acquiring whatever you need by then."

LOVE AND AWE

Sefas Emes

Any interpretation of the Pesach story must deal with the following questions: Why did the miracles associated with the Exodus occur in two phases: the departure from Egypt and the splitting of the Sea of Reeds? Why did Hashem choose not to wipe out the Egyptians in one quick stroke?

To answer these questions, we must say that both of these events were vital components in His plan for Israel's liberation. We may suggest that the Exodus and the Splitting of the Sea represent dual aspects of the relationship between the Jew and the Creator.

The Exodus brought not so much unbridled freedom as a challenge to make ourselves into Hashem's servants. At that time, the Jewish people were called "Hashem's hosts" (Shemos 12:41). The same term is used to describe all of the creations of the universe who serve Hashem with unquestioning loyalty: "The heaven and the earth were finished and all their hosts" (Bereishis 21). When Israel was released from Egypt, it took upon itself to serve Hashem with the same loyalty as the natural world.

On the seventh day of Pesach, however, as the sea split and the Jewish people sang the Song, something even greater happened. The Jewish people rose to the level of being Hashem's children. Thus, the passage in the Maariv prayer describing the Splitting of the Sea contains several references to Israel's status as Hashem's children: "He brought His children through the split parts of the Sea of Reeds"; "When His children perceived His power, they lauded and gave grateful praise to His Name"; and, "Your children beheld Your Majesty." (5658)

(The Exodus and the Splitting of the Sea were important not only for their intrinsic historical significance, but also because of certain character traits they implanted in the Jewish people, in particular love of Hashem and fear of Hashem. The Jews' conduct at the time of the Exodus provides one of the most impressive demonstrations of their love for Hashem in the course of their history. Only a people filled with love of its Creator would follow Him blindly into the Wilderness, with no provisions for the basic necessities of life such as food and water. The Song of the Sea, while also motivated by feelings of affection, was inspired primarily by fear of Hashem, as we see from the verse immediately preceding the Song (Shemos 14:31): "The people feared Hashem, and they had faith in Hashem and in Moshe, His servant.")

LIFTED WITH LOVE

Rabbi Elimelech Biderman

The Yom Tov is called Pesach, an enduring testimony to the fact that Hashem "passed over the houses of Yisrael in Mitzrayim when He smote the Egyptians" (Shemos 12:27). While the clear distinction between nations is worthy of celebration, why is this a bigger deal than any of the previous makkos, in which precisely the same thing happened?

By the makkah of “blood,” a Yid drinking from the same cup as an Egyptian had clear, delicious water, while the Mitzri had only blood. When the entire land was shrouded in darkness, the Bnei Yisrael had light in their homes. Why was this miracle any different?

The Maharal asks this question, and he explains that each of the makkos was effected by malachim, angels dispatched to fulfill His will. That a makkah generated by a malach can have no power over a Yid is not surprising, because a Yid is on a higher level than a malach.

Makkas Bechoros, however, was performed not by any malach or messenger, but by the Ribbono shel Olam Himself. By skipping over the homes of the Bnei Yisrael to spare them from His own action, He was lifting them to a place above this world, taking them and embracing them and holding them close, making them a part of Him and protecting them. That's reason for celebration!

And each year, we celebrate this anew on this exalted night, recalling the miracles of our survival and the ultimate miracle of being chosen this way, lifted into a different realm. On this night, we are with Him, bound up with Him, and sheltered by Him. That's a miracle that lives on.

NO ROOM FOR DOUBT

Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

In his hometown of Radin, the Chofetz Chaim went to see a doctor during an especially difficult time for the Jewish people there. They were suffering from many pogroms and men, women and children were being slaughtered mercilessly. The doctor asked the Chofetz Chaim how Hashem could allow such things to happen to His people. Before the Chofetz Chaim could respond, the doctor confessed that he was starting to lose faith that Hashem even existed at all.

The Chofetz Chaim responded “Are you sure that you really are a doctor?” Startled at the relevance of the question, the doctor announced that he certainly was. “How do I know?” retorted the Chofetz Chaim. “I have this certificate attesting to my qualifications right here” replied the doctor, pointing to the framed diploma on his wall.

The Chofetz Chaim read the diploma and said, “This certificate is thirty years old. How do I know about your qualifications today?” Flabbergasted at the line of questioning, the doctor declared, “I don't need to take a new examination every day. Once is enough to prove my skills and since then, everybody knows that I am a doctor even without this certificate on my wall!”

A smile lit up the Chofetz Chaim's face as he said to the doctor in a gentle voice, “You should know, the same is true with us. Before Hashem gave us the Torah, He showed to us many signs and wonders. He performed many miracles, and everyone knew that He was G-d. Today, thousands of years later, He too does not need to prove Himself anew every day. The Jews, after experiencing miracle after miracle, were able to testify at

Sinai that Hashem was the King of the World. He proved Himself then, and the memory of those events has not left the Jewish People for even one generation. We cannot know why Hashem is letting these terrible things happen to His people, but we can know for sure that He is here, and this is all part of His master plan.”

QUESTIONS ARE ENCOURAGED

Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

Pesach is the night where we develop and increase our faith and trust in Hashem as we recall the miracles He performed for our ancestors and the ones He will do for us to bring our ultimate redemption.

Since the Seder Night is the pinnacle night to develop our trust in Hashem (see the Darchei Moshe; Orach Chaim 480), it is strange that it involves so many questions. Surely it would be more appropriate not to ask a single question and certainly not to encourage them!?

(In fact, we purposely perform many unusual and contradictory actions at the Seder table specifically in order that further questions are asked; see Mishnah Berurah 473:69)

Unlike other religions, our faith in Hashem is not a “blind faith.” The Torah commands us to “know” there is a G-d, not to merely “believe” in His existence. The Rambam (Devarim 4:39) considers this the “foundation of foundations and the pillar of wisdom.” For this reason, questions are absolutely essential to facilitate any honest quest for knowledge, and Pesach - the night we enrich ourselves with deeper faith and understanding - is therefore the perfect time to ask them!

However, we can still ask: If the “foundation of foundations” is “knowing” Hashem, what role does “faith” play?

With all the research in the world, no one can possibly understand Hashem. However, if we take a parable of a father and son, we will see that a child is confident to jump into his father's arms because he has faith that his father will catch him.

The child does not understand the complexities of his father, yet he knows enough to be sure that his father is someone who is capable of catching him and who has the desire to do so. Trust, based on the understanding he has of his father, allows him to jump, confident that he will be caught.

The same is true in our relationship with Hashem. Through the miracles of Pesach, when Hashem chose us to become His Nation (Bamidbar 15:41), we gained enough understanding to know that He is capable and committed to save us.

Based on this knowledge, we have full faith, confidence, and trust in Hashem. This is the role of our Pesach Seder.

Through recounting everything that Hashem did for us then, we widen our knowledge and reinforce our faith, leading to a deeper relationship with the Creator of the World.

HAGGADAH

ORDER TO EVERYTHING

Maharal of Prague

This exalted evening is called "seder night," referring to the order of the meal, but - deeper - to the order of our lives. We affirm through this evening of faith that nothing happens randomly; Hashem has a divine order, a seder, to everything that transpires. The sequence of our lives is but the design of providence.

DECLARATION OF GRATITUDE

Reb Noson of Breslov

Blessed are You, Hashem, our G-d, that You have kept us alive, sustained us ...

As we recite the Kiddush, we bring to mind the miracles of Redemption. We proclaim to ourselves G-d's Ultimate Will and Providence. We become aware of the Divine guidance permeating our lives. Inherent in the security of that knowledge is an uplifting serenity. We rise above time, above the ephemeral experiences we call life. Every moment is infused with eternal meaning. We now usher in the Festival. Its lesson imbues meaning into every aspect of life. It is for that meaning in our lives that we now express our gratitude to Hashem for giving us life at this moment. (Likutey Halakhot, Birkhat Hoda'ah 6:62)

HASHEM'S KIDDUSH

Shpole Zeide

Blessed are You, Hashem, our G-d, that You have kept us alive, sustained us ...

It is customary for teachers of the very young to have their tender pupils memorize the key words which give the order of the Seder along with their traditional interpretations.

Once, on the evening of the Seder, the Shpole Zeide asked his little son to recite the key aloud. The youngster began, "Kaddesh when the father comes from the beis knesses, the synagogue, on the evening of the Seder, he must immediately recite kiddush." His father waited for him to continue, but the child said that the teacher had not taught him anything further on this point. And so, his father taught him the conclusion: "So that the youngsters won't fall asleep, but will ask the Mah Nishtanah (the Four Questions)."

On the following day, the teacher was present at the Rebbe's tish (table) and the Rebbe asked him, "Why didn't you teach the children the concluding remarks?"

"I didn't want to have them go to the trouble," said the teacher, "especially since it isn't a very important reason. For even a man who has no children recites the kiddush immediately on his arrival from the beis knesses."

The Rebbe became angry, "Are you the one to judge which reason is important and which is not? Are you wiser than all the other teachers? How did you dare change the version that has been taught for generations? Let me tell you what those who lived before us alluded to with this statement. "When the father - that is our Father in Heaven - comes from the beis knesses on the evening of the Seder and sees how his children, the people of Israel, have severed themselves from the life of the everyday and the darkness and troubles of the Exile, how they have come to the beis knesses to pray before Him and praise Him for their Redemption; when He sees this, He must immediately say kiddush - He must renew the kiddushin, the marriage bond between Himself and ourselves, and take us out of exile; so that the youngsters won't fall asleep - so that we don't sink into a deep slumber in our Exile; but will ask the Mah Nishtanah, why is this night different from all other nights - why is this night, this Exile, longer than all the other exiles."

When he said this, the Zaide burst into torrential weeping and all those present wept along with him. The Zaide came to himself and said, "Now we must give our Father some joy; we must show Him that His child can dance in the darkness, too." And he ordered them to sing a melody and began to dance, as was his holy way. (Sipurei Chassidim)

MUTUAL LOVE

Rabbi Yisrael Meir Druck

Blessed are You, Hashem, our G-d ... [You] have lovingly given us ... this Feast of Matzos [Chag HaMatzos] ...

In Kiddush and davening we describe Pesach the way the Torah describes it: Chag HaMatzos. Yet in general, we refer to the holiday as "Pesach." Why, wonders the Kedushas Levi, does the Torah of Matzos refer to the holiday as Chag HaMatzos, while the Jewish people call it "Pesach"?

He explains that when the Torah uses the name "Chag HaMatzos," it is praising the Jewish people for the actions described in this verse (Shemos 12:39): "They baked the dough that they took out of Egypt into unleavened cakes, for they could not be leavened, for they were driven from Egypt for they could not delay, nor had they made provisions for themselves." Indeed, Rashi comments: This tells the praise of Israel, that they did not say, "How can we go out to the wilderness without provisions?" Instead, they believed and went. That is what is stated in the Prophets, "I recall for you the kindness of your youth, the love of your nuptials, your following Me into the Wilderness, into an unsown land." What reward is stated clearly after this? [The next verse states:] "Israel is holy unto Hashem, etc."

When the Torah calls this Yom Tov "Chag HaMatzos," it is highlighting the praise of the Jewish people, who fulfill the Torah's commandments by eating matzah on Pesach and not chametz.

On the other hand, when we call the Yom Tov “Pesach,” we are giving praise and thanks to Hashem for saving us from the Destroyer in Egypt, as the verse states (Shemos 12:27): “You shall say, ‘It is a Passover offering to Hashem, Who passed (pasach) over the houses of the Children of Israel.’”

This mutual expression of admiration is in keeping with the idea of: “I am my Beloved's and my Beloved is mine.” These words are found in Shir HaShirim, and for this reason we read Shir HaShirim on Pesach night: to remember the mutual love between us and Hashem.

Similarly, the Gemara (Berachos 6a) teaches that Hashem wears tefillin, and His tefillin contain the words (I Divrei HaYamim 17:21) “And who is like Your people Israel, one nation in the land.” The Gemara continues: “And is the Holy One, Blessed is He, praised with the praises of Israel? Yes! For it is written (Devarim 26:17): ‘You have praised Hashem today,’ and it is also written: ‘And Hashem has praised you today.’”

The Holy One, Blessed is He, said to Israel: “You made Me a subject of unique praise in the world, and I will make you a subject of unique praise in the world. You made Me a subject of unique praise in the world, as it is stated (Devarim 6:4): ‘Hear O Israel: Hashem is our G-d, Hashem is One.’ And I will make you a subject of unique praise in the world, as it is stated: ‘And who is like Your people Israel, one nation (i.e., a unique nation) in the land.’”

We see, then, that Hashem is glorified through the Jewish people, while the Jewish people are glorified through Hashem. This idea is reflected in the names used to refer to the Yom Tov of Pesach: The Jewish people call it “Pesach,” praising Hashem for saving them, while Hashem calls it “Chag HaMatzos,” praising the Jewish people for fulfilling His mitzvos.

PLEASANT MISHAPS

Rabbi Elimelech Biderman

Kadesh ...

Before Kiddush one year, R' Zalman Brizel was making his final preparations for the Seder. The table looked magnificent, the air heavy with anticipation of what was to follow. One of the younger grandchildren, focused on a game he was playing, accidentally tugged on the tablecloth, and he sent the matzos tumbling down to the floor, where they cracked.

This was at a time when money was tight and each whole matzah was a precious commodity, but R' Zalman did not react to the accident. Instead, he smiled broadly and raised his eyes heavenward. “Ribbono shel Olam,” he said, “I thank You for my zeese eineklach, my sweet grandchildren.”

R' Brizel understood that the middah (attitude) with which to approach the Seder is that of gratitude and appreciation. Not only had the mishap not ruined that feeling, it had enhanced it!

DESPERATE TIMES, DESPERATE MEASURES

Tiferes Shmuel

Kadesh, Urchatz ...

On the first Pesach after he had become Rebbe, the Tiferes Shmuel of Alexander remarked: The order of the seder is Kadesh, Urchatz - first say the kiddush, the prayer of sanctification of the Festival, and then wash hands. Should not the order have been the reverse? First wash - a man should wash himself clean of sin and then rise and become holy... If, however, we think in terms of a parable, we can understand the order.

Not everyone is permitted to enter the palace of a king. Even those who have been invited to do so must make preparations, they must dress properly. And they can only go in at the appointed hour. If a man should enter without an invitation, without preparing himself - in sackcloth, or at an hour other than the one assigned - he would be severely punished. But if the man was fleeing from a band of murderous robbers and would rush into the palace to save his life, no one would hold him blameworthy or punish him.

On the evening of the first Seder in Egypt, Israel was sunk in the depths of impurity and corruption and was about to sink into the final depth and be completely assimilated. They were forced to leap up and out of the abyss into the palace of the King of kings to save themselves. They sanctified themselves (Kadesh) first, so to speak, and only afterwards went through stages of preparation; through the counting of the forty-nine days of the omer. That was the Urchatz, the washing away of the sins. (Eser Zechuyos)

HOLY EXCEPTION

Reb Chaim of Sanz

Kadesh, Urchatz ...

The order of the Seder is Kadesh, Urchatz - to make kiddush and then wash our hands. The Chassidic Rebbeim asked: Kadesh means to be holy, and it is necessary to cleanse oneself of sins in order to be holy, so why doesn't Urchatz precede Kadesh?

They answered said that although in Mitzrayim, Bnei Yisrael had fallen into the depths of impurity, nevertheless they merited to see the revelation of the Shechinah on Pesach night. This shows that Pesach night is so special that we can achieve kedushah even before we have cleansed ourselves of our sins.

WORTHY RADISH

Rabbi Elimelech Biderman

Karpas ... Blessed are You, Hashem ... Who creates the fruits of the earth ...

In Yiddish, there is an expression, “vert a reitach,” worth a radish, which indicates that something does not have very much value.

But the Beis Yisrael would say that Karpas teaches us the opposite lesson - tonight, at the Seder, this same radish is given a position of honor, an exalted spot on the Seder table.

This, he said, symbolizes the Yidden seated around the table as well. Even if all year long you felt distant and forlorn “vert a reitach,” tonight you are royalty.

The Yismach Yisrael saw a hint to this in the karpas itself. Many of the vegetables used for Karpas grow underground, almost entirely covered by dirt. Tonight, they sit on the table of kings, a cherished object of a mitzvah, invested with the ultimate glory.

That is every Yid on this night, as the name of this Yom Tov denotes: Pesach, every single one of us can “skip,” and reach a place so much higher than we have been until now.

FOLLOWING YOUR CUSTOMS

Reb Yissachar Dov of Belz

Karpas ... Blessed are You, Hashem ... Who creates the fruits of the earth ...

The Rebbe of Kretchnif told the following story: A chassid brought a sack of carrots to R' Yissachar Dov of Belz to be used as karpas during the Seder. He parted from the Rebbe and left for home. R' Yissachar Dov gave orders that the sack of carrots be burned with the chametz. Despite the astonishment of all present, no one questioned his instructions.

A few hours passed and the man who had brought the carrots appeared; he was very disturbed.

His maidservant had asked him if he was pleased with the carrots, since they were large and appealing to the eye! She even revealed the secret of her success. She had, she said, watered the plants with beer.

Her master had been horrified. “Beer is chametz,” he had thought. “The carrots are forbidden for Pesach and the Rebbe, heaven forbid, will use them for karpas.” He immediately saddled his horse and ridden full gallop to Belz. They calmed him and told him that the carrots had been burned with the chametz.

To the chassidim the incident seemed to be a miracle. But the Rebbe said, “I did not order the carrots burned because I knew that they had been watered with beer. How could I have known that? But I did know that it is forbidden to introduce changes which alter the ways of our fathers. When the carrots were brought for karpas, I thought to myself, ‘When did the generations gone by ever use carrots for karpas? Something is not quite right here!’ That is why I had them burned.”

The Rebbe of Kretchnif concluded his narration with, “See how adherence to ancestral customs prevented a violation of eating chametz on Pesach!”

BEST FRIENDS FOREVER

Rabbi Elimelech Biderman

Yachatz ...

This is a night upon which we remember the bris, the covenant between us and the Ribbono shel Olam, and a night upon which we celebrate that bris.

We break the middle matzah into two parts, one hidden away for the afikoman and one eaten. The sefarim compare this to two close friends, bound heart and soul, who are forced to part from one another. The separation will be painful, so before they take leave from one another, they make a pact. They take a picture together, then divide the picture into two halves, each one claiming a part. They pledge that they will each hold on to their incomplete halves until the day when they are reunited, together again. Then, they promise, they will put the picture back together, whole as is their relationship.

Tonight, at the Seder, we are making a similar pledge to the greatest Friend we will ever have, the Ribbono shel Olam.

We know that during the year ahead there will be times when we do not sense that same closeness and connection as we do by the Seder, that we will feel distant and detached. We put away part of this matzah for the afikoman, and parts of that will be saved for the long year ahead. This way, at moments when we need it most, we can grasp a crumb of that matzah and remember the bond we share, and that really, we are united.

NO NEED TO COMPARE

Tzemach Tzedek

Yachatz ...

At the Seder of the Tzemach Tzedek, the Rebbe of Lubavitch, one of those present, after breaking the middle matzah, measured the pieces against each other to see which was the bigger and would serve as afikoman. On seeing this, the Rebbe remarked, “If an object must be measured to determine whether it is great, then even something small may be greater than it.” (Sipurei Chassidim)

[The Rebbe was making a general statement about greatness and great men. Greatness which only can be determined in comparison with others is not true greatness.]

BROKEN WITHOUT HASHEM

Reb Menachem Mendel of Rimanov

Yachatz ...

The division of the matzah at yachatz is a loving message we convey to Hashem: without You in our lives, we are not whole - but broken.

KNOWING THAT WE DON'T KNOW

Reb Noson of Breslov

Yachatz ...

Matzah symbolizes great awareness of G-d. The Jewish People ate it on the night of Redemption. They also brought the Matzah forth with them from Egypt. In it, they experienced the taste of manna, Bread from Heaven. It epitomized the clear perception that man's sustenance is directly from G-d.

Mankind, though, is not yet ready for this overwhelming experience of G-d. Preparation is required. We must bring the deepest fibers of our souls into harmony and be willing to accept this eminent Truth.

First, we must put aside all notions of "knowing" G-d. We must realize that to know Hashem is to realize that we can never really know Him. We must therefore break the Matzah; separate this great awareness into fathomable sections.

The larger portion is set aside for the "end." In the End of Days, Man will rise again to his destined level of Awareness. Until then, we can utilize only the smaller part, the Lechem Oni, which is symbolic of the lack of that great knowledge. Upon this Lechem Oni, upon this knowledge of our unawareness, we recite the Haggadah. These are our prayers and words of faith that ultimately Hashem will redeem us from the darkness of unawareness. (Likutey Halakhot, Giluach 3:13-14)

LIVING THE STORY

Reb Noson of Breslov

Behold I am prepared and ready to fulfill the mitzvah of telling of the Exodus from Egypt ...

Man is incapable of a sudden confrontation with his Creator. The overwhelming experience of such awareness is just too awesome. Truth, the stark Truth, must be camouflaged. Only then can the soul gradually absorb it.

G-d, so to speak, camouflaged Himself in stories. These are the stories of Creation and of Adam and Eve. The stories of the Flood and of the Patriarchs. The stories of Jewish exile and redemption. Hashem is hidden in all the stories of human history. And, in the as yet untold stories of each and every human being. His trials. His tribulations. And his salvation.

At the Pesach Seder we tell stories - Maggid. We recount the stories of the exile and the redemption from Egypt. These represent the collective stories of mankind. They typify the individual stories of each and every one of us. As we relate the details of these stories, we must relate to them. Be aroused by them. See the Hand of Hashem in the stories of our own lives. Through the telling, we bring to life their stories. In turn, may Hashem bring to life the story of our Redemption. (Likutey Halakhot, Nedarim 5:6-8)

DON'T JUST TELL THEM, SHOW THEM

Avnei Nezer

Behold I am prepared and ready to fulfill the mitzvah of telling of the Exodus from Egypt ...

The Rebbe of Sochachov, author of Avnei Nezer, noted that the Aramaic translation of Onkelos renders v'higaditah l'vinchah, you shall tell your son (Shemos 13:8) as: u's'chavei l'vinchah, which may be understood as: you should show your son. We are to show him the Exodus, have him see it, in a sense, not merely tell him about it. (Neos Deshe II p. 189)

PROPER PREPERATIONS

Reb Chaim of Sanz

Behold I am prepared and ready to fulfill the mitzvah of telling of the Exodus from Egypt ...

Reb Chaim of Sanz was on his way to prayers. He reached the beis midrash, turned about, and retraced his steps. The Rav of Barniv followed him.

R' Chaim returned home, remained there for a brief period and, once more, started on his way to the beis midrash.

When he noticed the Rav of Barniv, he said, "Do you know why I returned home? A man must mentally prepare himself before fulfilling any mitzvah. Walking to the beis midrash is itself a mitzvah. And because I was so concerned with preparing myself for prayer, I neglected to think that I was about to perform the mitzvah of walking to the beis midrash. That is why I returned home."

He raised his voice and added, "Now, behold, I am walking to the beis midrash to pray!" (Otzar HaSipurim VI, 11)

MORE THAN A STORY

Rabbi Yisrael Meir Druck

Behold I am prepared and ready to fulfill the mitzvah of telling of the Exodus from Egypt ...

The terms "Maggid" and "Haggadah Shel Pesach" are derived from the verse (Shemos 13:8), "And you shall tell your son on that day, saying, 'It is because of this that Hashem acted on my behalf when I left Egypt.'" This verse is the source of the commandment to relate the story of the Exodus. Many have wondered, however, why the Haggadah is named after this pasuk, rather than after the pasuk that states (ibid. 10:2), "And so that you may relate in the ears of your son and your son's son that I made a mockery of Egypt and My signs that I placed among them - that you may know that I am Hashem," which also mentions the mitzvah of sippur Yetzias Mitzrayim, but refers to it with the verb "tisaper", not "v'hi'gaditah." Accordingly, "Maggid" could have been called "Sippur," and the Haggadah could have been known as "Sippur Shel Pesach."

We can explain this based on the Avudraham's teaching that the name "Haggadah" can be understood as a term of thanks and praise to Hashem for taking us out of Egypt, similar to the word "higaditi" in the verse (Devarim 26:3), "I declare (higaditi) today to Hashem, your G-d," which the Targum Yerushalmi and others interpret to mean "I give praise."

Likewise, we preface the Shemoneh Esrei prayer with the verse (Tehillim 51:17), "O Lord, open my lips, that my mouth may declare (yagid) Your praise," and the word "yagid" in this verse can be understood to mean "will praise."

The term "Haggadah," then, implies praise and thanksgiving. In explaining the mitzvah of sippur Yetzias Mitzrayim, the Rambam writes (Sefer HaMitzvos 157) that the more a person elaborates on what Hashem did for us and thanks Him for His kindness, the better it is.

We see, then, that the purpose of this mitzvah is to thank and praise Hashem for the kindness He has bestowed upon us. Now we can understand why we use the term "Haggadah Shel Pesach," rather than "Sippur Shel Pesach," for while both refer to the recounting of the story of the Exodus, "Haggadah" carries the added connotation of praise and thanks to Hashem for all the miracles and kindnesses He performed for us.

THE ULTIMATE HOST

Rabbi Yitzchak Hutner

This is the bread of affliction that our fathers ate ... Whoever is hungry - let him come and eat! ...

Some people invite guests for yom tov. Others make it a yom tov when they invite guests!

EMULATING HASHEM

Reb Noson of Breslov

This is the bread of affliction that our fathers ate ... Whoever is hungry - let him come and eat! ...

Hashem took us out of bondage as an uninvoked act of Kindness. We were not ready. We were undeserving. We must emulate G-d, performing acts of uninvoked kindness. We must make ourselves deserving of the Divine Grace.

Before Pesach, give much Tzedakah. Call out to the needy to come join us. Through this, we will merit to eat the Matzah, the symbol of Divine Grace. (Likutey Halachot, Kibud Av v'Aim 2:4, 6,16)

MOST IMPORTANT QUESTION

Rabbi Shlomo Heiman

Maggid ... Why is this night different from all other nights?

The most important question in the world is always the one being asked of you right now.

NOT THE NORM

Baal Hafla'ah

Why is this night different from all other nights? ...

R' Pinchas, the author of the Hafla'ah, was asked why we pose questions on Pesach and not on Succos, when many changes are also introduced and we leave our permanent homes for the temporary structure of the succah.

"On Pesach," he answered, "when the ever-troubled, ever-pursued Jew sits down to his table, as if free, and sees the beautiful dishes set before him, as if he is a lord and master, he asks, in amazement, 'Why is this night different?' But on Succos, he enters a tottery succah. That is in keeping with, and normal to, the bitter life of Exile. There is no reason for amazement." (Chassidim Mesaprim 1:525)

BONDAGE AND FREEDOM

Abarbanel

We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, but Hashem, our G-d, took us out from there with a mighty hand ...

The four questions are about the contradictory symbols of the seder: the matzah and maror indicate slavery, while the leaning and dipping are signs of freedom!

The answer to this is, "We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt!" Tonight, we transitioned from slavery to freedom. Hence, we evoke both the bitterness of our suffering and the euphoria of our redemption.

NOBLE GRATITUDE

Rabbi Yitzchak Elchanan Spektor

The more one tells about the discussion of the Exodus, the more he is praiseworthy ...

The more one elaborates upon the story of the Exodus, the more praiseworthy that person becomes. Through expressing heartfelt gratitude for one's freedom from slavery, his genuine nobility is discovered and revealed.

SEDER WITH THE SHECHINA

Rabbi Elimelech Biderman

Even if we were all men of wisdom ... The more one tells about the discussion of the Exodus, the more he is praiseworthy ...

We find an unusual and rare assurance in the Sefer Yesod Yosef: Anyone who retells the story of Yetzias Mitzrayim and shares the wonders and miracles with happiness and joy, without aggravation or stress, the wings of the Shechinah will be spread over them always, to protect them wherever they will go, and they will merit having miracles performed for them!

This is in line with the teaching of the Zohar HaKadosh, who writes that HaKadosh Baruch Hu and His heavenly entourage descend into the homes of the Bnei Yisrael on this night, eager to behold their avodah.

This is hinted at in the words of the Mishnah (Pesachim 10:2) which tell us of how the attendants poured wine (“mazgu lo”). When the Mishnah tells us of how the attendants brought vegetables, it uses the words “they brought it before him.” These words appear redundant. Why can it not just tell us that the attendants brought wine or vegetables - why does it add the words “before him”?

The Tiferes Shlomo tells us that the words refer not just to the host, but to the avodah that the host performs before the Master of the Universe, Who is visiting his home. We pour the wine before Him, bring the matzos before Him, and ultimately, we sing “before Him,” a new song.

This is the reality, with halachic implications. Even though we drink the four cups and eat the matzah while reclining, we do not recite the Haggadah in that position (according to the opinion of the Shelah HaKadosh, quoted in Mishnah Berurah 473:71).

This is because at that moment, every single Yid is like a student before his rebbi (who does not recline out of respect), since we are seated before the Master of the universe, Who is “standing” over us and listening to our every word. At the Seder, He is right here, with us.

SEEING THE LIGHT

Rabbi Yechiel Michel Epstein

It happened that Rabbi Eliezer, Rabbi Yehoshua, Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah, Rabbi Akiva, and Rabbi Tarfon were gathered ...

This episode occurred during the darkest period - following the destruction of the holy temple. The great rabbinic leaders gathered in Bnei Brak, seeking guidance and reassurance from Rabbi Akiva, the eternal optimist (see Makkos 24a-b).

By sunrise, the Rabbis got what they came for; they saw that there was a light at the end of the tunnel.

REMEMBERING ALL YEAR ROUND

Reb Elazar Menachem of Lelov

Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah said ... Ben Zoma expounded it: “In order that you may remember the day you left Egypt all the days of your life ...

When a man peruses a book while at his table and, at the end of the meal, before returning it to its place, shakes off the crumbs which have fallen into it, [so that there will be no chametz in his books when Pesach comes], he fulfills, in this way, in all the days of the year, the commandment that you “remember the day on which you went out of the land of Egypt all the days of your life” (Devarim 16:3). (Likutei Divrei Dovid 29)

DAILY EXODUS

Rebbe Nachman

Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah said ... Ben Zoma expounded it: “In order that you may remember the day you left Egypt all the days of your life ...

The exodus from Egypt occurs in every human being, in every era, every year, and every day; it is for this reason we recall it daily.

AVAILABLE TO ALL

Rabbi Chaim Soloveitchik

Blessed is the Omnipresent ... Blessed is the One Who has given the Torah to His people Israel; Blessed is He. Concerning four sons does the Torah speak ...

We praise Hashem for giving us the Torah that addresses all four sons - each on his own level. This is one of the unique wonders of the Torah, that the very same text may be studied - and savored - by young and old, beginner and scholar alike.

WISE ANSWER

Reb Chaim of Sanz

Concerning four sons does the Torah speak – A wise one, a wicked one, a simple one ...

One day, the Divrei Chaim of Sanz stood by the window looking out. A man passed by. The Rebbe tapped on the window and motioned him in. When he entered, the Rebbe asked, “Tell me! If you found a purse filled with gold coins, would you return it to its owner?”

“Certainly, Rebbe,” said the man. “I would return it immediately.”

“You're a fool,” said the Rebbe, and dismissed him.

Once more, he stood at the window and motioned to another passing man to enter. He put the same question to him.

“I'm not such a fool as to return a purse full of gold coins that fell into my hand,” said the man.

“You are wicked,” said the Rebbe, and sent him off.

Once again, he returned to the window, and beckoned to a third man to come in. And once again, he asked his question.

“How can I give an answer to the Rebbe?” said the man. “Do I know what will happen at such a moment? Will I have it in myself to suppress my evil desire? I hope that Hashem would help me overcome and help me return the lost object to its owner.”

“You are a wise man,” said the Rebbe, “that is how one should answer.” (Mekor Chaim 166)

SMART AND SIMPLE

Reb Naftali Tzvi of Ropshitz

A wise one ...

R' Naftali Tzvi of Ropshitz was very wise, perceptive, and keen witted. Once his master, the Chozeh of Lublin, said to him, "The Torah commands us: 'You shall be innocent with Hashem, your G-d' (Devarim 18:13); it does not demand: 'You shall be wise!'" "True, Rebbe," said R' Naftali, "but one needs exceptional wisdom to reach such innocence." (Ohr Yesharim p.229)

PROTECT THE OTHERS

Reb Tzvi Hirsch of Ziditchov

A wise one... a wicked one

R' Michel of Sambur said in the name of his uncle R' Tzvi Hirsch of Ziditchov:

Why did the compiler of the Haggadah place the wicked son next to the wise son and not at the end of the list of four sons?

Had the wicked son stood next to and after the simple son or the one who is unable to ask, he would influence them and ruin them, before the wise man could foil his plans. But he is placed next to the wise son who can keep an eye on him. (Eser Kedushos Tinyana 34)

KEEP IT SIMPLE

Baal Shem Tov

The simple son – what does he say? "What is this?" ... As for the son who is unable to ask ...

The purpose of the seder is to instill in us emunah peshutah - simple faith - in Hashem. This is reflected by the focus on children on this night. In a sense, we are all children and need to be reminded to have pure faith, without philosophical and theological additives.

The Yesod Ha'Avodah of Slonim said in the name of R' Noach of Lechovitz:

The Baal Shem Tov once told his disciples, "After all that I have gained in the upper realms in terms of spiritual understanding of the foundations of Torah and its mitzvos, and after all the pleasure I have derived from such understanding, I put it all aside and grasp onto simple faith; I am a simpleton and believe. And although it is stated (Mishlei 14:15): "The simpleton believes everything," it is also stated (Tehillim 116:6): "Hashem guards the simpletons." (Yesod Ha'Avodah)

SAVORING THE TASTE

Rabbi Mordechai Gifter

To the wise son – what does he say? ... [Explain to him] that one may not eat dessert after the final taste of the Passover offering...

He response to the wise son - that nothing should be eaten after the korban pesach so that its taste will linger in our mouth - is a basic message about Judaism for anyone who wishes to be wise: savor fully any spiritual matter you do. the joy, elevation, and excitement of a mitzvah should remain with you.

LASTING IMPRESSION

Reb Yissachar Dov of Belz

To the wise son - what does he say? ... [Explain to him] that one may not eat dessert after the final taste of the Passover offering...

Just as it is not permitted to taste anything after eating the portion of the Pesach sacrifice, so that the aftertaste of the sacrifice remain in the mouth, in a like manner, speak to the wise son of matters which will leave a taste with him forever.

MAINTAIN A CONNECTION

Reb Yisrael of Rizhin

The wicked son – what does he say ...

One should never despair of any Jew. Every Yid retains holiness. Maintain a connection. After all, a bucket that tumbles into a well can still be pulled from the depths - as long as it is still attached to a cord.

FIRST KNOW, THEN TELL

Reb Yehoshua of Belz

As for the one who is unable to ask ... You shall tell your son on that day: "It is because of this that Hashem did so for me" ...

The Torah has attached a precondition to the retelling of the story of the Exodus to children; "Words that flow from the heart enter the heart." In order to fix the story in the hearts of children, the fathers must first fix it in their own hearts.

On this point the Torah says: "That you may tell in the ears of your son and the son of your son what I did in Egypt, and of the signs which I put upon them, and you will know that I am Hashem" (Shemos 10:2). In order to tell over the story to your children you must first know that I am Hashem! (Ohel Yehoshua 14)

HIS WORD IS HIS BOND

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein

One might think that the obligation to discuss the Exodus commences with the first day of the month of Nissan ...

You might think to begin discussing the Exodus from Rosh Chodesh Nissan, for it was then that Hashem assured us that we would be redeemed a fortnight later (see Shemos Ch. 12). Hashem's word is His bond, and so, in a sense, we were freed on Rosh Chodesh.

TAKING A STAND

Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler

Originally our ancestors were idol worshipers ... Your fathers always lived beyond the Euphrates River, Terach the father of Avraham and Nachor, and they served other gods ...

Mentioning the idolatrous ways of Terach makes us appreciate the courage and iron will of our forefather Avraham. His absolute faith in Hashem propelled him against the current, rejecting the pagan practices of his father and the entire world. We must follow in Abraham's footsteps.

SHOWING RESTRAINT

Reb Abish of Tchernovitz

Blessed is He Who keeps His pledge to Israel ... upon the nation that they serve I execute judgment ...

R' Abish of Tchernovitz was a simple, perfect soul. When his Rebbe, R' Yisrael of Ruzhin, escaped from a Russian jail and went into exile, R' Abish asked him, in all innocence, why he did not punish the czar for all that he had suffered, and have him dethroned.

"Do you believe that Hashem directs the world?" asked the Rebbe.

"Certainly!" said R' Abish.

"Do you believe in the miracle of the Exodus from Egypt and the Ten Plagues?"

"Without a doubt."

Well, then, when I see that the all-powerful Holy One chooses to contain Himself, despite the evil behavior of the czar, I follow in His footsteps and control myself." (Irin Kaddishin)

VARIOUS METHODS... SAME RESULTS

Rabbi Chaim Berlin

It is this that has stood by our fathers and us ... but in every generation, they rise against us to annihilate us ...

The reason it says "dor" (generation) twice is to underscore the two methods utilized by our enemies bent on annihilating us. Some generations persecute and torture us; other generations use friendship and love in an attempt to assimilate us. Both are fatal to our national existence, and Hashem saves us from them.

BEWARE OF WHITEWASHING

Reb Aharon Menachem Mendel of Radzimin

Go and learn what Lavan Ha'Arami attempted to do to your father ... Lavan attempted to uproot everything ...

When I was a little boy and we reached this part of the Haggadah, my sainted grandfather R' Yaakov Aryeh put me on his lap and said to me:

"Know that there is a simple, direct, evil nature who pushes men to sin. His name is Pharaoh. We can hope to escape him, because he attacks openly. And even if we fail in our encounter, heaven forbid, there is hope that we will repent. But there is an evil nature whom we call Lavan the Aramean, because he fools us (m'reima) and dresses up in white (lavan) like a righteous man, a tzaddik. He persuades a man that a particular sin is not a sin, but a mitzvah. We are liable to overlook the trap and, not seeing it as a sin, fail to repent. Of him, my child, it is said that he wishes to uproot everything." (Chassidim Mesaprim III 451)

JUST PASSING THROUGH

Meshech Chochmah

Then he [Yaakov] descended to Egypt ... He sojourned there ...

This means that Yaakov intended to teach future progeny - by example - how they must conduct themselves in any exile in which they are found: never view yourselves as full-fledged, permanent citizens of your host country - but as temporary guests.

JUSTIFYING THEIR BIASIS

Rabbi Dovid Feinstein

Then he [Yaakov] descended to Egypt ... He sojourned there ...

Grammatically this reads, "They made us evil." By labeling the Jews as enemies, the Egyptians turned us into wicked people in their eyes. Once they had placed us into that category, it was easy to rationalize any injustice and oppression they wanted. Such has been the strategy of those who hate us throughout our history..

NOW THERE IS HOPE

Tzemach Tzedek

"There he became a nation" – this teaches that the Israelites were distinctive there ...

It is said that Israel had sunk to the forty-ninth, the all but final, depth of impurity in Egypt. Had they descended to the fiftieth, and bottom level, they could not have been saved.

The preservation of their distinctive name, language and dress prevented them from falling to the ultimate depth. But today, they have changed their name, language and dress; they are at the lowest state possible, that fiftieth depth. How can they be redeemed?

Fortunately, the present and the age of servitude in Egypt differ in one important factor. In Egypt, Israel had not yet received the Torah. They could have been assimilated completely. But after the Torah has been given, redemption is possible even from the abyss of the fiftieth depth of impurity. (Siach Sarfei Kodesh IV 203)

CONSIDERING THE TIMES

Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

“There he became a nation” – this teaches that the Israelites were distinctive there ...

The Haggadah writes that the Jewish People expanded into a vast Nation while confined in Egypt, where they were considered “metzuyanim” - which the Chasam Sofer translates as “distinct” and refers to the Jewish People's commitment to remain steadfast in keeping their unique language and mode of dress. Rav Yaakov Galinsky, however, notes an additional understanding of the word “those who excel” (as it is in modern Hebrew). Accordingly, Rav Galinsky asks whether the Jewish Nation could at that time genuinely be considered to be metzuyanim. For, despite being distinct from the Egyptians in some areas, as a Nation, they were idol worshippers, they had stopped circumcising their babies, and overall, they had reached the lowest form of spiritual deprivation possible. If so, do they really deserve to be referred to as those who excel? Or as Rav Galinsky said, “If someone had turned his back on Judaism, performing the worst sins imaginable, would we still praise him for looking like a Chassid?!”

Perhaps we can simply answer, yes! Indeed, when someone is immersed in a difficult environment and surrounded by harmful influences, merely hanging onto a Jewish identity is enough to warrant great praise. (The Medrash [Yalkut Shimoni, Shemos 7:182] notes that Egypt was the most base, immoral, and sinful nation in the world.)

This observation was taught by the Chofetz Chaim to a man who first visited him a year before the First World War broke out, and who revealed to him that he was struggling to make a living. He would buy large bundles of wheat from peasants and try to sell them in smaller quantities at a profit. Even when people did buy, he explained, they would pay in many installments and demand reductions for the poor quality. As such, this man was barely surviving. A year later, however, the man returned to the Chofetz Chaim excited about how well his business was doing. In the year that followed their last meeting, the Communist regime had come to power and outlawed non-governmental purchases, making it punishable by death for this man to sell his wheat privately. That did not stop this man, whose business was now booming, explaining to the Chofetz Chaim that nowadays, everyone pays him in advance, not even checking the quality and not daring to voice a word of complaint!

The Chofetz Chaim's response to this man will shed light onto our question. He explained that this man's plight was analogous to where we find ourselves spiritually today. When there was more freedom, and the environment was conducive to developing a relationship with Hashem, then Hashem scrutinized our actions more carefully. But in times of hardship, when the risks are greater, the difficulties are more severe, and the challenges are

harsher, then Hashem, too, does not look for imperfections. Instead, He sees who is doing what they can in the circumstances and values it no matter how seemingly insignificant.

The same can be said today. Whether it is the access to technology, the breakdown of certain social structures, or a plethora of other challenges that threaten to harm our spiritual growth, the Jewish People are facing immense spiritual obstacles on many fronts. Of course, we must constantly push ourselves against these spiritual dangers, but at the same time, we should know that in these times, every positive step we take - however small - is treasured by Hashem.

STOP AND THINK

Ramchal

The Egyptians did evil to us ... They imposed hard labor upon us ...

Pharaoh kept us so busy with our workload that we had no time to contemplate ways to rebel against him. This is the technique employed by the evil inclination, who attempts to distract us so that we have no time to think about how to free ourselves from his grasp.

SEE HOW FAR YOU'VE COME

Reb Nachum of Slonim

He begins with shame and concludes with the praiseworthy ...

[This is the mishnaic directive as to the format for telling the story of the Exodus; Mishnah Pesachim 10:4.]

R' Nachum of Slonim, one of the elders of the disciples of the Zaide of Lechovitz, told the following to the Yesod Ha'Avodah of Slonim:

While studying the Avos d'Reb Nasan (Ch. 21), I came across the passage which states that R' Akiva, in teaching his students, recalled his childhood. I imagined that the passage would note that R' Akiva was saddened when he remembered the years which had passed wastefully. But to my amazement, the recollection of the past caused R' Akiva to rejoice over his later years and he said, 'I praise You, Hashem, my G-d, that You have given me, as my lot, to be among those who sit in the beis midrash.' This teaches us that whoever succeeds to improve later in life should not be saddened by his early days. On the contrary, he should rejoice and be encouraged by the good he has found in the end. (Ma'asei Avos, Ch. 4)

REDEMPTIVE KNOWLEDGE

Reb Chanoch Henoch of Alexander

We cried out to Hashem, the G-d of our forefathers; and Hashem heard our cry ...

After the death of the Chiddushei HaRim, his chassidim wished to crown R' Chanoch Henoch as their Rebbe, whereupon he told the following:

“A butcher was once butchering the carcass of an animal on Friday. Time passed as he cut and cut, until night fell. The butcher suddenly took note that Shabbos had arrived and dashed out of his shop at a run, to the beis knesses; the congregation was singing Lecha Dodi. The butcher let loose a groan. It wasn't really the butcher's groan but a groan of the “eternal Jew” within him.

When the verse says, “and the Children of Israel groaned because of the servitude,” it means to tell us that the “child of Israel” within each of them groaned when he realized how deeply he had sunk into servitude. And then the Torah says (Shemos 2:25): “Hashem took note” (va'yeida Elokim) - the Holy One filled them with knowledge (da'as). “Only after the groan, which showed an awareness of their involvement in the material, and only after they had acquired knowledge, can the Torah return to speak of Moshe: “And Moshe was herding the flock of Yisro” (ibid. 3:1) - only then could He send the redeemer to them. (Siach Sarfei Kodesh)

YEARNING FOR REDEMPTION

Rabbi Yechezkel Levenstein

We cried out to Hashem, the G-d of our forefathers; and Hashem heard our cry ...

The groans and cries of the Jews in Egypt brought about their salvation. Redemption occurs only when there is an intense yearning to be redeemed; and so it must be in our times in order to usher in the arrival of Mashiach.

FREE FROM PHARAOH

Reb Noson of Breslov

“Our burden” – refers to the children ...

Pharaoh decreed death to the newborn males of the Jewish People. This symbolized his method of breaking the Jewish spirit.

When we are despondent and pessimistic, we are hard put to muster the strength of character to stand up to “Pharaoh's” temptations. “Pharaoh” creates for us all kinds of situations to dampen our spirits. We are then prey to his underlying objectives.

We need to do what we can to keep our spirits high, full of cheer and optimism. As long as we are enthusiastic and happy with our lot, we can see through “Pharaoh's” illusion.

It was the Jewish midwives in Egypt who endeavored to keep the male born alive. It is they, the contemporary Tzaddikim of every generation, who toil to rouse and kindle the invincible Jewish spirit. With their words of elevating encouragement, they add fire to the G-dly flame which burns in our hearts, sparking dynamic Jewishness, instilling in every Jewish “child” the awareness that Hashem is with him.

No matter what we have been through or are going through, ultimately Hashem will redeem us. Hashem will extricate us from the “Pharaoh” of our lives.

HASHEM TO THE RESCUE

Sefas Emes

Hashem took us out of Egypt – not through an angel ... but the Holy One, Blessed is He, in His glory, and by Himself ...

Why could Hashem not send an angel to redeem us?

Because we had sunk to such a low spiritual state that no angel saw anything redeemable about us. Only Hashem, Who recognized that at our core we were good, came Himself to our rescue.

SEIZE THE MOMENT

Rabbi Chaim Shmulevitz

“With great awe” – alludes to the revelation of the Shechinah ...

Our sages convey that at the splitting of the sea, even the simple maidservant witnessed levels of divine revelation that the great prophet Yechezkel would not. But, alas, the maidservant remained a maidservant.

One must be prepared to build upon moments of inspiration - or they vanish...

GENERATING SENSITIVITY

Alter of Slabodka

These are the ten plagues which the Holy One, Blessed is He, brought upon the Egyptians in Egypt ...

Why do we spill out drops of wine at the mention of each of the makkos? Perhaps it is to develop our sensitivity toward the suffering of the Egyptians - even though they caused so much pain to the Jewish people.

ATTITUDE OF GRATITUDE

Rabbi Chaim Shmulevitz

Blood ...

Aharon - not Moshe - initiated the plague of turning the water to blood, since the waters in which baby Moshe had been placed had saved his life.

If such gratitude is owed to inanimate objects, how much more so must we show appreciation to people from whom we have benefited!

DANGER OF ANGER

Rabbi Yaakov Yisrael Kanievsky

Frogs ...

One large frog came upon Egypt. Each time the Egyptians, in their fury, hit the frog, it multiplied into swarms of new frogs, until the entire land was covered.

Why, then, would they continue to strike it?

Because when one is angry, all rational thinking becomes suspended; he acts impulsively, even self-destructively.

IT'S ALL UNDER CONTROL

Rabbi Matisyahu Salomon

Wild beasts ...

The plague of assorted wild animals attacking Egypt made it seem as if things were completely out of control; in truth, Hashem controlled the situation entirely: not a single Jew was harmed. We must learn this lesson well...

SEEING ANOTHER'S PAIN

Chiddushei HaRim

Darkness ...

The verse describing the plague of darkness states: "One man did not see another, and no one arose from his place" (Shemos 10:23).

Indeed, someone who is so blinded by his own interests that he fails to see the needs and problems of his friend will not get up from his place - he will never attain true spiritual transcendence.

BELIEVING IN OUR LEADERS

Tiferes Shmuel of Alexander

Rabbi Yose HaGlili said ... they believed in Hashem and in His servant Moshe ...

I remember that when I was a youngster my sainted father was once teaching Torah to the townsmen of Turchin. He reached the verse: "And Yehoshua bin Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom because Moshe had placed his hands upon him and the Children of Israel hearkened to him" (Devarim 34:9). The wisdom of Yehoshua, he explained, flowed from two sources. There was a heavenly factor from above "because Moshe had placed his hands upon him." And there was a human factor, from below - the belief in the wise (emunas chachamim) which the Children of Israel had with regard to him. (Tiferes Shlomo 203)

BEYOND COMPREHENSION

Reb Yisrael of Ruzhin

Rabbi Yose HaGlili said ... they believed in Hashem and in His servant Moshe ...

R' Yisrael of Ruzhin asked the chassid Reb Yaakovke of Yarishov, "Did you know R' Baruch of Mezhibuz?"

"I did not really know him, but I believed in his holiness," answered Reb Yaakovke, wisely.

The Rebbe was pleased by his answer and said, "That is, indeed, as it should be! When Israel went out of Egypt, they reached the heights of human understanding of Hashem. The maidservant who witnessed the crossing of the Red Sea saw that which the prophet Yechezkel did not see in his vision. It was then that the Evil Desire came upon them and tried to sway them and lead them into error..."

"You have already seen everything,' the Evil Desire said. You have grasped it all. You have reached the limit of understanding. But they were not led astray. They knew that they still needed simple faith. That is why the Torah tells us that, just at that point in time, 'They believed in Hashem.'"

"And the verse continues: 'and in His servant Moshe.' For just as a man must realize that, as far as his belief in Hashem is concerned, no matter how much he grasps the greatness and lofty transcendence of the Creator, he has not reached an infinitesimal part of understanding, so he must know that he cannot grasp the exalted loftiness of the tzaddik. The more we understand the heights of his holiness, the more we must believe that he immeasurably surpasses our grasp." (Sipurei Tzaddikim 81)

20/20 VISION

Chiddushei HaRim

Rabbi Yose HaGlili said ... they believed in Hashem and in His servant Moshe ...

Israel saw the great "hand" which Hashem laid upon the Egyptians. But even after they had seen, the Torah tells us, "and they believed in Hashem." They had yet to reach the level of faith. This shows us that believing is greater than seeing. (Siach Sarfei Kodesh I 406)

COUNTLESS MIRACLES

Rabbi Avigdor Miller

Rabbi Akiva said ... at the sea [Egypt was struck] by two-hundred and fifty [plagues] ...

As many as 250 miracles were performed at the Yam Suf. Now, consider this: our sages taught (Pesachim 118a) that the miracle of supplying man with food is considered a greater wonder than that of splitting the sea! For food to grow from the earth, not just hundreds of miracles need to occur, but thousands upon thousands...

MEASURED HUMILITY

Reb Tzvi Hirsch Gidziler

The Omnipresent has bestowed so many favors upon us! ... Had He given us the Torah, but not brought us into the Land of Israel ...

R' Tzvi Hirsch Gidziler was exceptionally humble, truly insignificant in his own eyes. Once R' Moshe of Lelov visited him and found it difficult to remain indoors because of the smell of fresh hides which had been placed on the stove to dry.

"Why are these hides here?" he asked. "After all, you spend your time in learning and devotion to Hashem."

"True!" said R' Hirsch, "But my children earn their livelihood by the sale of hides, and they find it more convenient to dry them here, in my house."

“Chazal tell us, indeed,” said the Rebbe of Lelov, “that the Holy One gave the Torah on Mount Sinai, a lowly hill, so that we might learn from the act, the importance of modesty. But why then did He not give the Torah in a valley? The Torah shows us, thereby, that there is a limit to humility. A man must be something of a hill or mountain and not allow himself to be trampled upon by others.” (Likutei Divrei Dovid 49)

WELL EQUIPPED

Chiddushei HaRim

*The Omnipresent has bestowed so many favors upon us!
... Had He given us the Torah, but not brought us into the Land of Israel ...*

The Holy One gave us the Torah. According to halachah, a giver should give in good measure, and whoever gives his fellow a field surrounded by other fields also grants him a path of entry to the field.

Therefore, if Hashem gave us the Torah, he most certainly granted each of us the path, the power and ability to reach the Torah. (Siach Sarfei Kodesh I 407)

ALL ARE WELCOMED

Reb Yoel of Satmar

*The Omnipresent has bestowed so many favors upon us!
... Had He given us the Torah, but not brought us into the Land of Israel ...*

R' Yosef Tzvi Dushinsky, the Rav of Yerushalayim, told R' Yoel of Satmar that he had been questioned by a British board of inquiry about the immigration of non-observant Jews. He had said that one could not tell in advance who was non-observant.

The answer had aroused the ire of the secular Zionists and the Mizrahi. For it implied that those who declared that they were non-observant should not be permitted to immigrate.

The Rebbe of Satmar smiled and said, “Perhaps they are of the same opinion as Rav Hai Gaon.” The conversation was cut short abruptly.

Those who had been present, wishing to know to what the Rebbe had alluded, came and asked him.

He showed them the Aruch under the entry eser (ten), which notes that the mishnah in Keilim (1:6-9) lists ten degrees of holiness of place which do not include the holiness of Eretz Yisrael, although it appears in the mishnah (it is the eleventh item).

Rav Hai Gaon is cited by the Aruch as saying that Eretz Yisrael stands apart from the others. For all the other places, because of their holiness, deny entry to people bearing certain types of impurity.

But Eretz Yisrael, though it is holy, is accessible to even the impure. (Olamos Shacharvu 60)

HASHEM IS HERE, HASHEM IS THERE...

The Netziv

How much more so should we be grateful to the Omnipresent for all the numerous favors He showered upon us ...

Here the Haggadah uses the name HaMakom (the Omnipresent) - literally 'the place' - to describe Hashem. This title conveys that there is no place in the world that He does not occupy and control. Since this poem describes the series of wondrous events that divine providence orchestrated, such a designation is most befitting.

POWER OF REPENTANCE

Alter of Slabodka

How much more so should we be grateful to the Omnipresent for all the numerous favors He showered upon us ... built us the Temple, to atone for all our sins ...

See how remarkable is the power of repentance! So many stages of divine benevolence are enumerated here, including Exodus, the revelation at Sinai, and entering the land of Israel, yet the climax of them all was that a temple was built for us to atone for all of our sins!

RECIPROCAL LOVE

Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev

Pesach ... Because the Holy One, Blessed is He, passed over the houses of our fathers in Egypt ...

While we refer to this festival as 'Pesach' (Passover), praising Hashem for mercifully passing over the Jewish homes in Egypt this evening and sparing our lives, Hashem refers to it as 'the festival of matzos,' praising the devotion with which the Jews hastily followed him out of Egypt. The loving admiration of Hashem and his people is reciprocal.

A SKIP IN HASHEM'S STEP

Reb Moshe Leib of Sassov

Pesach ... Because the Holy One, Blessed is He, passed over the houses of our fathers in Egypt ...

R' Moshe Leib of Sassov loved his fellow Jews and would often say to his chassidim, “If only you would love the righteous man, the tzaddik, as much as the Holy One loves the least of those in Israel.”

Once, when he visited his master, R' Elimelech of Lizensk, his rebbe gave him the honor of speaking. “The Torah tells us,” he said, “that Hashem 'passed over the houses of the Children of Israel in Egypt.' Are we to take this in a literal sense? How can we? His glory fills the entire world. We must rather imagine that when Hashem came upon the home of an Israelite living in an Egyptian neighborhood, He would skip (poseach) and dance, so to speak, and say with joy, 'A Jew lives here! A Jew lives here!'”

RAPID REDEMPTION

Rabbi Avraham Pam

Matzah ... They baked the dough ... and could not delay , nor had they prepared any provisions for the way ...

The matzah serves as a reminder that just as in Egypt our national salvation happened so suddenly, so will Hashem rapidly and unexpectedly bring an end to our current exile.

MOVING OUT

Reb Simchah Bunim of Pshischa

Matzah ... They baked the dough ... and could not delay , nor had they prepared any provisions for the way ...

The condition for the Redemption from Egypt was that Israel leave their homes, abandon all their possessions, and make their way into the desert.

Such is not the practice which is in fashion today. But man must realize that is the way of redemption, that is the way which leads to the receiving of the Torah. (Siach Sarfei Kodesh I 48)

FREEDOM BEFORE BONDAGE?

Reb Simchah Bunim of Pshischa

Matzah - the unleavened bread; maror - the bitter herbs ...

Matzah is meant to remind us of freedom, while maror is meant to remind us of the bondage which preceded that freedom. Why, then, is matzah referred to before maror?

R' Simchah Bunim of Pshischa gave the following parable: A king had an only son whom he loved and upon whom he lavished every favor. The son, however, was an ingrate and rebelled against his father who, forthwith, banished him. Years passed and the king was moved to pity for his son. He sent one of his ministers to seek him out and bring him back. The minister inquired and investigated. He found the prince in an out-of-the-way village, barefoot, dressed in tatters and drinking himself silly in the local tavern. The minister approached him and asked him how he was. "Marvelous," answered the youth. "If I had a sheepskin jacket and a pair of boots no one could be happier." The minister wept to hear to what depths the once-pampered prince had fallen.

Thus, it is that Dovid HaMelech in speaking of Egypt and the Exodus says: "And He saw in what straits they were when He heard their song" (Tehillim 106:44). They were mired in the muck of bondage, and yet they sang. For the nadir of servitude is the coming to terms with the state of degradation.

We eat the matzah before the maror because Israel was entirely unaware of the bitterness of servitude indicated by the maror until they were worthy of the light of deliverance alluded to by the matzah. They truly tasted redemption before they felt their bondage. (Siach Sarfei Kodesh I 244)

ACCEPTING BITTERNESS

Yismach Yisrael of Alexander

Maror ...the Egyptians embittered the lives of our fathers.

It is important to accept suffering with love for Hashem. Chazal have alluded to this in saying: "If one swallows matzah (without first chewing and tasting it), he has fulfilled the mitzvah; if he swallows maror, he has not" (Pesachim 115b). Maror was meant to be chewed well. (Chassidim Mesaprim)

WORTH THE WAIT

Rebbe Nachman

Maror ...the Egyptians embittered the lives of our fathers.

A Jew and a German set out on a tour. Their money ran out while they were on the road, and they no longer had provisions. This happened just on the eve of Pesach and the Jew said to the German, "I'll teach you some of the Jewish customs of Pesach. In the evening we'll go to a synagogue. Jews are a compassionate people. They will take pity on us and invite us to be guests at their Seder."

He taught him about kiddush, about washing hands before the meal and other matters. But he forgot to tell him that maror is eaten before the meal.

In the evening, they went to a synagogue and one householder invited the Jew and, another, assuming that his friend, too, was a Jew, invited the German. The German came to the Seder after not having eaten the entire day. He waited impatiently for them to end the recitation of the Haggadah and begin the meal. Finally, they washed their hands and gave him a piece of matzah and he was happy.

His friend, the Jew, had told him that this signaled the beginning of the meal. Now, they would serve fish and meat and other good things.

And then, they passed him a portion of a vegetable. He bit into it. His mouth was filled with a bitter taste, his eyes watered. Certain that this was the promised, looked-for meal, and that this was all that would be offered, he picked himself up and ran in anger from the table shouting, "Cursed Jews, after all the long Seder, you give such bitter food." He took himself to the synagogue to await his friend and reproach him for his "good advice."

Sometime later his friend approached, happy and sated with food and drink. He asked the German how it had gone, and the German gave vent to bitter disappointment.

"Silly fool!" said the Jew. "What a pity! Had you waited but a bit longer, you would have enjoyed all the good things, just as I did."

The path of devotion to Hashem and drawing close to the true tzaddik is of a similar nature. After all the toil, when one is close to the goal, some bitterness enters the picture, to purify the body. Whoever bears it patiently and waits yet a bit, experiences all sorts of pleasures and feels a sense of vitality.

ANSWERED WITH LIGHT

Rabbi Yitzchak Hutner

Therefore, it our duty to thank, praise, pay tribute ... He brought us forth ... from darkness to great light ...

At the Exodus we went “from darkness to light.” It is for this reason that the Haggadah was designed in question-answer format. When one has a question, he is in darkness, and when he knows the answer he has “seen the light.”

HE IS ALWAYS WATCHING

Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev

Halleluy-ah! ... Who is enthroned on high, yet deigns to look ...

When R' Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev was once on a trip, the wagon driver noticed a bale of fodder lying by the wayside. No one was in sight. He halted and jumped down, intending to take the bale, when he heard the Rebbe suddenly shout, “They're watching! They're watching!”

The driver dropped the fodder in fright, climbed onto the wagon and whipped up the horses. A long moment later, he peered about and saw no one. “Who was looking?” he asked in wonder.

“The Holy One, Blessed is He!” said the Rebbe. (Chassidim Mesaprim)

DAYS OF NOBILITY

Chiddushei HaRim

Halleluy-ah! ... He raises the destitute from the dust ... to seat them with nobles, with nobles of His people ...

Days on which Hallel is recited, even people spiritually destitute become elevated, seated with the nobles of His people.

SPIRITUAL FREEDOM

Chida

Blessed are You, Hashem, our G-d ... for our redemption and for the liberation of our souls ...

The freedom that we celebrate on Pesach is not merely from physical bondage, but a spiritual liberation of the soul.

SERVING WITH JOY

Shelah HaKadosh

Blessed are You, Hashem, our G-d ... [Who] has commanded us concerning the eating of the matzah ...

I witnessed elevated souls who would kiss the matzos and maror to demonstrate their adoration for these mitzvos. Fortunate is the one who serves Hashem with joy!

PART OF THE PROCESS

Sefas Emes

Korech ... In remembrance of the Temple we do as Hillel did in Temple times: He would combine (the Passover offering,) matzah and maror ...

Hillel stressed the importance of combining the matzah and maror together as one. Only once you grasp that torment and triumph are interrelated do you truly understand the Jewish experience.

ELEVATING THE MUNDANE

The Netziv

Shulchan Orech ...

By interrupting the Hallel with a meal, we demonstrate that even our mundane activities such as eating may be raised to a high form of praise to Him.

GAURANTEED SUSTENANCE

Sefer HaChinuch

Barech ...

Whoever is careful to recite Birchas HaMazon properly will merit abundant sustenance all of his life.

IN A BLINK OF AN EYE

Rabbi Aharon Schechter

A song of ascents ... Restore our captives, Hashem, like streams in the dry land ...

In the Negev, the soil is dry. Yet at any time this desert could experience a torrential downpour, soaking the parched land. This is how it will be when Mashiach arrives: in an instant we will go from a barren existence to a joyous gush of redemption!

IT'S ALL FROM ABOVE

Reb Zusha of Hanipoli

Barech ... He gives nourishment to all flesh ...

Each morning, after prayers, R' Zusha of Hanipoli would say, “Master of the world, Zusha is very hungry and wishes to eat. Please furnish him with his food.” When his shammash (attendant) would hear this, he would enter and serve him refreshments, a portion of cake and drink.

One day, the shammash thought to himself, “Why doesn't the Rebbe ask me to bring him his food? Why does he turn to the Holy One with his request?” He decided that he would not serve the Rebbe unless he was asked to do so directly.

That morning, R' Zusha immersed himself in the mikveh before prayers as was his custom. It was a rainy day and the roads of Hanipoli were muddy. A path of narrow planks had been placed from one end of the street to the other to allow passageway.

R' Zusha was pacing along the planks on his way to the beis knesses when, there in front of him, he saw a stranger, a visitor in town, walking towards him. The stranger saw an elderly, slight Jew hurrying in his direction. The desire to play a prank seized him and he pushed R' Zusha off the plank and into the mud. R' Zusha fell, dirtying his clothes, picked himself up without a word, and continued on his way.

The stranger laughed heartily at the comical sight and could not stop laughing all the way to his lodgings. There, he told the innkeeper of the prank he had played. When, in answer to his host's question, he had described the man whom he had pushed off the plank, the innkeeper smote his hands and said, "Oh my! What have you done? You shoved the Rebbe, R' Zusha, into the mud."

The visitor shook and trembled. R' Zusha was known as a holy man of G-d. "Woe is me!" he cried out in fear, "What shall I do?" "Listen to me," said his host. "R' Zusha spends a long time at his prayers and afterwards takes refreshments. Take some good-tasting pastry and quality liquor. Bring them to him as a present and ask his pardon. I'm positive that, righteous and modest as he is, he will forgive you whole-heartedly."

R' Zusha finished his prayers, took off his tefillin and said, "Master of the world, Zusha is very hungry and wishes to eat. Please furnish him with his food." The shammash heard him and didn't make a move. "If the Rebbe turns to Hashem, let Hashem bring him refreshments," he thought. The door suddenly opened and in walked a stranger bearing a tray of pastry and liquor. He entered the Rebbe's room and placed the tray before him. It was now evident to the shammash that it was not he who provided the Rebbe with food, but the Holy One. (Sipurei Tzaddikim 74)

IT'S ALL GOOD

Reb Simchah Bunim of Pshischa

Barech ... But those who seek Hashem will not lack any good ...

"Those who seek Hashem will not lack" because "everything is good." They know that whatever Hashem does to them is only for the good. (Siach Sarfei Kodesh II 396)

OPENING THE DOOR

Reb Ze'ev Wolf of Strikov

Pour Your wrath...

Reb Ze'ev Wolf of Strikov asked why we open the door when we say, "Pour Your wrath" after the meal, and not before the meal when we recite the formula "Whoever is hungry let him come and eat"? How can we invite guests if the door is kept locked?

He answered, "Whoever is hungry etc." has a non-physical aspect. For, on the evening of the Seder, the gate to high spiritual attainments lies open.

Not only can they be acquired, but we are invited to enter and receive them in overflowing measure - whosoever is hungry let him come!

But there is a single prior condition which must be met. We must ourselves open the door. We must show that we are not lazy.

[The Rebbe of Kotzk explained a Gemara in a similar vein; Rabban Gamliel declared that if a man's inner spiritual self did not match his outward mode of behavior, he was to be barred from entering the beis midrash. And he posted a watchman to enforce his decree (Berachos 28a). Yet how could the watchman gauge a man's true personality? In practice the watchman gave entry to no one. Whoever climbed the wall and entered via the window showed that his inner self complemented his outer one; he truly wished to learn.]

AN OPEN HEART

Rabbi Aryeh Levin

Pour Your wrath...

People make a mistake believing that Eliyahu HaNavi enters through the door. In truth, he enters through our hearts and souls.

AN OPEN HEART

Reb Menachem Mendel of Kotzk

Not for our sake ... but for Your Name's sake ... Their idols are silver and gold, the handiwork of man ...

Homiletically, these words may be interpreted to mean that sadness (etzev) comes from the mistaken notion that "silver and gold" are "the handiwork of man." Know that material resources are allocated by Hashem alone; this will bring serenity.

NO PLACE FOR HAUGHTINESS

Reb Shlomo Leib of Lenchno

Hashem Who has remembered us ... He will bless those who fear Hashem, the small as well as the great ...

Those who fear Hashem will be considered blessed if the great and the small will live together, without the great being haughty towards the small. (Eser Ataros 56)

COMPLETING THE MISSION

Reb Noson of Breslov

Hashem Who has remembered us ... He will bless those who fear Hashem, the small as well as the great ...

The following question was put to Reb Noson: Seeing that Mashiach hasn't yet come despite all the efforts of all the very great Tzaddikim in all the previous generations, how will he come in these few remaining and much weaker generations. Reb Noson told a parable to explain this paradox:

There was once a city that was very well fortified. It was enclosed by a thick stone wall, thought to be impenetrable. A wise king decided to conquer this fortified city. After inspecting the fortifications, he sent his mightiest soldiers to bring down the wall and attack the city. These soldiers fell. He next sent a second wave of less mighty soldiers, and then a third wave, and so on. Before long, his entire army had been depleted and the wall had not come down. But the king did not give up.

Once again he circled the city, inspecting its walls. "How can you expect to capture this city if all your mighty soldiers are gone?" he was asked. The wise king smiled. "If you look closely, you will see that though the soldiers could not breach the wall, they did succeed in cracking it. It is no longer strong and impenetrable. Now, with even the weak and wounded I can bring down the wall." The king then sent his few remaining and weakest soldiers into battle and conquered the city.

Reb Noson explained that though they did not succeed in bringing the Mashiach, all the great Tzaddikim of the previous generation did succeed in cracking the wall of obstacles which stand in the way. Now, though we are weak and haven't the strength or the power, if we would but make a concerted effort, we could bring the wall down and bring the Mashiach. (Ma'asios U'Meshalim, p. 36-37)

PRAYING TO PRAY

Reb Noson of Breslov

I love Him, for Hashem hears my voice, my supplications ...

Reb Yitzchak of Tulchin, Reb Noson's son, would frequently discuss his difficulties in spiritual development with his father. He once expressed his frustrations, saying that his devotions had weakened and he could not meditate properly.

Reb Noson told his son that Dovid HaMelech's greatness manifested itself in precisely just such a predicament. Many times, Dovid HaMelech himself wanted to pray, but could not find the words to speak to G-d. But he knew that one should never despair. Instead of giving up, he would groan and cry out to Hashem that his mouth was closed and that he could not find the appropriate words to pray.

This became his prayer. Hashem would then accept his entreaties and provide Dovid HaMelech with the inspiration to find the right words with which to pour out his heart. Indeed, Hashem wants us to pray to Him that we should be capable of praying properly. (Aveneha Barzel, p. 70 #53)

LET'S TALK FAITH

Reb Mordechai of Lechowitz

I love Him ... I kept faith although I say ...

Homiletically, this verse may be interpreted as, "I kept faith because I would say." Verbalizing matters of faith in Hashem serves to reinforce and strengthen one's faith.

THERE IS ALWAYS HOPE

Piaseczno Rebbe

How can I repay Hashem ... I will raise the cup of salvations and invoke the Name of Hashem ...

Even when we, the Jewish people, are in the enemy's fatal clutches - we must never lose hope in Hashem's imminent salvation.

TRULY LIVING

Reb Shlomo Leib of Lenchno

From the straits did I call ... I shall not die, but I shall live ...

The verse can be understood as follows: "I shall not die while I live" - while I am still alive. I will not be like the wicked who are called dead even when still alive.

SIEZE THE MOMENT

Chiddushei HaRim

From the straits did I call ... Open for me the gates of righteousness ...

"Fortunate is the man who harkens to me to keep guard at my doors, day by day; to guard the doorposts of my openings" (Mishlei 8:34). Each man must wait expectantly at the door for the moment it opens, so that he might immediately enter, before it closes once more.

UNEXPECTED GREATNESS

Rabbi Avraham Pam

From the straits did I call ... The stone which the builders despised has become the cornerstone! ...

It often happens that the one who is considered "least likely to succeed" is the one who achieves the greatest accomplishments.

LASTING IMPRESSION

Rabbi Yitzchak Hutner

Blessed be he who comes in the Name of Hashem ... bind the festival offering [Isru Chag] ...

On "Isru Chag" - when the yom tov concludes - never say that it has gone away. Those elevated moments of the festival remain forever embedded in our personalities, characters, and essence.

CONCEALED MIRACLES

Midrash

Gives thanks to Hashem ... to Him Who alone does great wonders; His kindness endures forever! ...

Hashem often makes wonders that He alone is aware of; the recipient of the miracle usually remains oblivious to the fact that divine providence is protecting him from harm.

THINK ABOUT IT

Reb Simcha Bunim of Pshischa

Gives thanks to Hashem ... to Him Who made the heavens with understanding ...

Certainly, the Holy One made the heavens with understanding. Did anyone ever imagine that they were sewn with needles?

The verse is not discussing the means by which the heavens were fashioned but their purpose.

Hashem fashioned the heavens for the sake of contemplation, so that by contemplating them, we might understand His greatness, as it is written: "Lift your eyes on high and see who created these" (Yeshayahu 40:26). (Siach Sarfei Kodesh I, 221)

REASON TO CELEBRATE

Rabbi Shimshon Pincus

Gives thanks to Hashem ... to He gives food to all living creatures; His kindness endures forever! ...

Our sages teach that Hashem's wondrous providing of daily sustenance to man is akin to the splitting of the sea (Pesachim 118a).

It follows, then, that just as the Jews burst forth in a spontaneous song of gratitude for the miracle by the sea, so should we each time we open our refrigerator door and find it stocked with food.

WAKE UP CALL

Reb Shmelke of Nikolsburg

The soul of every living being shall bless Your Name, Hashem, our G-d ... Who arouses the sleepers (y'sheinim) and awakens the slumberers (nirdamim)...

There are two categories of "sleepers":

There are those who are in a deep sleep with regard to their devotion to Hashem (y'sheinim). They must be aroused from the coma-like slumber which the flow of time of this world has imposed upon them. And it is the Holy One Who arouses them.

But there are those who, at times, do remember and serve Hashem, and at times, forget him; they doze off. And the Holy One also awakens these slumberers (nirdamim). (Eretz HaChaim 423)

SUPPORTING THE FALLEN

Chiddushei HaRim

The soul of every living being shall bless Your Name, Hashem, our G-d ... He supports the falling ...

Even when a person has slipped in sin, Hashem is still by his side to help lift him up.

Hashem is there to support him even when he's fallen, providing him hope going forward.

ILLUMINATING THE RIGHTEOUS

Reb BenZion of Bobov

The soul of every living being shall bless Your Name, Hashem, our G-d ... [were] our eyes as brilliant as the sun and the moon ...

"Our eyes" refers to the righteous, the tzaddikim, who are called "the eyes of the assembly."

Even if they are as brilliant as the sun at its height, they see themselves as the moon only, which has no radiance of its own but reflects that of the sun.

They see their power as having its source in Israel who cling to them. (Heichal Bobov 156)

HAPPY FEET

Reb Chaim of Kosov

The soul of every living being shall bless Your Name, Hashem, our G-d ... [were] our feet as swift as deer...

R' Chaim of Kosov would dance with great and saintly enthusiasm each Shabbos night, his face radiant like a torch. Once a heavy bench fell on his feet and he stopped dancing for some time. But after a few weeks had passed, he began to dance once more with his customary fervor.

When his chassidim tried to prevent him, because of his injured feet, he said, "You thought I had stopped dancing because my feet hurt me, but in truth my feet hurt because I had stopped dancing." (Sipurei Chassidim, Moadim 162)

RELYING ON HASHEM'S MERCY

Reb Yitzchak of Skver

The soul of every living being shall bless Your Name, Hashem, our G-d ... Until now [Your mercy] has helped us ... Do not abandon us ...

This is not a prayer and a plea, but a declaration of faith.

Had You aided us until now, because we were found worthy by virtue of our good deeds and righteousness, we would, of necessity, be concerned about the future. Would we continue to be so favored?

But we have been helped because of Your mercy and Your kindness. These will never be exhausted and spent. We are certain that You will never abandon us. (Besoros Tovos)

BOWING ERECT

Reb Mendel of Vorka

The soul of every living being shall bless Your Name, Hashem, our G-d ... all who stand erect shall bow before You ...

A genuine chassid must know how to bow even while standing erect, cry out even while silent, and dance without moving.

WE ARE ROYALTY

Reb Aharon of Karlin

O G-d, in the omnipotence of Your strength ... O King enthroned upon a high and lofty throne ...

The basic task of the evil desire is to make man forget that he is a King's son! (Darchei Aharon 24)

OUR FATHER

Reb Menachem Mendel of Kotzk

O G-d, in the omnipotence of Your strength ... O King enthroned upon a high and lofty throne ...

A Kotzker chassid overheard another chassid during prayer constantly screaming "Tatte!" ("father!"). Hearing this outburst, the chassid admonished him, saying, "Perhaps the Almighty is not your Father, for does it not say: 'At times that Israel does not do the will of G-d, we are called servants and not children?'"

Upon hearing this angry response, the Kotzker rebuked the chassid, saying, "Perhaps if he keeps on screaming 'Father' long enough, He will become our Father."

WILLING AND CAPABLE

Rabbi Avi Weisenfeld

O G-d, in the omnipotence of Your strength ... O King enthroned upon a high and lofty throne ...

We refer to Hashem as "our Father, our King."

A father wants to do everything for his children, but he is limited. He can't do everything that he wants to do.

A king can do anything for his people, but he doesn't necessarily always want to.

Hashem is our father and our king. Not only can He do anything, but He also wants to do everything for us!

OUR WORLD, OUR ESSENCE

Rabbi Shimshon Pincus

And in the assemblies of the myriads of Your people ... to thank, praise, laud, glorify, exalt, adore, bless, raise high, and sing praises ...

You can tell the nature of a people by its thesaurus. Eskimos have many similar words describing snow, for that is their world, their existence. Jews have a full array of terms to express praise to Hashem, for that is our essence.

POWER OF DESIRE

Reb Simchah Bunim of Pshischa

May your Name be praised forever, our King, the G-d ... Who favors songs of praise ...

This can be homiletically interpreted as "Hashem chooses the remnants (bishayarei) of the song." Those precious feelings left over once we have completed our singing and prayers, that intense longing to continue singing even after the actual service ends - is chosen and preferred by Hashem over the actual songs and prayers.

IMMEDIATE REDEMPTION

Rabbi Yedidiah Tiah Weill

Nirtzah ... He is most mighty. May He soon rebuild His House, speedily, yes speedily, in our days, soon ...

The future Beis HaMikdash will not be built by man but will descend from on high, fashioned by Hashem (see Rashi on Succah 41a). As such, halachic restrictions of building on yom tov do not apply to it. Hence, this poem expresses our genuine hope that the third holy temple will be built immediately, without delay, on this very seder night!

IT WILL ALL MAKE SENSE

Imrei Emes

A kid ... a cat ... a dog ... a stick ... a fire ...

This song is a metaphor for the Jewish people. A person may look at the saga of our nation's history and view it as nothing more than a series of random events: there was a kid, then came a cat, then a dog, a stick, a fire, etc. However, in the end, Mashiach will come and reveal how the entire sequence was carefully arranged by Hashem.

LOVE SONG

Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe

Shir HaShirim ...

Shir HaShirim is a song of the love that exists between Hashem and the Jewish people. Seder night, after having recounted the story of the Exodus, as we palpably sense Hashem's love for us and ours for Him, Shir HaShirim flows naturally.

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