

Rabbi David Aaron |

Rosh Yeshiva

Pesach commemorates the miraculous exodus of the Jews from Egypt. After 210 years of oppression and cruel servitude, an entire people leave in astounding record time, faster than it takes dough to leaven into bread. We celebrate this event with a festive meal and ceremony called the Seder, during which we recite the Haggada—telling of this wondrous historical episode.

The Exodus from Egypt, however, is not just another milestone in the history of the Jewish people. In fact, every holiday is actually a memorial to the Exodus. Even Shabbat is referred to as a “*Zecher L’Yetziat Mitzrayim*,” a remembrance of the Exodus from Egypt, although it has no apparent connection to the Exodus. In addition, every Jew is obligated to see himself as if he personally had left Egypt and to recount it every day.

The first of the Ten Commandments is: “I am YHVH your Hashem Who took you out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.” The Zohar, the magnum opus of Jewish mysticism, explains: “This is the foundation and the root of Torah, all the commandments, and the complete faith of Israel”.

Thus, the Exodus is the seminal event of the Jewish calendar and of daily Jewish consciousness.

Although the obvious theme of the holiday is freedom it is commonly referred to as Pesach. Wouldn’t “the Holiday of Freedom” or the “Exodus” be more appropriate? Jewish tradition teaches that it is so named because Hashem passed over the houses of the Jews when He caused the death of the firstborn of the Egyptians during the tenth plague. This disturbing image of Hashem, hopping and skipping over the Jews’ homes, is also hinted at in the Song of Songs, which is read on Pesach: “Behold the voice of my Beloved comes skipping over mountains, hopping over valleys.” (**Shir Hashirim 2:8**)

Indeed, the oral tradition emphasizes that it was Hashem Himself who was skipping. The Yerushalmi establishes that Hashem personally came to redeem Israel, He did not send an agent (**Sanhedrin 2:1**). A verse in Shemot reads, “*I will perform judgment—I am YHVH*” (**Shemot 12:12**). The famous Torah commentator Rashi from the eleventh century explains that Hashem is assuring them that “I Myself and not an agent” will deliver you from your oppression and enslavement.

Couldn't Hashem have simply decreed the death of the first-born without all this skipping around? What is the significance of His personal involvement?

It is common knowledge that the Jews in Egypt deteriorated to the 49th level of spiritual impurity and moral decadence. Our sages tell us (**Beit Halevi Derush 2 in the name of the Arizal**) that Hashem saved them just before they fell to the last level, the fiftieth, which is total spiritual suicide and obliteration. In other words, the Jews were actually unworthy of liberation. So why did Hashem free them nonetheless?

A careful reading of the Exodus story shows that the predominant message of the liberation of the Jews is the revelation of the profound Truth of "I am YHVH."

We know that each Divine name indicates a different encounter with Hashem, revealing different attributes and perspectives of the Divine truth and our relationship to Hashem.

Elokim is Hashem revealed as the Creator of nature, borders, rules, principles, and regulations. This is the name that appears throughout the creation story. In addition, this name refers to Hashem when He is revealed as a Judge, committed to laws, order, justice, consequences, cause and effect. Hashem, as *Elokim*, responds measure for measure to the choices and deeds of people. Therefore, Hashem as *Elokim* cannot save the Jews, because they don't deserve it.

However, Hashem is not only referred to as *Elokim*, but also as YHVH—this divine name is mentioned when Hashem is revealing His compassion. It indicates that Hashem is not only a Creator, a Ruler, and a Judge, but also a compassionate Sustainer. He lovingly extends and shares His being with us, perpetuating our existence at every moment. We do not exist independently of YHVH, rather we are unified with Him as the rays of the sun are to the sun or the thought is to the thinker. Therefore, YHVH suggests that Hashem is like a compassionate parent and we are His children.

Hashem as *Elokim* is committed to the laws of nature and only works within the limitations of time and space. Therefore, Hashem as *Elokim* could not liberate the Jews from Egypt.

Hashem as YHVH, however, is beyond nature. He is the miracle worker Who, in the name of love, can transcend time and space and perform supernatural feats. Indeed the exodus of the Jews was miraculous.

The Egyptian military security was so tight that no slave had ever succeeded in escaping Pharaoh's captivity. And yet the entire nation of three million people left Egypt in less time than it takes for bread dough to rise. To mobilize my own family to leave the house takes longer than that. Hashem, however, not only suspended the laws of nature, He also suspended the laws of justice.

This perhaps is the greatest miracle in the exodus story—that even though the Jews were undeserving and unworthy to be liberated by Hashem as *Elokim*, they were nonetheless saved by Hashem as YHVH.

Judaism teaches that the essential name of Hashem is YHVH, and that the essential attribute of Hashem is love and compassion. This basic truth is embodied in the Exodus story and therefore we must remember the exodus daily.

The name *Elokim*, however, is really only an aspect of the name YHVH. In other words, the divine attribute of justice is an aspect of the attribute of love and subordinate to it.

Such is the way of true parenthood: Because of my love for my child I establish for her rules and regulations. I create a world of law and order where her choices incur real consequences. I judge her, reward her and discipline her, all for the sake of empowering her to take responsibility and become who she can be. However, since my judgment is because of my love and thereby subordinate to it, there may be times when I will be compassionate towards my child even though she does not deserve it. I will “pass over” my standards of judgment and be compassionate, in order to save my child. I will overrule my rules in the name of love.

This is the meaning of the verse in the Song of Songs: “*Behold the voice of my beloved comes skipping over the mountains, hopping over the valleys*” (**Shir Hashirim 2:8**). Nothing can stand in the way of Hashem's love for you. No obstacle is too great. His love transcends all barriers.

This is the inner dynamic of this miraculous event and this is one reason why this holiday is commonly referred to as Pesach. Hashem, in order to pass over the homes of the Jews, passed over His attribute of judgment in the name of love. The Zohar teaches: “Even though Hashem loves justice, His love for His children overcame His love for His justice.”

One more vital point needs elucidation: Why did Hashem require the Jews to sacrifice the Paschal lamb and smear its blood on their door-posts? Did Hashem really need this sign to identify Jewish homes and pass over them?

There really is one obstacle that can stand in the way of Hashem's love. Hashem can love us, but He can't make us believe that he loves us. A poignant passage in Isaiah portrays this impasse. The Prophet is defending the people, claiming that they are sinning because Hashem is not present for them. Hashem responds (**Yeshayahu {Isaiah} 65:1**): *"I was ready to be sought by those who did not ask for Me. I was ready to be found by those who did not seek Me. I said 'Here I am, here I am.' "*

Hashem may pour upon us all His love, but it is up to us to acknowledge and accept it. We have to make some overture, some sign, which is what smearing the blood on the doorposts was all about. Hashem did not need an identifying sign, but we had to identify ourselves as wanting redemption and believing it can happen. Hashem says to the Jews, "Nothing can stand in the way of My love for you, except you."

Pesach is the time to experience and acknowledge Hashem's unconditional love for you. That's why it is the foundation of all the holidays, of all of Judaism. Without the acknowledgment that Hashem loves you enough to redeem you even when you're not worthy, you have no inkling of Hashem's relationship with you. That's why we read the great love poem, the Song of Songs, on Pesach. That's why we spend hours reciting the Haggada, like an enamored lover describing every minute detail of how her beloved proposed to her.

The more we acknowledge Hashem's love, the more we will experience His unconditional love.

May you have a happy Pesach, basking in Hashem's loving presence.

Rav Binny Freedman |

Rosh Yeshiva

Dear Orayta family,

What a wonderful initiative on behalf of our Orayta students! We do so hope you will enjoy this taste of what our 'Orayta boys' have enjoyed in preparing for Pesach. Perhaps next year we will at long last merit to taste Pesach Seder all together, in Jerusalem! (On Orayta's roof?) Meanwhile, here is a thought for discussion for the Seder this year:

What does it mean to truly live in, to truly be in a moment? One day, when we are all up in heaven, perhaps I will have the chance to ask Noam Apter, 22, of Otniel.

Friday night: White tablecloths and china, the sweet light of the Shabbat candles, and the singing of Shalom Aleichem, a song of peace that begins every Shabbat dinner in every Jewish home. No matter where Jews have been, and how unwelcoming and challenging the world around them has been, they are still singing of peace on Friday nights. And this particular Friday night in the Yeshiva at Otniel was no different. Except that while the students of this yeshiva and their families were singing of peace, no one heard the silent click of wire cutters slicing through the security fence.

Smiling faces, Kiddush over wine, and the blessing of the children; every Friday night for thousands of years Jewish parents have taken a moment to appreciate the gift of children sitting at the Shabbat table. It is a moment of dreams and joy, of potential and love. If we can bless the sweet delicious challot, and appreciate how blessed we are to have bread on our table when so many in the world can only imagine such a luxury, how can we not take a moment to appreciate what a blessing each child is, and how many dreams each of them represent? Except that this Friday night, while parents were blessing their children with light, and seeing in them the majesty of creation, two other 'children', armed with M-16 automatic assault rifles and grenades, were making their way into the same dining hall bringing only darkness and destruction.

Otniel, a town in the Hebron foothills south of Jerusalem, is also home to a very special yeshiva, where boys add two years to their army service in order to combine army service with Jewish studies. While students and families sang and danced to traditional Shabbat tunes in the dining hall, Noam, along with Gavriel, aged 17, Tzvika, aged 19, and Yehuda aged 20, were in the kitchen getting the first course on to the serving plates.

In the blink of an eye, light became darkness and the sweet sound of Shabbat melodies was lost in the horrible sounds of gunfire. Two terrorists, members of the Islamic Jihad organization, entered the kitchen wearing IDF army uniforms and began shooting immediately.

Under fire, Noam Apter ran towards the door separating the kitchen from the dining room where over a hundred unsuspecting people, young boys and families, were welcoming Shabbat.

Wounded and bleeding profusely, with his last strength, he managed to lock both locks and throw the key away. He locked himself in with the terrorists, preventing them from entering the dining hall, and raining death and destruction on all those inside. Noam Apter paid for this act of heroism with his life. The terrorists murdered him, and the other three boys with him.

It is difficult to imagine what pure terror such a moment must contain. To be at such close quarters, with no way of defending yourself, facing evil in its purest form, the range of emotions that must inevitably sweep over a person is impossible to describe. Many experience pure fear, the fear of the unknown. Some experience intense sadness, the sadness that comes with the awareness of endings; dreams that will never be realized, loved ones that will be left behind, goals never to be achieved.

*And some, those rare few, experience challenge, the challenge that comes with the realization that life always means opportunity, and that we are always here for a purpose. How does a human being rise to such a level? How does one overcome every natural instinct of self-preservation, and so see his fellow human beings before him, **that he is able to run towards danger, instead of away from it?** If I ever get the chance, I will ask Noam Apter that question. There are those who, in a moment, achieve what most people strive an entire lifetime to become.*

You may think that this is a terribly sad story, and this may be true. But there is also a deep joy hidden here, because in between the lines of this story is the secret power of a given moment, and with it, perhaps, the reason we are still here as a people, after four thousand years of wandering and struggle, pain and suffering. But to explain this, we need to take a closer look at the story of the Exodus from Egypt in Parshat Bo.

This week, at long last, after two hundred and ten years of pain and suffering in the darkness of Egyptian servitude, the family of Yaakov finally leaves Egypt, and, amidst the great Exodus from Egypt, the Jewish people is born. And, perhaps no less important, we are given our mission as a people, as we receive our first Mitzva, the first commandment given to us as a people on the road to Sinai.

“And Hashem (G-d) spoke to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt saying: This month shall be to you the beginning (Head) of the months, it will be the first for you of the months of the year.” (Shemot 12:1-2)

Incredibly, the first Mitzva given to us as a people is the Mitzva of Kiddush HaChodesh, the sanctification of the new moon. One might have assumed, and maybe even expected a more ‘impressive’ Mitzva to get our journey as a people started: Shabbat, for example, or the Mitzva to believe in one G-d. We might even have understood beginning with one of the special Mitzvot associated with Pesach (Passover), like Matza or the Paschal lamb (which actually does come next). So why is the first Mitzva given the Jewish people, the commandment to have a calendar (and begin it with this month of Nissan)?

Why is our calendar (and which month we begin that calendar with) so important as to be the very first Mitzva the Jewish people are ever given as a people? This is especially challenging when one stops to consider the true nature of our ‘lunar’ calendar, which seems to be almost as much a solar calendar as it ever was a lunar one.

As an example, the calendar we employ utilizes a rather odd system of leap years (which occur seven out of every nineteen years) to ensure that the three major festivals always fall in the appropriate seasons. Pesach, after all, is meant to fall in the springtime, as it represents the newness of planting and springtime and is the birth or planting of the Jewish people. Indeed, G-d Himself says: “Today you are leaving, *“Be’Chodesh Ha’Aviv”*, in the month of spring. (Shemot 13:4)

And Shavuot, the festival of the giving of the Torah, is really the festival of the first fruits (called *“Chag Ha’Bikkurim”*, in early summer, just as Sukkot is the festival of the harvest (*“Chag He’Asif”*). And the entire Jewish calendar revolves around making sure that these festivals fall during the solar seasons we are meant to experience with them. So why then, do we have a lunar calendar? And why is it the first Mitzva we are given as a people?

It is interesting to note that there seems to be an extra word used here in communicating the nature of this Mitzva, which is the word *“Lachem”* (*“for you”*) (Shemot 12: 2) The first month which is meant to begin the Jewish New Year is *“for you”*, and the word is plural, meaning perhaps: *‘for all of you’*.

This month shall be to you (“Lachem”) the beginning (Head) of the months (Shemot 12:1-2)

The Torah need only have said that this month (Nissan), the month in which we finally left Egypt behind, would be forever the first month of the year. Why the necessity to stress that the month was and is for us?

Further, why does G-d need to present this commandment to both Moshe and Aaron? It would certainly have been enough for Hashem to speak with Moshe, as was normally done; why must Aaron be included here? And lastly, how does all this relate to the Exodus from Egypt, which is clearly the central theme of this particular Parasha?

Perhaps before we explore the difference between solar and lunar calendars, we need to first understand what a calendar is all about. When you stop to think about it, a calendar is all about time. And this was really the first gift Hashem gave us as a people. Just prior to leaving Egypt, on the eve of the tenth and last plague, Hashem gave us the gift of time.

A slave really has no need for a calendar, because a slave really has no use for time. His time is not his own; he is essentially at the mercy of his master. He cannot plan because his future is not his to determine. Tomorrow will be no different from today, which, as well, is indistinguishable from yesterday. This is a life of toil, with no set hours, and no end in sight, merely a tool in someone else's plan, without rhyme or reason, as much an object to his overseers as an ox or a plough, he is merely one more object to be utilized as long as practical, and eventually discarded when no longer useful.

Indeed, many historians believe our numerical system of counting was originally devised in ancient Egypt as a method of numbering slaves. Slavery inevitably reduced human beings to mere numbers, indistinguishable from one another, which is why the Torah prohibits counting human beings; in Judaism, especially after our experience in the horrors of Egyptian slavery, a human being is never a number, he is always a world.

And one needn't go all the way back to the Egypt of three thousand years ago to understand this message; it is no accident that the Nazis were tattooing numbers onto human arms in an effort to turn human beings into numbers. Because once a human being is reduced to a number, he is no longer a person; he is no different from a lampshade or a bar of soap, just one more item on a shelf, to be used until no longer useful and then discarded. And that is how human beings can be tossed into pits, or baby boys tossed into the Nile River.

And when you are a number in a vast sea of slave labor, what difference does it make what day or even what month it is? Tomorrow and today are one and the same, and we are all discardable items in a physical world.

And in the end, we cannot change the world around us, nor is there any value to any attempt to change who we are, because after all, we will all wither away and die in the end anyway.

Only with freedom did we rediscover the value and the power of time. Because all of a sudden what we did today could make all the difference in who and how we would be tomorrow.

And this is the essential difference between a lunar and a solar calendar. Every day, everywhere in the known world, the sun will rise in the East and set in the West. And this will happen every day, of every week, of every year, forever. The sun represents the idea that in the end, nothing ever really changes. From our human perspective, we see the sun as being the same every day; rising and setting today just as it did yesterday, and as it will continue to do every day, forever. And if the world does not change, then who are we to assume that we can be any better? And in the end, there is no point to change and growth, because it all ends the same way anyway.

When one looks up at the sun, one is reminded of the inexorable pattern of nature. One cannot, in truth, even look at the sun. We are, in the end, before the mighty majesty of the heavens, small indeed. And like all things natural, we too, small that we are, will one day fade away into the oblivion of time. Here today, gone tomorrow, we might as well enjoy our short time on this earth, for it will be gone before we know it, and nothing we do really makes that much of a difference, after all, when viewed against the magnitude and unchanging pattern of the sun.

But Judaism has a very different approach: Our calendar is a calendar of the moon. And even though our calendar is linked to the seasons, which suggests that there is a time for all things, and that life is a process of growth and harvesting, it is also a lunar calendar. One of the things that distinguish the moon from the sun is that, even to the naked eye, unlike the sun, the moon appears different every night. The moon waxes and wanes, and just when you think it is gone forever, it comes back, stronger than ever, kind of like the Jewish people.

Right from the outset, Hashem wanted to teach us, that we always have the power to change, and that we are never ever doomed to be where we think we are stuck. We can always rise above where and even who we are, just like the moon, which is constantly changing and never 'gives up', waxing again just when it appears to be gone forever.

But there is more because time is meaningless unless it is imbued with purpose. Like freedom, now that for the first time in more than two hundred years we had 'time on our hands', the question was, what was all that time for?

Ever wonder why the Jews have such a strange way to celebrate freedom?

I still remember the magnificent celebrations in 1976 to commemorate America's bicentennial. An armada of navy ships, including battleships, destroyers, and even an aircraft carrier, sailed down the Hudson River, culminating in an incredible fireworks display above the statue of Liberty in New York Harbor. And the next night, over Central Park in New York City, they gave out free beer to over a 100,000 people with an even bigger fireworks display. Imagine 100,000 New Yorkers in Central Park at midnight, with free beer; now that's a party!

But what do we do to celebrate our freedom? Every year, on the anniversary of the Exodus from Egypt, we have the most structured night of the year! And there are so many details: you have to have four cups of wine, not three, and each one has to be at least 3 fluid ounces, and make sure to lean when you drink, not to mention how much effort has to go into the Matza, and the need to eat a minimum of two Matzot at different parts of the Seder. In fact, there are fourteen different components to the Seder, beginning with the Kiddush, and culminating in the Hallel and Nirtza prayers after the meal. And heaven forbid there be any Chametz (unleavened bread) at the Seder....

In fact, the very name Seder, means order! So where's the party? Why doesn't the Torah loosen up a bit?

In point of fact, the message of the Seder is that we don't celebrate freedom because we don't view freedom as the end of a struggle, it is merely another stepping-stone. The question in life is not whether you are free; the question is what that freedom is for. If your freedom is only to drink and get high, then, in the end, you are still a slave. We all serve something, and the challenge of 'freedom' is what we choose to serve.

What was the purpose of leaving Egypt? Where were we meant to go, and who were we meant to be? That is the hidden message of the moon, and the reason it is the beginning of the journey of the Jewish people. We are given a world that is very much incomplete, and our challenge is whether we can be partners in changing it and making it better.

So how do we do this?

Perhaps the ritual of sanctifying the new moon is a clue. Every month, the Sanhedrin (the Jewish High Court) would convene in the courtyard of the Temple, the Beit HaMikdash, in Jerusalem, on the nights when the New Moon was meant to appear. Having waned away into nothingness, the new month would begin as soon as the barest sliver of the New Moon would be seen in the sky.

Interestingly, however, the Sanhedrin itself could not witness this sliver of moon and declare the new month. They had to wait until two individuals came forth and claimed to have seen the sliver of moon in the sky.

And only when they were both questioned separately, and the facts ascertained to match reality (i.e. that they the sliver of moon in the part of the sky it was expected to appear in, etc.) was the new month declared. Perhaps the calendar and this ritual were not meant to be a ritual of the leadership alone; it was meant to connect the greatest of Rabbis with the simplest of fellows, on whom they depended to set the calendar. And if we are going to make a difference in the world as a people, we can only do it if we are together.

And this may be the meaning of the verse: “Ha’Chodesh Ha’Zeh **Lachem...**” *“This month shall be **for you**”*. (Shemot 12:2)

This month is for all of you, and together, it is a gift I give you, says G-d, to change the world.

Indeed, this is alluded to as well by the fact that this very special Mitzva is first given to Moses and Aaron together. The **Torah Temimah** (Rav Baruch Epstein, 1857-1940) points out that it is really two witnesses who determine the New Moon, and not a Jewish court of three judges because when a decision is made by three individuals there will always be a majority opinion. But when there are two witnesses, in order to make a decision, everyone needs to agree. So the witnesses actually represent the unity of purpose. When we declare a new month we are dependent on being together, and learning to be able to agree with each other.

And there is one more detail in this week’s portion worth mentioning, along the lines of this theme.

Even if we can agree and rise to the challenge of being together, and even if it is clear that we have to get out of Egypt, as well as where and why we are going, there is one more important detail.

This week we are also given the Mitzva of eating Matza.

Now, if you would ask the average person why we eat Matza on Pesach, they would tell you that we left Egypt in such a hurry that the dough did not have the time to rise. And in truth, they would be right, as the verse says:

“And the people carried their dough before it fermented.” (Shemot 12:34), and later:

“And they baked the dough which they took out with them from Egypt into Matza cakes, which was unleavened, for they were expelled from Egypt and could not tarry and had made no provisions.” (Shemot 12:39)

But a closer look reveals that it was not quite so simple. God tells Moses and Aaron that the Jewish people should set aside a lamb for the paschal sacrifice on the tenth day of Nissan, which will be slaughtered and eaten on the eve of their departure from Egypt one week later. And at the same time (see **Shemot 12:14-15**) Hashem tells them the Jewish people will celebrate a seven-day festival during which they will eat only Matza! In other words, the Jewish people (or at least Moses and Aaron) know they will be eating matza after the Exodus from Egypt for a full week before they actually leave! So why didn't they have time to bake bread? They had an entire week for their dough to rise?

The only way to explain the juxtaposition of this seeming contradiction in the text is to assume that while the people (or at least Moses and Aaron) know they will be eating Matza when they leave Egypt for a whole week prior to the Exodus, nonetheless, when they finally leave Egypt, they depart in such a hurry that in fact their dough has no time to rise. Obviously, God wanted us to be leaving Egypt in a hurry.

Indeed, this is supported by the manner in which we were commanded to eat the Paschal lamb on the eve of the Exodus:

*“And thus shall you eat it: with your loins belted, your sandals on your feet, and your walking sticks in your hands, and you shall eat it **be'chipazon**, in a hurry, for it is Pesach to God.” (Shemot 12:11)*

The **Tzidkat HaTzaddik** (Rav Tzadok HaKohen, 1823-1900) explains that Hashem wanted us to be ready to leave Egypt at a moment's notice. Because getting out of Egypt is meant to happen in the blink of an eye.

We all have our own Egypt's: the places and experiences, habits and addictions that we seem to get stuck in. And every once in a while, we get the opportunity to get out. We recognize how stuck we are and we get the urge to let go of all the things that hold us back, and get out of 'Egypt'. Says the Tzidkat HaTzaddik: you have to grab those opportunities because they don't last.

Matza represents the ability to recognize when such a moment has come, as well as the challenge of rising to such a moment before it is gone. And all of this is the beginning of the story of the Jewish people. We are never really 'stuck' in the moment, and we can always change who we are, and rise to who we can become. And the recipe for all this is the ability, even in the darkest of moments, to always be together, and see everyone around us, even when every instinct screams out to think only of ourselves.

In Otniel, Noam Apter seized such a moment. Faced with a reality where there was no way out, and a foregone conclusion, he chose to see everyone else rather than himself, and in so doing grabbed on to a window, a fleeting moment of Jewish history, and brought us all a little bit closer together. And as much as that moment was full of tragedy, it was, as well, a celebration of who we really are.

Rudyard Kipling's famous poem "*If*", comes to mind:

***"If you can fill the given minute, with sixty seconds of long distance run,
Yours is the earth and everything in it, and you'll be a man my son."***

Sometimes, a person comes along who truly succeeds in filling the given minute with sixty seconds of long distance run.

Three thousand years ago, a people, enslaved for more than two hundred years, discovered that every minute can be such a moment. And in the town of Otniel, a young man reminded us that such moments begin by seeing everyone else even before you see yourself.

Yehi' Zichram Baruch. May their memory be Blessed.

Rav Yitzchak Blau | Rosh Yeshiva

Seder night is one of the educational highlights of the year as parents tell our foundational story over to their children. Close analysis of some halachic details of this night point the way towards a Jewish theory of education. To elucidate these themes, let us turn to the thought of Rav Yitzchak Hutner, author of the *Pachad Yitzchak*. Rav Hutner's letters include important pedagogic insights (see letters 74 and 128 in the volume entitled **Iggerot u'Ketavim**) and so does his volume on Pesach.

The Torah (**Shemot 13:8**) emphasizes that parents should tell their children the story of the Exodus on the first night of Pesach. It also stresses (**Devarim 6:20**) that this dialogue should take place in a question and answer format. These reflect two distinct themes. I could instruct another person without using the questions and answer method. Conversely, I can ask questions and seek out answers without the presence of another person. Indeed, the Gemara (**Pesachim 116a**) says that a person conducting the Seder alone asks himself questions.

Rav Hutner (**Pesach no. 4**) analyzes these two themes in the context of the four sons. He wonders why the wicked son and the son who does not know how to ask receive the identical response, a verse from **Shemot 13:8**. Why do they not receive more individualized answers? R. Hutner explains that two of the sons, the wise and the simple, ask questions and receive answers tailored specifically to their queries. There, the parents fulfill both the dialogue theme and the question and answer theme.

In contrast, the wicked son and the son who does not know how to ask only allow for the theme of instructing others. The latter cannot ask; clearly, he does not engender a question and answer structure. The wicked son seemingly asks a question but it is more of an objection or a statement of cynicism and not a genuine quest for an answer. Thus, two sons lack an authentic question and receive a more standardized response.

The Mishna (**Pesachim 10:4**) teaches that the Haggada should begin with the negative and then move over to the positive. Rav Hutner (**Pesach no. 17**) cites Maharal (**Gevurat Hashem chapter 52**) who notes that the negative actually enhances the praise and the positive. There is something more impressive about converting a problematic situation into something beautiful than in simply starting out with the sun shining and the flowers blooming. Rav Hutner draws an intriguing parallel to the question and answer theme.

At times, the most profound understanding stems from struggling with a question and arriving at an answer rather than just beginning with a clear conclusion.

Three educational ideas emerge. Jewish education ideally takes place in a dialogue format in which we hear the insights and ideas of others. Note the unique emphasis on *chavruta* learning in yeshiva culture. Secondly, we believe strongly in asking questions and may occasionally value the questions more than the answers. Only questioning leads to deeper understanding. Finally, we appreciate how the most authentic growth happens in the process of overcoming hardships. We begin in the dark and work our way towards the light.

I would like to congratulate the Orayta students for this Haggada endeavor. These students understand the value of sharing ideas with others, asking questions, and working hard to transcend limitations. May they continue to enjoy a lifetime of engagement in the age-old dialogue of Torah study and find in it a treasury of inspiration and wisdom.

Rav Moshe Kornblum |

Assistant Dean of Orayta

As we start the book of Shemot, we are introduced to the person who will become Moshe Rabbeinu. Certain Biblical figures have adjectives as part of their names whenever we refer to them.

Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov – *Avinu* (our father)

Sarah, Rivka, Rachel and Leah – *Imeinu* (our mother)

Yosef – *Hatzaddik* (the pious one)

Aharon – *Hakohen* (the priest)

David and Shlomo – *Hamelech* (the king)

However, only Moshe is Rabbeinu – our Rebbe. Moshe who was the greatest teacher and prophet – and leader that the world has ever seen. Now, this isn't an opinion poll. It's not like we now vote on the biggest sports hero or the most influential person of the last 100 years and we can now vote on it and have great debates; weighing the pros and cons of each selection.

This idea is so powerful that when the Rambam (Maimonides) enshrined his Thirteen Fundamental Principles of Faith (without believing in them – you're not a believing Jew), he included that we believe that Moshe Rabbeinu was the Greatest Prophet who ever lived. Greater than all those who came before him or after him.

Principle number 7: ***I believe with a whole belief that the Prophecies of Moshe Rabbeinu are true. And that he was the Father (Greatest) of Prophets, both those who preceded him and those who came after him.***

Principle Number 8: ***I believe with a whole belief that the whole Torah that we now have in our hands was given to Moshe Rabbeinu.***

Which means by the way, that Moshe Rabbeinu will be a greater *Navi* (Prophet) than *Mashiach*.

Why? Because Moshe gave us the Torah, no *Navi* could come along at a later date and say that he was superior to Moshe and therefore we have to change, modify, reform or adapt the Torah.

Moshe spoke to Hashem face to face, not in a dream or a vision. The only one!

So how did Moshe become Moshe Rabbeinu?

Because great leaders aren't born; they're made. But sometimes leaders are made even before they're born.

Here's a quick story: A couple came to a Rebbe and asked which school they should put their child in. They want to prepare him for a special life. The Rebbe said that you're starting too late. Preparations for a proper education for your child starts with the first day of your marriage. What type of home will you have? The tone of it? The look of it?

You guys are preparing right now for your kids. Seems crazy – doesn't it. But the character that you're molding in yourselves right now, every day will in many ways determine exactly the type of kids you're going to have. What career you go into? Who you pick as your wife? Now is the preparation for who will come after you! – No pressure, by the way.

As I'm sure you all know, a home has a character to it. You can often walk straight into someone's house and know straight away that this is a special place. Do you know what I'm talking about? Haven't you walked into a new home, the house of a friend for the first time and felt comfortable and easy immediately? And haven't you sometimes walked into a house and straight away you get the feeling: touch nothing, don't even breathe on anything and the tension is radiating all over the place?

Totally different environments.

Moshe Rabbeinu grew up in a special home. Maybe the most special home of all time. After all, look what it produced: three children, each of them *Tzaddikim*, each of them Prophets and each of them *Gedolei Yisrael*. That's amazing!

When Moshe's father and Mother get together, how does the Passuk describe it?

וַיֵּלֶךְ אִישׁ מִבֵּית לְוִי וַיִּקַּח אֶת בַּת לְוִי: *A certain man of the house of Levi went and married a Levite woman. (Shemot 2:1)*

Now we know that the "Ish" was Amram, Moshe's father (he was the *Gadol Hador*) and that the "Bat Levi" was Yocheved, Moshe's mother; so why does the Torah mention them anonymously at first? In fact, the first nine *passukim* (verses) have no names at all. Just the story, but nothing about the characters in them.

How can this be? One thing that we learned in Sefer Bereishit was how important names are. How much they signify about a person, their character, their development.

And we know who they are:

The man is **Amram** - Moshe's father.

The woman is **Yocheved** – Moshe's mother.

The child is **Moshe**.

The child's sister is **Miriam**.

So what is the Torah telling us by not telling us their names?

Our great Torah Commentator Rashi quotes the Gemara that Amram was so depressed when Pharaoh made his gezeirah (edict) that you shall kill all newborn Jewish baby boys that he went and separated himself (according to some opinions divorced) from his wife, Yocheved, rather than bring a son into this world who might be killed by Pharaoh. They already had two children: Miriam and Aharon. (**Sotah 12a**)

And it was Miriam who saved the day, inspiring her father and reminding him of his role and responsibility.

I remember reading in one of his memoirs, that Elie Wiesel recounts the very last words his Zeide said to him: "Your job is to be Jewish. The rest is up to God."

Amram, with his renewed faith and Emunah in Hashem that this child would be protected, already gave Moshe part of the spiritual strength to become Moshe Rabbeinu – even before his birth.

That's the concept of "Spiritual Genes". It's not just hair color that's included in our DNA. It's also the spark in our *Neshamot* (souls).

So we know that Moshe had exceptional parents. But the reason (in my opinion) that the Passuk said "*Ish Levi*" and "*Bat Levi*" (and not their real names) is because the Torah wants to show us that everyone had to make that decision then. And everyone had to make momentous decisions that were tremendously difficult and challenging and dangerous. But that is the path that many of us have to take in life. To make those decisions. To walk the walk.

There's a magnificent exchange between Frodo and Gandalf in "The Fellowship of The Ring" by Tolkien that illustrates this:

— "*I wish the ring had never come to me. I wish none of this had happened.*"

— "*So do all who live to see such times. But that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given to us.*"

So the Torah wants to teach us that any “Ish” of Israel and any “Daughter” of Israel are capable of making those tough decisions and can exhibit similar exemplary qualities. That we all can and should aspire to rise to the challenges of life, to all aspire to raise our children to do great things in their lives as we hope to do great things in our own lives.

It isn't easy to be a Jew. It's not easy to be a committed Jew. But it's the most rewarding life possible.

It's not easy to walk into your boss' office and say I can't work Saturdays if need be I'll work on Sunday or even.

It's not easy to wear a Yarmulke to work, on campus and in the street and have everyone watch you and judge you on it.

Our goal, our ideal, is to turn our boys and girls, and Men and Women of Israel into leaders of our People and lovers of its Torah. Wishing you a very meaningful Pesach as we figure out how to make that path a reality.

Keeping the Story Alive|

Rav Dovid Silverstein, Sgan Rosh Yeshiva

The holiday of Pesach commemorates the story of the Jewish people's exodus from the land of Egypt. In fact, the Ramban (Nachmanides) argues that God insisted on "hardening Pharaoh's heart," and delivering a total of ten plagues on the Egyptians so that the Jewish people would have a national story highlighting God's might to transmit from generation to generation. Yet despite the clear Biblical directive to recount the Exodus story on the first night of Pesach, the means through which we tell the story seem counter intuitive. After all, instead of simply opening the Bible to the relevant sections in the book of Shemot and retelling the story as it is found in the text, we spend the entire night of Pesach reading the Haggada in which there almost no mention of the verses found in Exodus itself!

Additionally, the structure of the Haggada seems difficult to understand. According to the Talmud, the Haggada must begin with a description of the more complicated aspects of the history of the Israelites and only then move onto discussing the more religiously elevated parts of Jewish history. The Rambam (Maimonides) rules that this directive is accomplished by expounding on the verses in Devarim detailing the story of an individual bringing his first fruits to the temple in Jerusalem (*arami oved avi*).

According to the Rambam, the more one expounds on this aspect of the Haggada, the more the Mitzva of "*sippur yetziat mitzrayim*" (telling the Passover story) is accomplished. This ruling of the Rambam only highlights the problem mentioned above. Not only does the Haggada not contain explicit references to the story as documented in the book of Shemot, the climax of the Haggada involves the participants telling the Exodus story from the perspective of tangentially relevant Deuteronomic description of a Jew bringing his first fruits to the temple!

Rav Soloveitchik addresses these questions by noting that goal of the Seder is to analyze the story of the Exodus by placing it in the context of the larger story of the Jewish people. According to Rav Soloveitchik, "we celebrate the festival of *Yetziat Mitzrayim* not only because we remember it, nor just because we re-experience it, but because it is permanent drama. Every generation lives through the actual experience of *Yetziat Mitzrayim*."

Reading the relevant verses in Sefer Shemot exclusively would divorce the Exodus story from its larger context. By focusing our interpretative energies on the story of the Jew bringing his first fruits to Jerusalem, "we inform the listener that our method is one of total interpretation of translating the past into the present of identifying memory with reality."

More precisely, it is this section of the Torah that reminds us that “we are a lonely people, that we are a band of wandering Arameans facing hostility, that our very existence is a miracle.”

Rav Yaakov Nagen provides a different model for thinking about these questions. According to Rav Nagen, the Pesach Seder is not about retelling the Exodus story simply as a matter of historical record. Rather, the goal of the Seder is to tell the story of Jews who have themselves continued to tell the story of Exodus throughout the generations. It is for this reason that the climax of the Haggada is the section of “my father was a wandering Aramean.” After all, it is these verses that highlight the first recorded moment in Jewish history where a Jew publicly retold the story of the Jewish people beginning with Abraham until the arrival of the Jewish people into the promised land. By delving into the details of the Exodus story through the lens of the Jew offering his first fruits in Jerusalem, the Seder highlights not only the story itself. Rather, it additionally focuses the participants’ on their connection to generations of Jews who continued to keep the story of the Jewish people alive.

This explanation of Rav Nagen also explains why the Haggada is filled with endless Rabbinic citations highlighting the Oral Law’s perspective on the Exodus story. It is these interpretations that highlight the story’s continued relevance. By studying, interpreting and applying the lessons of the Pesach story, Rabbinic Sages continue to keep the Exodus story alive by adding their voices to the transmission of the Shemot narrative. Seeing the Pesach Seder as a familial learning opportunity allows each individual participant to contribute his unique perspective on his people’s continued story.

According to this model, the Pesach Seder is best described our annual collective family reunion. As Rabbi Jonathan Sacks notes, “at the heart of the covenant is the idea of *Emunah*, which means faithfulness or loyalty.” Jews gather together every year thus affirming “a loyalty to generations past and generations yet unborn to continue the narrative.”

Another Look at the Ten Plagues |

Rav Dovid'l Weinberg, Ra'm

***Dam* – Blood:**

The Lubavitcher Rebbe elucidated the symbolic, inner meaning of the first plague by contrasting water with blood. Water is cool, while blood is hot. Turning water into blood expresses the requisite movement away from “too cool” cynicism and toward a more blood-hot, passionate commitment to truth. This is the begging of the redemption from Egypt. Has being afraid to seem “too committed” ever gotten in the way of starting something?

***Tzefardeia* – Frogs:**

Rashi (**Shemot 8:2**) comments that [at least according to one opinion] the plague all started with one frog. When they hit it, it multiplied, and as they continued to hit it, it persisted in multiplying until the plague was out of control. Why didn't they stop after hitting it and witnessing the counterproductive results? The Steipler Gaon was inclined to answer this question by pointing out that the Egyptians, no doubt, were hitting the frog in anger. When a person is angry, he will act out in ways which are foolish and even self-destructive. In this instance, what started as the innocuous appearance of a singular amphibian spiraled out of control, decimating the entire Egyptian landscape. Has anger ever caused you to act out in a way which is either irrational or self-destructive?

***Kinim* – Lice:**

After coming to grips with their inability to replicate the plague of lice, the Egyptian magicians cried out, “this is the finger of God” (**Shemot 8:15**). Rabbi Jonathan Sacks has pointed to this declaration as the first recorded instance of what has now been coined “the god of the Gaps,” wherein God is recognized only when we cannot explain or control a particular phenomenon or set of phenomena. He argues that it is this pagan view of Divinity which the Torah seeks to undermine here. Judaism seeks to reveal Hashem in the natural order as well, and does not relegate Him to the realm of the mysterious. How do you see Hashem in nature?

***Arov* – Mixture of Wild Animals:**

The Torah describes the plague of wild animals as “the houses of Egypt will be filled with vicious animals, and the ground they are on.”

While the simple interpretation of “the ground they are on” refers to the Egyptians, (i.e. the plague will fill their houses and any other ground they are on—see **Seforno**), some (see **Maharil Diskin**) explained the verse as a reference to “the ground they—the animals—are on.”

Animals are not as comfortable exercising their strength when they are not in their natural habitat. In addition to transporting an array of animals into Egypt, Hashem miraculously provided each animal with its natural habitat. Snow accompanied arctic creatures, while more tropical animals enjoyed the humidity of the rain forests.

***Dever* – Death of Animals:**

The Torah indicates that every Egyptian animal died “*ad echad*.” This is generally understood as: “Up to and including the very last one.” The Midrash, however, translates “*ad echad*” as: “Until, but not including, the very last one.” The survival of a single animal was enough to convince Pharaoh that there is no evidence for Hashem’s control of the cosmos despite the overwhelming evidence to the contrary. Has one small reservation ever caused you to ignore overwhelming confirmation of an important value or truth?

***Shechin* – Boils:**

The Ramban (**Shemot 9:11**) elucidates the Torah’s assertion that the magicians of Egypt were “unable” to stand before Moshe. He explains that they were “embarrassed to stand before Moshe covered in boils.” Although, already by the plague of lice, they had shown their inability to control or replicate the plague, here there was an additional level of shame as it became clear that they lacked control, even over their own bodies. How can we overcome the illusion that we have complete control of our life’s circumstances?

***Barad* – Hail:**

The “hail” of this plague was not of the norm; rather, it was constituted of opposites, both fire and ice. Perhaps this can explain the oddity of Moshe Rabbeinu’s inability to pray for the removal of the plague from within Egypt’s idol-ridden cities, despite being able to do so many times before and after.

The Shem Mi’shmuel (2nd Sochatchover Rebbe, 1855-1926, **Vaera 5678, d”h K’tzeiti**) suggests that for fire and ice to coexist, they must have, perforce, descended from a place so lofty, that Hashem’s manifest unity leaves no possibility for opposition, even between fire and water. To remove such a lofty revelation of Godliness, Moshe needed to pray in a place free of idolatry, where no opposition to Hashem’s Oneness is even suggested. In what ways can connecting to Hashem’s Oneness save you from dispute with someone who thinks differently than you?

Arbeh – Locusts:

The Imrei Emes (The 4th Gerer Rebbe 1866-1948, **Parshat Bo**) points out that, unlike the previous plagues, there are no clear details about the nature of this plague. Quoting the previous Rebbe, the Sefas Emes, he notes that part of the revelation explicit in this makah is the partnership that will be forged between Am Yisrael and Hashem through the Torah sh'baal peh (The Oral Tradition). As a result, Hashem gives Moshe full control of how to execute this plague: no details necessary. Do you exercise your ability to partner with Hashem and innovate Torah ideas?

Choshech – Darkness:

According to the Ohr Hachaim (Rabbi Hayyim ben Moshe Ibn Attar, 1696-1743, **Shemot 10:23**), the light which enabled the Jews to see during the plague of darkness was none other than the light Hidden of Creation. In fact, a first generation student of the Ba'al Shem Tov, Rav Pinchas Koritzer zy"ta, explained that the darkness which struck the Egyptians was, in reality, the blinding light of the *Ohr Haganuz*. This was a foretaste of the World to Come, as described by the Gemara (**Avoda Zara 3b**), when Hashem will remove the sun from its sheath, thereby simultaneously healing the righteous and punishing the wicked. Are there any things in your life which you perceive as bad, but are in fact really abundantly good?

Makas Bechoros – Death of the First Born:

Rav Simcha Bunim of Pershischa (**Kol Simcha, Parshat Bo**) wondered why the Jewish first born sons needed to be saved from Makat Bechorot. Why is there even a forethought that they deserved to be killed? In answering, Rav Simcha Bunim pointed out that the purpose of this final plague was to proclaim to the world that there is only one "*Rishon*" – only one First-cause, if you will. To this end, every *bechor*, whose very birth-order proclaimed a new "*Rishon*," ceased to exist. If this is the case, how were the firstborn Jews saved? Rav Simcha Bunim explained that from here we see that every Jew is endowed with a "*Chelek Eloka Mimal*," or "a piece of God above." In this way, the firstborn Jews were not a contradiction to God's Oneness, but, instead, a further expression of it. In what ways to you attempt to express that you carry within yourself a piece of God?

The World to Come is Already Here!

But Only for Those Who Eat Maror |

Rav Nuriel Aaron, Ra”m

When a person knows that all events are for his good, this is an aspect of the world to come (Likutei Moharan 4).

According to Rabbi Nachman, we can experience an aspect of *Olam Haba* (The World to Come) in this world if we only look and understand that everything that happens to us is for our good. This essay will look at such an encounter on the Seder night based on the words of Rav Kook zt”l. R. Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook explains how the *Simanim* (stages) of the Haggada are a spiritual process in which a person proceeds stage by stage towards the holy sanctuary in this world. One of the peaks is the *Siman* of *Tzafun* (when we eat the Afikoman before Bentsching), an experience of *Olam Haba* in this world. This spiritual process is parallel to the fifteen steps that lead from the *Ezrat Yisrael* (Courtyard of the Holy Temple) to the *Heichal* (Inner Chamber of the Holy Temple).

Before we delve into the words of Rav Kook, we should note a crucial and recurring point.

The Exodus from Egypt is the kind of event that only from a coarse external perspective is an event that once occurred and passed. It remains a powerful memory in Jewish history and in general human history. In truth, understanding its content leads us to realize that the Egyptian exodus is an ongoing event.

One of the barriers we face in connecting to spiritual processes on the holidays is the feeling that we are discussing a memory, and we act because of the past, perhaps as a means of learning some ethical principle. Pesach emphasizes that everything is alive and affecting us in the present. As we say in the Haggada: “*A person is obligated to view himself as if he left Egypt as it says “And you will tell your child on that day saying, because of this God did it for me as I left Egypt”*”. It does not say “when I left Egypt” but “as I left” since it is an ongoing present in which I am always leaving Egypt.

When we speak about leaving servitude, entering freedom or a spiritual experience we have to find where it is in our lives. The past is a map and a mirror for what happens in reality, in the past was first revealed the enduring essence of every detail of reality.

Let us return to the essence of the matter – the meeting with aspects of the world to come on the Seder night.

The words of Rav Kook enable us to note the two central axes crucial to achieving the pinnacle of the Seder night in *Tzafun* when we eat the *Afikomanas* a commemoration of *the korban Pesach* (Pesach Sacrifice) that was eaten at the end of the meal.

When Rav Nachman said that a person has to understand that all events are for his benefit, the first interpretation that occurs to us is that when a person sees the evil as part of the good, he experiences a taste of the world to come.

However, we can add another layer. Not only is evil for his good but so too all matters of the mundane and material are for our good. These two central axes – the attachment between holy and mundane and between good and evil bring a person to the experience of the world to come.

The connection between holy and mundane is already found in *Yachatz* when we split the Matza in two and save half for the *Afikoman*. Rav Kook explains the rationale: “*We divide the Matza Into two acts of eating so that the necessary mundane eating will not be separate from the holy eating which is its goal. We cannot arrive at the holy eating without a preface of all that is ordered and pleasant to prepare the food....These two complimentary acts of eating, the two halves of Yachatz- bring completion.*”

It is well known that the *Korban Pesach* or the *Afikoman* has to be eaten on a full stomach. Only after a person has satisfied his desire can he eat the holy. Rav Kook emphasizes that this is the reason for *Karpas* (The vegetable we eat after *Kiddush*), which whets our appetite until we arrive at the *Shulchan Aruch* (The Seder Meal). These two items jointly express how, on the “night of watching” we are not afraid of the mundane and the need for physical enjoyment. On the contrary, all the pleasant and good Seder is preparation for the necessary holy eating.

On the other hand, the danger is clear. The mundane and the pleasurable can take us to areas diametrically opposed to true sanctity. Here, enters the second condition, the connection between servitude and freedom, between the negative and the praiseworthy, and between evil and good.

Maror was always a wonder to me – why is this a category of its own and why do we recite a blessing over it? Why do we make a sandwich of it together with Matza?

A Midrash on a verse in Iyov (Job) can provide direction. *“Who can divide between the pure and impure, is it not the One. For example, Avraham from Terach, Chizkiyahu from Achaz, Yoshiyahu from Amon, Mordechai from Shimmi, the Jews from the pagans, the world to come from this world. Who did this? Who commanded this? Who decreed this? Was it not the singular One of the universe? (Bemidbar Rabba 19:1)*

Without the passage through difficulty, servitude, and, at times, evil, we cannot arrive at the good, the good in its wholeness.

As Rav Kook writes: *“We begin with the negative and conclude with the positive to teach that the negative services the positive. We begin with the negative that ‘we were slaves.’ Slavery is certainly a cause of much evil, many corrupt traits as well as all the evil and pain for those suffering as slaves. Yet it is also the trait of subjugation and being in servitude to the One who it is worthy to serve, to be a true servant of God, to negate our personal will and inclination in order to accept the yoke of heaven. Israel excels at this trait. Through it, Israel brought abundant good to themselves and to the world. This ability was acquired through slavery and the norms of servitude, and only it can complete the fullest freedom. “*

With greater clarification, *“After we remove all the negative aspects of slavery, we will retain the positive aspect in which a person can lovingly withstand all that is against his will and inclination. This is the foundation of Maror, to accept with love the bitter aspects of life when one knows that he has a higher purpose and an elevated ethic.”*

Another level arrives with Korech (The Hillel Sandwich) – *“The full form of freedom comes intertwined with slavery. Then, he will find in himself the full control fitting for the authentic free person who rules over even the great force of freedom itself”.*

That is to say, the ability to be in servitude, to subject himself, to be a slave, also to know to stop oneself and not be a slave to freedom. Even the existence of evil in this world prepares the most exalted good as Rav Kook explains in **Orot Hakodesh (479)**.

After we have met these two central axes: holy and mundane and good and evil, we arrive at the pinnacle of the Seder, *Tzafun*.

Rav Kook describes how the moment of eating the *Afikomanin* memory of the Koran Pesach should inspire a deep hidden feeling within us, a feeling that cannot be expressed in words. It is a feeling beyond all intellect, knowledge or explanation. It is a love of life for its inherent sanctity without need for external matters.

There is no external goal; we are satisfied. There is no practical necessity for action. There is a meeting with the essence of life.

The Emotion of Korban Pesach |

Rav Noam Himmelstein, Mashgiach

Before they left Egypt, the Jewish people were commanded to bring a special Korban – *Pesach Mitzrayim*. One of the important details in that Korban is to: “... eat the flesh in that night, roast with fire, and unleavened bread; with *Maror* they shall eat it.” (**Shemot 12:8**)

At first glance this seems a bit strange. We all eat *Maror* every year at the Seder; as part of the command to “show in every generation as if we ourselves left the Egyptian slavery” (**Rambam, Hilchot Chametz Umatza 7:6**) we attempt to experience as much as possible the bitterness of the oppression – as we say in the Haggada: “Why do we eat this *Maror*?” But why was it necessary for the Jews to eat *Maror* on the night before they actually left Egypt? Did they really need to be reminded of the bitterness of the slavery? Was that not part of their daily lives?

Apparently, however, that WAS necessary – even for them! The Gemara (**Rosh Hashana 11a**) relates that the Jews ceased working for the Egyptians on the previous Rosh Hashana; as Rashi points out that was six months before they left in *Nissan*! When they finally left, the slavery was somewhat of a faded memory; witness the fact that just a month after the Exodus they were complaining:

“And they took their journey from Elim, and all the congregation of the children of Israel came unto the wilderness of Sin ... on the fifteenth day of the second month after their departing out of the land of Egypt. And the whole congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron in the wilderness ... Would that we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the flesh-pots, when we did eat bread to the full ...” (**Shemot 16:1-3**).

It didn't take them long to forget what it was actually like ... Sometimes there can be a disconnect between one's intellect and his emotions; he KNOWS he should do something, but emotionally he can't connect. The Jews in Egypt had been so far removed from the slavery that even they needed to be reminded on the night before they left of the bitterness that they had suffered.

However, as important as it was that they connect emotionally to their experience, it is important to note the limits of emotional experiences.

The Gemara (**Shabbat 10a**) relates: “Raba saw R. Hamnuna prolonging his prayers. Said he, They forsake eternal life (*chayei olam*) and occupy themselves with temporal life (*chayei sha’a*).” This is a little strange. *Tefilla* is a very important component of our *Avodat Hashem*! How can that be termed *chayei sha’a*?!

The answer might be in the fundamental distinction between studying Torah and davening. When engaged in the former, although of course one should strive to connect emotionally to his studies and see in them a vehicle for *Yediat Hashem* (knowing Hashem), at the end of the day it is first and foremost an intellectual activity. When you have studied and mastered a topic, you know it – it is lasting. (Unless you don’t do revision and forget it...:)) However, prayer, davening, is first and foremost an emotional experience, wherein one strives to meet Hashem. Indeed, you cannot compare your *Mincha* yesterday to that of today; they are different experiences. And that is because the emotion of yesterday did not remain, it doesn’t stay with you – and you must try to create (not recreate!) a new emotional experience today. Therefore, to a certain extent, indeed *Tefilla* might be described as “*chayei sha’a*”!

Throughout history, we find that an emotional experience, as powerful and as important as it may be, did not last. Immediately after *Ma’amad Har Sinai* came the Golden Calf; immediately after the people fell upon their faces acknowledging Hashem on Har Carmel, Eliyahu Hanavi has to flee for his life.

That is why it is critical to balance emotions with intellect – and with discipline. The Maharal (*Netivot Olam*) notes the importance that Shimon Ben Pazi gave to the passuk: “*The one lamb shalt thou offer in the morning and the other lamb shalt thou offer at dusk*”. (**Bemidbar [Numbers] 28:4**) This refers to someone who is absolutely consistent in his *Avodat Hashem*, says the Maharal, just as a servant serves his master always and does not swerve from his service. Indeed, emotions can carry one to great heights, but might not be able to sustain one in his *Avoda*.

Rav Elchanan Samet (**Megadim 24, pg 66**) points out that the passuk in Yishayahu (**Isaiah 40:31**) at first glance appears to be reversed:

“But they that wait for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; they shall walk, and not faint.”

The usual style in Tanach is from the easy to the more difficult. It should have said that “they shall walk and not faint; and EVEN IF THEY RUN, they (still) will not be weary”! But that is the point: many have a burst of energy, a burst of enthusiasm – so they run. But to continuously walk, and not faint from the obstacles on the way, not to give up on the long road, to be consistent – now that is something! Indeed, it is from the easy to the more difficult!

Much has been spoken of Neo-Hasidic trends in contemporary Judaism today. Long peyot, gartels, singing and dancing during davening is now not an uncommon sight. The search for connection, for emotion, is certainly worthy. However, let us make efforts to ensure that our consistency is not affected. Even when not entirely excited and emotional, our daily obligations still stand.