

THE



PESACH COMPANION

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בס"ד

Being still relatively new to Bircas HaTorah, and at this stage still being an outside-insider, I was intrigued to see how this idea would play out. When I suggested to a number of the Rabbonim and avreichim who learn and teach at Bircas that they should write a Pesach thought to share with talmidim, alumni and friends of the yeshiva – would the Bircas approach to learning shine through? And what about the Bircas emphasis on personal growth?

As you will see from the contents of this Pesach Companion, it truly is a Bircas HaTorah Pesach Companion.

As always, your comments and feedback are welcome.

ly'H next year we will all celebrate Pesach together in Yerushalayim. In the meantime, wishing you a chag kasher v'sameach, a chag where we all grow in our emunah, bitachon, and avodas Hashem.

Rabbi Richard Jacobs
Executive Director

REASONS FOR THE EXILE IN EGYPT

by Rabbi Dov Sandler, Rosh Kollel

The commentators expatiate on the reasons our forefathers were exiled to Egypt. Rav Yitzchak Maltzin, one of the great Torah scholars of the 18th century, succinctly puts together a listing of major reasons in his commentary to the Haggadah, Siach Yitzchak. A digest of some of the major reasons is here provided:

It is a punishment for Avraham Avinu questioning Hashem's promise (Bereishis 15:8): "How will I know that I will inherit the land". This reason is given in the Gemara in Nedarim (32a).

The Seforno suggests that the Jews were punished with slavery when their spiritual level declined, after the death of the last of the 12 sons of Yaakov Avinu, and they fell into sin. The Seforno cites as support a verse from the prophet Yechezkel (20:8): "And, they rebelled against me and did not want to listen to me. Nobody threw away their idols, nor did they forsake the gods of Egypt, and I decided to pour my wrath on them in Egypt."

Rabbi Elazar Ashkenazi, the author of the work Ma'asei Hashem, suggests that the Egyptian Exile was not a punishment at all. Rather, Hashem knew that the ultimate goal of Avraham Avinu was to spread knowledge of Hashem's divinity and power. Therefore, it was an object of immense joy to Avraham Avinu when Ha-

shem informed him that his descendants will be exiled and enslaved, such that their redemption by means of incredible miracles will proclaim to the world the Oneness and Awesomeness of Hashem.

The Shl"ah HaKadosh and the Shemen HaMor maintain that the Egyptian experience was necessary in order to prepare the Jewish nation for the acceptance of the Torah. Namely, the Torah demands from the person total subjection to Hashem, and punctilious performance of all the *mitzvos*. A person's nature rebels against subjecting himself to such a regimen. By means of the harsh slavery endured in Egypt, the Jew developed the ability to accept the discipline of the Torah. The Shl"ah HaKadosh adds that the Promised Land of the Jewish nation, Eretz Canaan (ארץ כנען), is so named because it is related to the word *hachna'ah* (הכנעה), meaning subjection of oneself (to Hashem).

The Alshich HaKadosh (along with other Kabbalistics) writes that the slavery in Egypt was necessary to remove the impurity that entered the human race when Adam HaRishon ate from the Tree of Knowledge. The slavery served as a refining tool, and made the Jews eligible to receive prophecy.

The above are not an exhaustive listing of all the reasons (see other reasons in Nedarim 32a), but they are major factors to explain why we were enslaved. |

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OUR EXODUS FROM EGYPT

by Rabbi Moshe Krieger, Sho’el U’Meishiv

The Sages (Pesachim, 116b) tell us that, on the night of the Pesach Seder, every Jew is “obligated to see himself as if he left Egypt.”

There are numerous times we are commanded to remember important events in history, such as the *mitzvah* to remember what happened to Miriam (after she spoke against Moshe and was punished with leprosy); however, regarding the other *mitzvos*, we are not commanded to imagine as if they happened to us personally. If so, why is there a need to imagine ourselves as slaves running away from our masters? Moreover, the command of the Sages indicates not that we must *imagine* as if we left Egypt, but rather to *see ourselves* as if we left Egypt. The wording implies a very personal experience that we should *feel*. How can we possibly fulfill this obligation? Can a Jew who grew up in the twenty-first century really see himself as if he were a slave in Egypt?

The Alter of Kelm answers that the Exodus teaches us the most critical elements of our faith: that Hashem exists and that He oversees all of the world’s affairs. He chose us as His people, and He punishes those who defy His will. Therefore, the Alter says, believing that it happened is not enough when it comes to the Exodus. We have to feel that it happened.

As for how we accomplish this, the Alter of Kelm advises performing actions that bring this knowledge closer to our senses. Thus, when the Sages commanded us to see ourselves as if we left Egypt, their intent was that we do actions, such as eating *matzah* and *marror*, so that the Exodus comes alive. Indeed, when the Rambam brings the Sages’ ruling (*Hilchos Chametz Umatzah, 7:6*) in *halacha*, he states that a Jew is obligated to “show himself” as if he left Egypt. By showing ourselves these experiences, we bring the Exodus closer to our senses.

The Haggadah’s detailed description of the Exodus transforms it from mere dry fact into a more vivid experience. Indeed the Haggadah itself tells us, “The more that one

tells it, the more praiseworthy”, as we are bolstering our faith – not just in our heads, but in our hearts.

The Brisker Rav notes that there is an obligation to mention the Exodus every day and every night. However, on the Seder Night, the obligation is to *recount* it. This is much more than a mere mention. We delve into important background events which led the Jews to descend to Egypt. We talk about how the enslavement began, and we describe each of the Ten Plagues that brought our servitude to an end. This recounting takes the form of “question and answer,” which brings out a more personal participation from the audience and, naturally, a greater emotional investment.

R’ Yaakov Yosef Weiss, a Holocaust survivor, would recount every year on the Seder Night: “When my father spoke at the Seder when I was a boy, I could see that he was living through what he was saying. You could feel how real it was to him. I internalized a very deep *emunah* in Hashem from his words, and I believe that it was this *emunah* that enabled me to survive those horrific years of the Holocaust.”

“I spent some of those years together with a friend who had lost his *emunah*, and I would always tell him: If Hashem wants to, He can redeem us right here, too.”

“Once, we were being led to the gas chambers. Everyone knew that this would be the end. I continued to think to myself, ‘Even if a sharp sword is on one’s neck, he must never despair of Hashem’s mercy.’ (Brachos 10a) I was the last one to enter the chamber, which was so crowded that the Nazi, may his name and memory be blotted out, could not close the door! I was big, and I was by the door. So, the Nazi shouted at me to get out. I did, and I survived.”

May we be *zocheh* to relive the Exodus and transmit it to others! |

SETTING US UP TO WIN

by Rabbi Yaakov Schonzeit, Ra"m

Moshe returns to Egypt to free the Jews, but, rather than easing the situation, he only makes it worse. Dejected and angry, Moshe asks G-d why He is doing bad to the people. G-d responds harshly to Moshe, but tells him to relay a message of hope to the Jews, which contains the four languages of redemption. 1) "I will **remove you** from under the oppression of Egypt." 2) "I will **save you** from your bondage." 3) "I will **redeem you** with an outstretched arm and with great judgements." 4) "I will **take you** for Me as a nation." (Shemos 6:6-7)

The Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains what these four expressions refer to. The first stage would lighten and ease the burden of slavery. The Jews still feared the Egyptians, so they would voluntarily offer their services. However, now the enslavement would be manageable. The second stage would be a complete cessation of all work. The third stage would be to remove the Jews from the Land of Egypt, which includes the splitting of the Yam Suf. Lastly, the fourth stage would be the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai.

We see that G-d assures four kindnesses to the Jews, but, that being said, the next verse contains a fifth promise, namely, "I will **bring you** to the Land [of Israel]." (Shemos 6:8)

We know that G-d's words are pure words without any trace of falsehood, and, if so, when G-d promises these five kindnesses, we should see their fulfillment without exception. However, although the first four kindnesses came true, the final promise to bring *these* Jews into the land was not kept. As a result of the Golden Calf and the sin of the Spies, the men between twenty and sixty-years-old were decreed to die in the desert without ever entering Israel. Therefore, how could G-d promise to bring *the Jews who left Egypt* into Israel, and then not fulfill His word?

The Ohr HaChaim raises this difficulty and offers the following answer. If we look at the text of these verses, we can notice a discrepancy.

"Therefore, say to the Children of Israel: 'I am G-d and I

will remove you from under the oppression of Egypt, and I will save you from their bondage, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgements. And I will take you for Me as a nation, and I will be to you a G-d, **and you will know that I am Hashem your G-d the One who took you out from under the oppression of Egypt.** And I will bring you to the land etc."

We see that there is a break between the fourth promise of "take you for Me" and the fifth promise of "bring you to the Land," namely the words, "you will know that I am Hashem your G-d etc." Why is this clause said here specifically? Why doesn't G-d wait until after the final promise to say this?

The Ohr HaChaim explains that this clause was intentionally stated here to make the final promise conditional. That is, G-d would *only* bring these Jews into Israel, *if* they recognized G-d's existence and involvement in the Exodus. However, if they failed to do this, then G-d would not be obligated to bring them to Israel. The first four things G-d said were unconditional promises, but the final one was dependent on us. Since the Jews sinned after leaving Egypt by worshipping an idol, they denied belief in G-d, which released G-d from His vow, and, therefore, these Jews did not merit entry into the Holy Land.

A final question on the Ohr HaChaim is why did G-d make the last promise conditional? Once He made the first four promises unconditional, why not do the same for the fifth?

We can suggest that G-d does not give *everything* to us free of effort. He sets us up with life, health, and the tools for success, but the final decision to succeed is left to us. If we choose correctly, G-d will reward us accordingly. Therefore, G-d gifted us with four stages of freedom. The final stage, however, is always put in our hands. G-d is ready to redeem us and bring us to Jerusalem. All we need is to "know that I am Hashem your G-d, the One who took you out from under the oppression of Egypt." |

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ALL FOUR ONE OR ONE FOUR ALL

by Rabbi Richard Jacobs, Executive Director

Given that the primary purpose of the Seder night and the Haggadah is to instill fundamentals of Jewish faith in the next generation, it's of little surprise that we find educational principles embedded in the text of the Haggadah.

The paragraph of the "four sons" guides us with how to relate to different types of children, which path in *chinuch* to follow, and what to teach.

For the *chacham*, the wise son, with particular talents in learning, a quick and good understanding, and who asks of the "testimonies, statutes and laws" — let him apply his talents to Torah learning and not be distracted by other wisdoms. What becomes of those who are successful in these other disciplines? The modern world is full of new and wondrous discoveries, but the way of the world is that while the new flourish, the old flounder — the new overwrites the old. Not so when it comes to Torah, where the Sages of times gone by are well remembered and live on, as their words in the Talmud and commentaries are debated and analyzed in *yeshivas*.

To the *rasha*, the wicked son, disconnected from tradition, not following *halacha*, and all too often in our days associating with friends who are a negative influence — don't address his challenges head on, but also don't despair and cut him off. Recognize that there is an issue, yet realize that he is there at the Seder and may absorb from the words of Torah around him.

The *tam* is usually translated as the simple son, but this doesn't do him justice. The *tam* is someone who doesn't have natural talents in learning. We know that the secret to success in Torah is hard work, toil and perseverance. We see that there are *gedolei* Torah who showed limited promise as a child, and yet, despite this or perhaps even *because* of it, with resolute determination develop to become a flowing river of Torah. David HaMelech tells us, "The testimony of G-d is trustworthy, making the simple one wise." (Tehillim 19:8)

And finally, the child who does not know to ask, who is usually inaccurately portrayed as a young child, not yet old enough to be able to pose a question. In reality, he is the partner of the *rasha* who doesn't ask. Not because he is not able to ask, but because he is not interested. In many ways, he is more challenging to deal with — the *rasha* kicks and screams against the Torah, indicating the pain of his *neschama*, while the child who doesn't ask shows no outward indication that there is a problem to deal with. Here too don't despair. The Haggadah quotes the same verse in answering both of these children, but, in the case of the child who

doesn't ask, makes one small addition — "*at patach lo*" — you (singular, feminine) open him up, initiate with him. You (singular, feminine), like the mercy of a mother opening up the mouth of a reluctant baby so that she can feed him and he will grow strong.

Four sons — four different educational principles. However, there is a curiosity in the translation. "The Torah speaks of four sons: one (*echad*) wise, one (*echad*) wicked, one (*echad*) simple, and one (*echad*) who doesn't know how to ask." The word "*echad*" when used in sequence like this often means "whether" — whether this, whether that...

Perhaps there are not four sons but one, with different character traits dominant at different times; and, rather than categorizing each child as one of these four archetypes, maybe we should recognize the complex nature of people and the importance of not stereotyping and limiting the way we relate to them. Instead, we could take a holistic approach, seeing the entirety of the child and, at the same time, strengthening their *emunah* with a methodology tailored specifically for them, with all their characteristics.

Alternatively, perhaps there are not four sons, but one, with different character traits being dominant at any given time; and, rather than only deriving principles for ways of relating to our children and strengthening their *emunah*, we should also be asking ourselves:

- Do we apply ourselves as fully to Torah learning as we should?
- Do we associate with the right people who will be a positive influence on us?
- When there is an area of learning that doesn't lend itself to our natural strengths, do we devote enough energy and effort to understanding it?
- And, when there is an area of Torah that we are not interested in, do we actively look for the opening that will lead us to engagement? |

THE FOCUS OF OUR FREEDOM

by Rabbi Aryeh-Tzvi Setzer, Ra"m

Yetzi'as Mitzrayim is one of the six Zechiros, the Six Remembrances, and we mention it in Kriyas Shema twice a day. During Sukkos, we leave our homes to dwell in a sukkah *zecher l'Yetzi'as Mitzrayim*, i.e. as a remembrance of the exodus from Egypt, and, in every single *kiddush* of the year, we proclaim "*zecher l'Yetzi'as Mitzrayim*." So, what is all the hype about Pesach? Is the *mitzvah* to recount the story of Yetzi'as Mitzrayim on Pesach a new *mitzvah* or the same one as during the rest of the year?

As you may know, on the Seder night, there are by far the most *mitzvos d'oraisa* done in one sitting, compiled of many different *mitzvos*. In fact, according to the Gr"a (Sichos HaGra"sh Brevda, page 56), we have almost 100 *mitzvos* just on Pesach night for us to grab! But, why to-night?

When looking at the sections of the Haggadah that deal with Yetzi'as Mitzrayim, I would say they majorly focus on the events during our leaving of Mitzrayim and the miracles that Hashem did for us. Why? Surely the point of the Haggadah is not just to give us a history overview.

Additionally, reciting the Haggadah at this point in the meal, which is straight after *kiddush*, is obviously really important because it creates an excessive gap between *kiddush* and *hamotzi*, which in usual circumstances presents a halachic issue. (Shulchan Aruch O.C. Siman 273; Tosfos, Pesachim 103b, s.v. "*Rav Ashi*...") Yet, here we are doing it intentionally. Why?

One of the clear themes throughout the Seder night is the expression of our freedom, connecting to Pesach's role as referred to in the *davening* of '*zman cheirusinu*,' i.e. the time of our freedom. This theme pops out of all the *mitzvos* of the Seder night, and, in fact, the *halacha* is that certain *mitzvos* which are not done "*b'derech cheirus*," i.e. in a manner expressing our freedom, may not have been fulfilled at all! (Shulchan Aruch O.C. Siman 472:7)

But, what sort of freedom is this with almost 100 *mitzvos* on one night, and everything that we eat having to be weighed and eaten in a certain time? Let alone the cleaning for a month before Pesach to get rid of all the *chametz* in our homes!

To answer all of these questions, let us take a closer look at the Haggadah. Just after the responses to the four sons, the Haggadah states "*mi'techilla ovdei avodah zara... v'achshav kirvanu hamakom la'avodaso*"- Generations ago, our forefathers were idol worshippers, but now Hashem has brought us closer to Him to enable us to serve Him. The Gemara (Pesachim 116b) asserts that the story of Yetzi'as Mitzrayim should begin at a stage when the Jews were enduring hardship, and the Gemara brings an argument as to when the story actually begins. Is it from "*avadim hayinu*" or from this statement of "*mi'techilla ovdei avodah zara*"? However, in the paragraph of "*mi'techilla*," there is a seemingly out of place

sentence that appears totally unrelated to Yetzi'as Mitzrayim: "And now, Hashem has brought us close to Him to enable us to serve Him." We aren't discussing Hashem saving us from Mitzrayim, rather we talk about the general idea of serving Hashem!

In his book *Derech Hashem* (Section 4, Chapter 8), the Ramcha"l explains that our separation from *chametz* to eat *matzah* epitomizes Yetzi'as Mitzrayim, where Hashem separated Klal Yisroel from impurity and brought them to a state of holiness that enabled them to receive the Torah. Similarly, in *Sefer HaMa'amarim* (Ma'amar HaChochma, "*Inyanei Seder Leil Pesach*"), the Ramcha"l says that eating *matzah* during Pesach enables us to attain *kedusha* throughout the year. This is the redemption that we refer to when discussing Yetzi'as Mitzrayim.

Perhaps we could explain that this crucial part of the Haggadah tells us that the entire goal of the process of our exile was to cleanse us and get us ready for the goodness that Hashem was about to bestow upon us. (Ma'aseh Nissim on the Haggadah, s.v. "*Mitechilla ovdei avodah zara*...") This message could also explain why this portion of the Haggada directly follows the discussion of the four sons because this could also be intended as an answer to the four sons. (Rabbeinu Avraham Chaddida, *Otzar HaRishonim al Haggadah shel Pesach*) So, we are talking to the wicked son, and it is vital that he hears this because we have to bring him closer by showing the wicked son that the goal of the exile is really for our good and that true good is attained by getting closer to Hashem through the Torah and *mitzvos*.

With this, now we can understand why the seemingly excessive gap between *kiddush* and *hamotzi* is really considered a *tzorech se'uda* - necessary and relating to the meal. We have to understand that, during Yetzi'as Mitzrayim, Hashem made it absolutely clear that He runs the world and that the purpose of our freedom is to get closer to Hashem by learning Torah and keeping the *mitzvos*. (Sefer HaChinuch) On the Seder night, we have to get this perspective clear for the entire year, so we are going to get an injection of almost 100 *mitzvos* before the meal is even over to drive this point home.

At this point in the Haggadah, we are now correctly aligned with the goal of hearing the story of Yetzi'as Mitzrayim, so we are ready to read about the plagues and the miracles that took place with a whole new level of appreciation. It is with this intent that we will sing the Hallel HaGadol, with real appreciation and understanding of our true goal in this world, and then we can say the *bracha* on the second cup of wine, which says, "You redeemed us and our forefathers to enable us to eat *matzah* and *marror*...and eat from the sacrifices...and we will thank you then..." |

YETZIAS MITZRAYIM ON A PERSONAL LEVEL

by Rabbi Simcha Lapp, Rosh Chabura (Issur v'Heter)

The Derech Hashem (*Chelek 4, Perek 4, Os 9*) writes that the time the Jewish nation spent in Mitzrayim was a period of refinement and growth. It was in this time that we became capable of receiving the kindnesses which Hashem desired to bestow upon us. He writes that, through recounting the redemption from Mitzrayim, we renew the capability to receive goodness from Hashem. However, we must understand how this occurs. How can simply saying over the story of leaving Mitzrayim result in such profound results?

We can find the answer to this question by looking at the experience of Mitzrayim on individual people. The great figures of the time went through a painful and difficult period of servitude, but they did not let themselves get caught up in the struggle and hardship, nor were they interested in the easy life being lived in the other Mesopotamian civilizations. All they cared about was growing and refining themselves. They were overcoming each hurdle in their way and using the hardships as a means by which to grow. The Kedushas Levi (Drushim L'Pesach, s.v. "ve'Amartem Zevach Pesach...") writes that *makkas bechoros* was only a side-effect of the redemption because Hashem was really coming to take the Jews out of Egypt. The Egyptians happened to be in the way, so they had to be removed. He gives a parable to a king traveling on the road to a destination; any rock along the path must be cleared. So too, once the Jews were able to be redeemed -- once they were refined and developed, Hashem came for them, and all the barriers and obstacles simply fell away.

We all know the goal of Pesach is to view ourselves as leaving Mitzrayim. We can do this by only relating to the historic, **national** redemption; however, we can also reflect on our personal exit from struggle. The Rosh Yeshiva, Rabbi Tagger, says over from Rabbi Shlomo Zafrani that, on Pesach, Rav Zafrani himself examines what is his personal Mitzrayim, meaning to say where is he trapped in unwanted behavior and how can he change this behavior to achieve **personal** redemption. This is the reason that mentioning the redemption of Mitzrayim is so central to our lives. It is a reminder of the obligation we have to overcome every obstacle in our path.

We all undergo struggle and hardship in our lives - no one is free from a life without struggle. It is natural to view pain and struggle in the short term and only see them simply as an experience we would rather not have. However, we can adopt a new approach and begin to look at our struggles as the moments where we will evolve into more developed and sophisticated beings. This happened on a national level in Mitzrayim, but it has the potential to happen to each and every one of us every day. |

THE MITZVAH OF MATZAH: RELEASING OR PURIFYING?

by R' Moshe-Simcha Sigala, Ra"m

During the course of the Pesach Seder, Rabban Gamliel in the Haggadah instructs us that there are three critical topics that must be mentioned in order to fulfill the *mitzvah* of the night, namely the *korban pesach*, *matzah*, and *marror*. The Haggadah continues to detail that we should focus on each of these items, or their representatives in the case of the *korban pesach*, and explain the reason that each one in turn is present at the Seder. When it gets to the *matzah*, the Haggadah tells us that we eat *matzah* on Pesach night because, when our ancestors left Mitzrayim, their dough did not have enough time to leaven before HaKadosh Baruch Hu redeemed them and led them out of Mitzrayim; therefore, Klal Yisroel had to bake their unleavened dough into *matzah*, as that was the only provisions that they had with them

in their speedy emancipation from slavery. (Mishna, Pesachim 116a)

Many *meforshim* are troubled by the reason presented by the Haggadah because, before Klal Yisroel ever left Mitzrayim, Hashem had already commanded them to eat *matzah* on Pesach! (Shemos 12:15) So, why does the Haggadah assert that *matzah* is eaten on Pesach because, technically, our ancestors were prevented from making leavened bread and instead had *matzah* when leaving Mitzrayim? Why doesn't the Haggadah maintain that we eat *matzah* during Pesach because Hashem commanded us to?

The Shiblei HaLeket quotes the Ri"d, who tries to tackle this issue by pointing to Hashem's omniscience,

and the Ri"ד proposes that, even though Hashem commanded Klal Yisroel to eat *matzah* on Pesach, Hashem really only did so because Hashem knew that Bnei Yisroel would be rushed out of Mitzrayim without enough time to bake leavened bread. Therefore, the Haggadah informs us that the true reason that *matzah* is eaten is because the Jewish people did not have enough time to bake bread when leaving Mitzrayim, and the Ri"ד adds that, if Klal Yisroel would have had enough time, they would have actually made *chametz* bread because, on that first Pesach of history, we were only commanded to eat *matzah* together with the *korban pesach* on the **night** of Pesach.

While this explanation does address the issue at hand in the Haggadah, it creates a strange dynamic between Hashem's command to eat *matzah* and the physical reality that the Jews were rushed out of Mitzrayim. It seems difficult to understand why Hashem would manufacture a command to eat *matzah* that is based on a technical factor that Klal Yisroel just wouldn't get around to baking their bread in time, and it seems even harder to understand why we would then be told to eat *matzah* to remember the Jews being rushed out and not because of Hashem's initial command.

Furthermore, the Ri"ד appears to be in direct contradiction to the Gemara (Pesachim 96b) because, even though the Gemara initially suggests that there was only a prohibition against *chametz* for the night of the first Pesach, like the Ri"ד holds, the conclusion of the Gemara maintains that *chametz* was forbidden the entire first day of Pesach! In fact, the Ri"ד himself in the Piskei HaRi"ד (Pesachim, 116b, s.v. "*Rabban Gamliel omer...*") contradicts himself and sides with the Gemara's conclusion that *chametz* was forbidden the whole first day of the first Pesach!

The Ta"z takes a fascinating approach which sheds light on the Haggadah. On that first Pesach night when Klal Yisroel were eating the *korban pesach* before leaving Mitzrayim, the Ta"z explains that Moshe Rabbeinu along with the rest of Bnei Yisroel firmly believed that the prohibition of consuming *chametz* was connected to the injunction to eat the *korban pesach* with *matzah*, and, thus, there was only an issue with eating *chametz* on the first night of Pesach. Then, when Hashem miraculously orchestrated the events so that the Jews would be rushed out of Mitzrayim before even having a chance to bake leavened bread, Klal Yisroel understood that Hashem was pushing them out of Mitzrayim for their own good, and they took this as a message to them that the prohibition against *chametz* must really extend throughout the entire first day of Pesach. (Divrei Dovid, Shemos 12:34, s.v. "*Terem Yechmatz...*")

The Rosh Yeshiva, Rabbi Tagger, *shlit"א*, once asked a very basic question on this Ta"z. Why was it necessary for Hashem to push Klal Yisroel out of Mitzrayim before they could bake their bread properly in order to show them that the prohibition against *chametz* was for the entire first day of Pesach? When Hashem initially instructed Klal Yisroel not to eat *chametz*, why

couldn't Hashem just inform them from the very beginning that there is a problem with eating *chametz* for the entire day?

In the Derech Hashem (Chelek 4, Perek 8), the Ramcha"l explains that, prior to Yetzias Mitzrayim, the Jewish people were mixed amongst the other nations, and their physicality polluted and darkened their ability to connect to their spirituality. However, upon exiting Mitzrayim, the Bnei Yisroel became separated, and their bodies were purified by means of abstaining from *chametz* and eating *matzah* in order to prepare them to receive the Torah.

Based on this, the Rosh Yeshiva, *shlit"א*, proposed that, if the prohibition against *chametz* only existed during the first night, then this prohibition would be connected to the eating of the *korban pesach* and, therefore, it would serve the function of releasing Klal Yisroel from Mitzrayim. Hashem presented the Jews with two different *mitzvos*, namely *bris milah* and the *korban pesach*, in order to justify redeeming them from Mitzrayim because the Jews didn't have any merits by which to be released, so the problem of eating *chametz* would just be a detail in the *mitzvah* of *korban pesach* in order to free Klal Yisroel. However, if the issue of *chametz* really applies to the entire first day, then it serves a separate function that extends beyond Yetzias Mitzrayim, and it exists to prepare us for Kabbalas HaTorah. Now, Hashem understood that the only way that Klal Yisroel would perceive this subtle difference in the prohibition's function is if they would mistakenly assume that the prohibition against *chametz* was a releaser from Mitzrayim that only existed on the night, and then they would be graphically shown that the prohibition really extends into the next day as they ride out into the desert to receive the Torah.

So, sitting around the table on the Seder night, why do we care? If the Haggadah would attribute the *matzah's* consumption to Hashem's original command, then we would be eating the *matzah* in order to help us be set free. However, now that the Haggadah instructs us to eat the *matzah* because our ancestors were rushed out of Mitzrayim without leavened bread, we are eating the *matzah* in order to purify and prepare **ourselves** to receive the Torah. |

CHAROSES & MARROR: UNLOCKING OUR EXPERIENCES

by Rabbi Binyomin Schenkier, Ra"m

In the Gemara (Pesachim, 114a), the Mishna teaches us that we should bring *charoses* to the Pesach table, even though it's not a *mitzvah* to do so. However, Rabbi Elazar the son of Rabbi Tzaddok argues that it really is a *mitzvah* to have the *charoses*.

The Gemara (116a) questions the initial position: if it's not a *mitzvah*, then why are we bringing *charoses* at all? To which, the Gemara answers that the *charoses* is necessary because of a danger that lies within the *marror*. Rashi explains that the juices of the *marror* are (slightly) venomous, and the *charoses* neutralizes this issue. So, according to the first position of the Mishna, the *charoses* is just a technical addition that Chazal made to the Seder night for safety purposes.

With this in mind, Tosfos (114a, s.v. "Af Al Pi Sh'Ein Charoses Mitzvah") challenges this first position and asks, if the *charoses* is not a *mitzvah*, then how are we allowed to dip the *marror* in the *charoses*? Later on, the Gemara (115a) says that, if two items are simultaneously eaten, but one of the foods is not itself a *mitzvah*, then the non-*mitzvah* taste undermines the *mitzvah* taste and ruins the *mitzvah*. Here too, if the *charoses* is not a *mitzvah*, then the *charoses* should actually undermine the *mitzvah* of *marror*! However, Tosfos answers that our case functions differently because the *marror* is **only** able to be eaten by means of the *charoses* due to the venom problem, and, therefore, the *mitzvah* of *marror* remains intact despite the presence of the *charoses*.

Commenting on this Tosfos, the Maharsha proves that Rabbi Elazar, the second position in the Mishna, must also agree with this answer of Tosfos because, even though Rabbi Elazar holds that eating *charoses* itself is a *mitzvah*, he also should be wary that the *charoses* will undermine the *mitzvah* of *marror* in the times of the Beis HaMikdash when eating *marror* was a Torah *mitvah* and therefore could be undermined by the Rabbinical *charoses*.

So, since everyone must agree that the *charoses* is used to dilute the *marror's* venom, why does Rabbi Elazar argue that eating the *charoses* is also a *mitzvah* in its own right?

Rabbi Levi and Rabbi Yochanon debate what the *mitzvah* is according to Rabbi Elazar. (116a) Rabbi Levi maintains that the *charoses* is eaten to remember the apple, which Rashi explains to mean that *charoses* recalls the kindness that Hashem did to birth Jewish babies under the apple trees in the fields of Egypt. Therefore, we make *charoses* out of apples and sour things. On the other hand, Rabbi Yochanon argues that *charoses* reminds us of the cement that was used to build in Egypt, and, therefore, we make *charoses* thick. Combining both of these positions, Abaye concludes

that we should make thick *charoses* out of apples and the like.

But, what are Rabbi Levi and Rabbi Yochanon truly arguing about?

It occurs to me that Rabbi Elazar holds that the *charoses* is a *mitzvah* because he understands that the *charoses* must not merely be diluting the *marror*, but must also be enhancing the *mitzvah*. The *charoses* takes away from the experience of bitterness that we're obligated to feel by eating the *marror*, and Rabbi Elazar understood that Chazal wouldn't instruct us to do a *mitzvah* in a way that makes the *mitzvah* less effective, albeit more safe. Therefore, the *charoses* must be assisting the *mitzvah* in some way. With this concept in mind, in the Gemara, Rabbi Levi understands that the function *charoses* serves as a *mitzvah* parallels the physical effects of *charoses*. Just like it physically mitigates the bitterness of the *marror*, so too the *charoses* reminds us of Hashem's kindnesses that ensured the bitterness of the Egyptian servitude wouldn't turn us into bitter people. On the other hand, Rabbi Yochanon understands that, since the *charoses* serves to enhance the *mitzvah* of the *marror*, the *charoses* must be helping us relate to the bitterness that we experienced and, therefore, should be used to remember the details of the servitude, such as the thick cement.

Based on this, perhaps Abaye's conclusion is that, in order to fulfill Rabbi Yochanon's position and enhance our identity as Jewish people who have experienced much bitterness through the generations, we must at the same time recall that, even within those times of intense difficulty, Hashem was and is showering us with kindness and protection. This complete perspective will allow us to relate to our ancestors and our own experiences in a real way without succumbing to the venom of bitterness. |

THE HORSE AND ITS RIDER

by Rabbi Daryl Michel, Gabbai

After the miraculous events of Kriyas Yam Suf, Klal Yisroel open up with praise to Hashem and sing the Shiras HaYam. Then, immediately after, the Torah recounts that Miriam led all of the women out with timbrels, and the *pasuk* says that Miriam “answered them” by instructing them to sing to Hashem because He is very exalted. He cast the horse and its rider into the sea. (Shemos 15:20 - 21)

The simple implication of the *pasuk* is that Miriam was responding to the women, but the Torah never let us in on any specific question that was being asked. So, what was Miriam responding to? Furthermore, out of the entire Shiras HaYam that Moshe Rabbeinu and the Jewish men had just sung, why does Miriam specifically choose to repeat the praise that Hashem cast the horse and its rider into the sea?

The Divrei Yeshayahu (*Drasha Tet LeBar Mitzvah*, page 37) explains that, through the process of Yetzias Mitzrayim, the Jews were connected to Hashem’s miracles. They had felt the subjugation of their slavery, and now they were experiencing the hopeful sense of freedom. But, what was the purpose of their newfound freedom? It

wasn’t freedom for freedom’s sake, rather it was to bring them to serve a new master, HaKadosh Baruch Hu, and to accept the Torah & *mitzvos*. However, the Divrei Yeshayahu says that the Jewish women felt left behind in a sense because they were going to have less relevance to the *mitzvos*, seeing as women are not obligated in certain time-bound *mitzvos* and etc. Therefore, the women were searching for more ways in which to serve Hashem after Kaballas HaTorah.

To answer this question, Miriam repeated the praise that Hashem cast the horse and its rider into the sea. Why exactly did the horse need to be thrown into the sea? The Egyptian rider was chasing after Klal Yisroel after years of enslaving them, so the Egyptians definitely deserved to get what was coming to them. But, what did the horse do wrong? Miriam understood that the horse was being punished solely for its role in aiding and abetting the Egyptian’s pursuit of the Jews, and, therefore, Miriam realized that, if Hashem in His ultimate justice punishes the horse for helping the Egyptians achieve their evil goal, then surely Hashem will reward a person who encourages and supports another in fulfilling the Torah and doing the *mitzvos*. |

KRIYAS YAM SUF: CHARGING INTO HASHEM’S EMBRACE

From the *Shiurim of the Rosh Yeshiva*, Rabbi Nissim Tagger, *shlit”a*

The Egyptian army was closing in fast on Klal Yisroel from the rear, and the ocean was spread out in front of them. The Medrashim (Shemos Rabbah 21:5) teach that there were even packs of wild animals surrounding Bnei Yisroel on the sides, so the Jewish people were completely boxed in with no clear escape route.

Meanwhile, Moshe Rabbeinu was busy trying to boost morale and placate the rising panic, as the *pasukim* relate. When the Jews caught sight of the enclosing Egyptians, they were terrified, and the Jewish people cried out to Hashem. Then, in response to their fear, Moshe Rabbeinu instructed Klal Yisroel not to be afraid and to instead stand firm in order to witness Hashem’s salvation because the Jewish people would never again see the Egyptians in the way they would see them on that day. (Shemos 14:10 – 14)

So, on the one hand, Moshe Rabbeinu’s first job was to encourage and cheer on Klal Yisroel, but, at the same time, Moshe was working hard *davening* to Hashem.

(Rashi, Shemos 14:15) In fact, Moshe Rabbeinu was *davening* so intensely that Hashem responded with a very difficult *pasuk*. After all of Moshe Rabbeinu’s *tefillos*, Hashem asks Moshe, “Why are you *davening* to Me? Just talk to the Jewish people and go forward!” (Shemos 14:15)

The Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh (Shemos 14:15, s.v. “*Ma Titzak Elai*”) bombards this *pasuk* with questions, and the Ohr HaChaim starts off by probing Hashem’s strange language of “why are you *davening* to Me?” So, the Ohr HaChaim says that, since there is nothing else in existence for Moshe Rabbeinu to *daven* to except for Hashem, who else was Moshe supposed to *daven* to? Furthermore, Klal Yisroel were in the face of imminent danger, and the Torah demonstrates that a person is supposed to cry out to Hashem during a time of danger, as the *pasuk* says, “*Min ha’metzar karasi K-ah*” - “In distress I called out to G-d”. (Tehillim 118:5) So, why did Hashem challenge Moshe Rabbeinu for *davening* to Him when Moshe was just following the Torah’s instructions?

In the very next *pasuk*, Hashem commands Moshe Rabbeinu to raise his staff and stretch it out over the sea to split the Yam Suf, and then Bnei Yisroel will travel forward on dry land right through the water. (Shemos 14:16) So, the Ohr HaChaim concludes that Moshe Rabbeinu's *tefillos* were really answered, and, if so, why did Hashem have to yell at Moshe Rabbeinu for *davening* if Hashem ended up accepting those *tefillos*?

Finally, the Ohr HaChaim asks what was Hashem's intention in telling Moshe Rabbeinu to speak to the Jewish People and go forth? Klal Yisroel was surrounded on all sides and had nowhere to go, so where exactly did Hashem want Moshe to lead the Jews?

The Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh resolves all these difficulties with a single idea, which is based on the Zohar (Volume 2, 170b) and the Shemos Rabbah (21:7), and we will try to understand this point in order to apply it to our lives. At the time of Kriyas Yam Suf, the Jewish people were on the same spiritual level as the Egyptians, and the Malachim were protesting that Klal Yisroel do not deserve to be miraculously saved from the Egyptians because both the Jewish people at the time and the Egyptians were idol worshipers. The Zohar quoted by the Ohr HaChaim asserts that this was an example of the attribute of justice prosecuting, and the Zohar explains that, when the attribute of strict justice rules that a person does not deserve something, then it is impossible to undo that evaluation, unless an action is performed in this world that will strengthen the attribute of mercy.

With this concept in mind, the Ohr HaChaim explains that, when Hashem questioned Moshe Rabbeinu for calling out to Him, Hashem meant that Klal Yisroel's salvation was, in a sense, out of Hashem's control because the attribute of justice had already decreed that Bnei Yisroel deserved to be destroyed along with the Egyptians, so Moshe's *davening* was not being effective on some level. Therefore, the Ohr HaChaim writes that Hashem advised Moshe Rabbeinu how to circumvent the prosecution of the attribute of strict justice, and Hashem informed Moshe that the only way out of Klal Yisroel's predicament was for them to strengthen their *emunah* with all their heart and to dive into the sea **before** it was split.

So, when Hashem instructed Moshe to speak to Bnei Yisroel and go forward, Hashem meant that, instead of *davening*, Moshe Rabbeinu should inspire Bnei Yisroel in their *emunah* and then march them straight into the Yam Suf before it even split while relying on their *bitachon* in Hashem that a miracle would be performed to save them. Then, by way of this tremendous display of *bitachon* which defies all logic, the miracle would happen. And, the Ohr HaChaim points out that this is exactly what happened to Klal Yisroel in the end because Nachshon ben Aminadav dove into the water, and the sea split when the water reached Nachshon's throat on the merit of his actions. (Sotah, 37a)

So, what is the point according to the Ohr HaChaim? *Tefillah*, the most powerful tool, was unable to override Hashem's justice because the attribute of justice decides

what a person rightfully deserves, and, when that evaluation is performed, *tefillah* cannot overturn that ruling. However, despite the finality of this evaluation, *emunah* & *bitachon* can undo the decision made by Hashem's justice.

This is not a mysterious *segulah* or a special trick. The attribute of justice is a very rational system. If you do 'x', you deserve 'y'. On the other hand, the attribute of mercy when put in the context of *emunah* and *bitachon* is, in a sense, an irrational approach if you will. Now, your relationship with Hashem will be determined by your approach. If you want to have a rational relationship with Hashem, then Hashem will employ the system of justice, but, if you break out into an irrational relationship with Hashem, then Hashem will respond in kind.

When Klal Yisroel decided to irrationally march forth into the sea with no logical plan other than relying on Hashem's kindness to perform a miracle, they deviated from the rational system of justice wherein *tefillah* was their only hope for reprieve, and **even** they, who the prosecuting angels were classifying as idolaters that deserved to be wiped out, were able to access this lofty level of divine intervention by means of their *emunah* & *bitachon*. Therefore, for sure, the average Jew who is unclear if he deserves to succeed or not can always shift to Hashem's system of mercy through *emunah* & *bitachon*.

But, in order to have this higher relationship with Hashem that operates with a super form of Hashgacha Pratit like Bnei Yisroel experienced at Kriyas Yam Suf, then a simple two-step process of *emunah* & *bitachon* is required. First, you have to arouse and strengthen your *emunah* until you really feel it, so go learn one of the *mussar seforim* about *emunah*. Then, the second step is *bitachon*. Now, *bitachon* is not telling yourself that Hashem is going to make everything work out how you want it to, rather, as we see from the Ohr HaChaim, *bitachon* is the performance of an action that demonstrates a recognition that Hashem is the only force that runs the world, such as Klal Yisroel charging into the ocean and expecting Hashem to split the sea. This process of *emunah* & *bitachon* in Hashem transforms your relationship with Hashem from the rational system of justice to the super relationship of mercy, which was the experiential reality of even the maidservants at Kriyas Yam Suf.

How can we apply this in our own circumstances without being reckless and irresponsible? By Kriyas Yam Suf, HaKadosh Baruch Hu *parkened* that this act of marching straight into the water and almost drowning was responsible, so, if you are unclear about the acceptable mode of *bitachon* and the right steps to take in certain situations, then call your *posek* or *rabbi* and ask for a *psak* of what is appropriate for your situation. There is a powerful concept here, and we have to figure out in each situation how to apply this process of *emunah* & *bitachon* to catapult ourselves into a new relationship with Hashem. |

YESHIVAS BIRCAS HATORAH

WHERE PONEVEZH MEETS

THE OLD CITY

ESTHER ILANA RABI

Rabbi Nissim Tagger and Rabbi Avraham Ziskind — both *marbitzei Torah* living in Yerushalayim — had to go to South Africa to be introduced.

Rabbi Ziskind returns yearly to his hometown, Johannesburg, to give *shiurim* for a week before Pesach. His popular *shiurim* are well publicized, which is why some of the notices about his speaking schedule were still posted when Rabbi Tagger, Rosh Yeshivah of Yeshivas Bircas HaTorah in the Old City, went to Jo'berg the week after Pesach. He asked his host, Mr. Leon Welcher, about Rabbi Ziskind, and Mr. Welcher commented on how closely the two rabbanim's views aligned on how to run a yeshivah and how to build a bochur.

THE IMAGE PROBLEM

Back in Yerushalayim, Rabbi Tagger was intrigued and met up with Rabbi Ziskind to discuss his educational philosophy. They saw eye-to-eye on some of the biggest improvements they believe need to be made to the common approach to turning a *ben Torah* into a proper *talmid chacham*.

Rabbi Tagger mentioned the Torah world's tremendous investment in the at-risk population. "The best bochurim, though, suffer from many of the same issues that afflict the at-risk kids, just to a lesser degree," Rabbi Tagger told Rabbi Ziskind. "People don't want to look at the issues that the entire generation grapples with, unless the bochur

is broken, on drugs, or OTD. As long as a good bochur is maintaining the yeshivah schedule, too many yeshivahs won't work to maximize his *avodas Hashem*."

The root of the problem is an overwhelming concern with image. "Is a yeshivah worried about its bochurim wearing the right shoes because dressing like proper *bnei Torah* enhances their *avodas Hashem*, or because it's worried about the impact colorful shoes may have on next year's registration?" he asked. "A Rosh Yeshivah who cares about his *talmidim* has to address *their* needs, not his own. This subtle distinction resonates in the heart of every *talmid*."

"You're speaking to *my* heart," Rabbi Ziskind said. He, too, wished the yeshivahs would acknowledge that even the top boys need guidance to develop a relationship with Hashem, and act on it.

MEN OF TRUTH

When a yeshivah's image takes precedence over the needs of its *talmidim*, *emes* is unattainable.

Rabbi Tagger recalls a time when he decided it would be better for his son to spend *bein hazmanim* on a guided tour to Poland, in a kosher environment with proper *hashgachah* than for his son to hang around the house; the pitfall of vacation. The problem? The trip began a couple of days before the *zman* ended. His son's prominent Rosh Yeshivah said, "He can go early, but don't let him know I said so."

"I can't teach my son to be dishonest," Rav Tagger protested. "Either you give him permission or you don't."

Eventually, the yeshivah decided he could go as long as he didn't tell any other bochurim he had permission to leave early. "But that response, 'Go, but do it behind my back,' that's scary," says Rabbi Tagger. "It shows the disconnect between the rabbis and their *talmidim*. They play these games in which the *talmidim* hide from the rabbanim. The rabbanim think that's what they have to do for their yeshivahs to maintain their status as an elite yeshivah. Such a concept is foreign to me and to Rabbi Ziskind."

The big yeshivahs hire dorm counselors from other yeshivahs. In



Rabbi Nissim Tagger, Rosh Yeshivah



Rabbi Avraham Ziskind will now be Rosh Yeshivah alongside Rabbi Tagger

Bircas, the older bochurim serve that role and get the *zechus* of helping the younger bochurim. They share the issues they themselves faced and grow by helping younger bochurim grow. As the older bochurim are close to the Rosh Yeshivah, he knows what's going on during free time. There's no "us vs. them" mentality in which the bochurim are viewed as being on a different team than the rabbanim. It's a win-win situation, in which the older bochurim bridge any gaps that might appear in the relationship between staff and students. This is one of the factors that makes Bircas bochurim feel so strongly connected to their Rosh Yeshivah.

Rabbi Tagger once gave a *shiur* in an out-of-town yeshivah in America. The boys were enthusiastic about the *shiur* and got deeply involved in the *sugya*. Rabbi Tagger's traveling companion suggested they apply to Bircas HaTorah. Their Rosh Yeshivah was noncommittal. "We first have to see which boys will be accepted to the big-name yeshivahs," he said.

"These are nice, good boys you have," said Rabbi Tagger's companion, "but they can barely lein a *daf* Gemara. What will they do in a huge *shiur* with very advanced boys?"

After being pressed, the Rosh Yeshivah confessed, "If I don't send students to the top three yeshivahs, I won't get boys enrolling in my yeshivah next year."

"If we extract the essence of what he's saying," Rabbi Tagger explains, "it was, 'My *parmassah* is more important than helping a *talmid* develop into a *ben Torah* in a way that's ideal for him.'"

BUILDING TORAH SCHOLARS

Turning a yeshivah high school student into a *ben Torah* requires a *shiur* that involves them and gets them excited about the Gemara. Rabbi Tagger and Rabbi Ziskind have different styles of teaching, but they complement each other.

Rabbi Tagger's approach is text-based, teaching the bochurim how to analyze and appreciate the deeper levels of *pshat* in the Gemara, Rashi, and Tosfos. "I've been privileged to teach Gemara *b'iyun* in prestigious yeshivahs for twenty-nine years, and I know that a cloudy *sugya* is a tragedy for a bochur," says Rabbi Ziskind. "Bochurim need a clear idea of what the Gemara is saying. The clarity that Rav Tagger imparts saves

them from this calamity."

Rabbi Ziskind's approach is more *sevara*-based. The thirty-three volumes of *Imros Avraham* he has authored delve into the *sevaros* in large areas of Shas.

Rav Shmuel Rozovsky *ztz"l* influenced Ponevezh's *derech halimud*, which is to analyze the *sevaros*. At the same time, in Mir, Rav Nachum Partzovitz *ztz"l* was teaching bochurim a style that's more anchored in the *pshat*. Rav Elya Baruch Finkel, a *talmid* of Rav Shmuel, went to Mir and became a *talmid* of Rav Nachum as well. "How did you manage to merge the two *derachim*?" his friend asked.

"Rav Shmuel opened my head and taught me how to think. Rav Nachum opened my eyes to see what's going on in the text — the beginning, middle and end of a *sugya*, and the arguments between *rishonim*," he said.

A similar melding is taking place in Bircas HaTorah. Before Rabbi Ziskind's weekly *shiur klali*, every *maggid shiur* in Bircas HaTorah helps the bochurim review his sources and understand his questions. Then they're fully prepared to be engaged in the *shiur klali*, instead of just listening to the *adam gadol* spin the Shas around on his finger and flex his "Torah muscles." The students are so well grounded in the Gemara and Rishonim, they're able to push Rabbi Ziskind to show them how his *sevara* is implicit in the *shakla v'tarya*. The bochurim love his approach, and are drawn like bees to nectar to hear Rabbi Ziskind's *shiur*.

That's the unique synergy that exists between Rabbi Tagger and Rabbi Ziskind, and that's why Bircas HaTorah is proud to announce that Rabbi Ziskind will now be Rosh Yeshivah alongside Rabbi Tagger.

Rabbi Ziskind admires Rabbi Tagger as a man of truth who does not deviate from *emes* in any way. He respects his commitment to undiluted *emes* in his Yiddishkeit, his learning and his *bein adam l'chaveiro*. "His reverence for *emes* can give a bochur direction for life," he says. He's also impressed by his dedication to each and every bochur in the yeshivah. "It's a father-son relationship. He'll do anything to enable a *talmid* to succeed and to develop his *yiras Shamayim*, no matter what hurdles he has to jump. These things make me happy to serve together with him as one of the Roshei Yeshivah of Bircas HaTorah."



The Bircas HaTorah Beis Medrash