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FREEDOM AND SLAVERY IN THE HAGGADA

Herman Wouk, the famed author of *Winds of War* and *War and Remembrance*, recently wrote a book entitled, *The Will to Live On*. In this book, he writes that in 1955, when he visited Israel, he went to Sdeh Boker to visit the prime minister of Israel, David Ben Gurion. Ben Gurion told Herman Wouk that he must live in Israel. "This is the only place for Jews like you," said Ben Gurion. "Here you will be free." "Free?" Wouk responded. "Free? With enemy armies ringing you, with their leaders publicly threatening to wipe out the Zionist entity, with your roads impassable after sundown - free?" "I did not say safe," the old man retorted, "I said free."

RABBI JONATHAN
MUSKAT
Rebbe

What is the definition of freedom for us Jews and for the world at large? When we fight for freedom, what do we fight for? As we all know, *Pesach* is the holiday of freedom and symbols of freedom are represented throughout the *seder*. However, I believe that the manner in which freedom is represented at the *seder* is significant. On the night of the *seder*, there is an inextricable link between slavery and freedom in all aspects of the *seder*. Every aspect of the *seder* involves both themes.

First, we know that there is a *mitzvah* to drink four cups of wine at the *seder*. The *gemara* in *Pesachim* 99b writes that the four cups of wine correspond to four terminologies of redemption. However, the *Shulhan Arukh* (*Orah Hayyim*, 472:11) writes there is a *mitzvah* to drink red wine specifically and the *Mishna Berura* (472:38) explains that one reason for this *mitzvah* is that red wine symbolizes the blood of the Hebrews that was spilt in Egypt. Thus, the wine is symbolic of both freedom and slavery.

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BAYAMIN HAHEIM: B'ZMAN HAZEH

Chag HaPesach is a time to commemorate the awesome miracles that Hashem performed for Bnei Yisroel at Yetzias Mitzrayim. In addition to being the vehicle of the Jewish people's salvation, these miracles were the foundation for our ancestors' acceptance of Hashem, Moshe as his emissary, and ultimately the Torah. As such, it is an appropriate time to reflect on the nature of Hahem's miracles and their relevancy to us.

ELISHA
PEARL
Senior

First, we must understand what miracles are. By secular definition, a miracle is "a surprising and welcome event that is not explicable by natural or scientific laws and is therefore considered to be the work of a divine agency¹." This popular definition has found its way into contemporary Jewish thought and hence we can say that the simple understanding of a Neis is an event where Hashem sees fit to obviously tamper with the laws of nature.

There is a curious Mishna² which explains that ten miraculous

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Additionally, there is a *mitzvah* to lean, which is a symbol of freedom, when drinking the four cups of wine. However, according to the *gemara* in *Pesachim* 108a, leaning is required only for two of the four cups of wine, but because there is a debate as to which two cups of wine require leaning, we are stringent and lean when drinking all four cups of wine. Therefore, conceptually, only half of the cups of wine require this symbol of freedom and half of the cups of wine should not require this symbol of freedom.

Moreover, there's a *mitzvah* to lean for one of the primary *seder* foods, i.e., the *matza*, but not for the other primary *seder* food, i.e., the *maror*. *Matza* is the symbol of freedom so we lean and *maror* is the symbol of slavery so we do not lean. Furthermore, even the *matza* is not necessarily a symbol of freedom; it is a symbol of both slavery and freedom. At the beginning of the *seder*, it is referred to as the "poor man's bread that our ancestors ate in Egypt" and only later do we refer to it as the food that we ate during the Exodus, when we were freed. Moreover, we recite *al akhilat matza* on one whole *matza* and one broken piece of *matza* (see *Mishna Berura*, 475:2). Again, the broken piece of *matza* represents the "poor man's bread" or "slavery" aspect of *matza* and the whole *matza* represents the "freedom" aspect of *matza*.

Additionally, the *gemara* in *Pesachim* 116a states that the obligation to tell the story of *Pesach* requires not only mention of the freedom from Egypt, but also the slavery in Egypt. The act of dipping, which is a symbol of freedom, is done with *maror*, which is a "slavery" food and with the *karpas*, which, according to the *Mishna Berura* 473:19, also symbolizes slavery. (The word *karpas*, if the letters are unscrambled, can spell out "samekh parekh," or "600,000 were enslaved bitterly.") The *koreikh* sandwich, which, according to Hillel, is the ideal form of fulfilling the *mitzvah* of *matza*, *maror* and *korban Pesach*, involves the consumption of both "freedom" and "slavery" foods together.

Why do we experience slavery in every aspect of freedom in the *seder*, including the story that we tell, the foods that we eat, the wine that we drink, the *mitzva* of leaning and the custom of dipping? Obviously, the goal of *Pesach* night is not merely to experience freedom, but to re-experience the transformation from slavery to freedom. On one level, perhaps we need to experience this transformation in order to appreciate freedom. Very often, freedom is not discerned until it has been snatched away. However, on *Pesach*, we do not merely celebrate freedom of our ancestors from slavery. We are not merely celebrating the gift of freedom from which our ancestors benefited, but we are celebrating the freedom that our ancestors, together with our G-d, brought into the world, both physically and spiritually. I believe that it is important to re-experience the transformation from slavery to freedom in order to fully appreciate the accomplishments of the *Bnei Yisrael*.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks has remarked that the revolution of *Bnei Yisrael* was not a military revolution but a revolution of consciousness. He correctly pointed out that systems of law existed before Moses and monotheism had already been attempted in Egypt prior to the exodus from Egypt. However, in antiquity, G-ds were on the side of established power. Rulers ruled because they were G-ds or children of G-ds or prime intermediaries between the G-ds and mankind. That G-d, creator of Heaven and Earth, might intervene in history to liberate slaves was unthinkable. According to Rabbi Sacks, the greatness in this story was that G-d was on the side of the underdog, that G-d had care, concern and compassion for the poor, the stranger and the oppressed. The experience in Egypt provided Israel with a sense of solidarity with the poor, stranger and the oppressed. For such a revolution to take place, perhaps we needed to experience oppression firsthand. We must experience the transformation from slavery to freedom on the night of *Pesach* to appreciate the gift of freedom, the idea of helping the poor, stranger and oppressed, that *Bnei Yisrael* gave to the world.

Additionally, it is important to re-experience this transformation from being the slave of Pharaoh to being the slave of G-d on the night of the *seder* because that is what we must do every single day of our lives. Were we free when we became slaves of G-d? The answer is undoubtedly yes. According to the philosopher Emmanuel Kant, freedom is obedience to a law which we prescribe to ourselves. Rav Soloveitchik, zt"l, explained that man is a confronted being. He is a prisoner of natural law and social institutions. He is always insecure, as disaster can strike at any moment. Man is always enslaved to nature, to society, to hundreds of restrictive phobias, social norms and customs.

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FREEDOM AND SLAVERY IN THE HAGGADA CONTINUED

When our physical appetites are overindulged, we become enslaved to an addiction, which drains us of our strength, dignity and free will. To be liberated from this tyranny would then constitute an ideal freedom by freeing the soul from this abuse so that the individual becomes the author of his own values and is not swayed by every passion and desire. Without *Torah* and *mitzvot*, we cannot free ourselves from ourselves and we are not free to accomplish the goal of spiritual self-realization. The *mishna* in *Avot* teaches us “*ein lekha ben horin ela mi she-osaik batorah*,” i.e., a free person is someone who occupies himself with *Torah*. The *mishna* tells us that the Hebrew word for freedom, *herut*, is related to the *luhot*, the Tablets, G-d's commandments, which were *harut*, or engraved on the tablets. The *Torah* is freedom. We are enslaved by our own limitations, but the *Torah* helps us rise above our limitations by surrendering to G-d. The act of surrendering is a challenging one as there are tremendous pressures, but all we have to do is to exert our ability, to surrender to G-d and His *Torah* and then we will be freer than ever before.

This is the freedom of self-actualization, or moral or spiritual freedom, something that is beyond mere physical freedom. This freedom of self-actualization is, in my view, the highest level in Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of motivation. Maslow's first level includes physiological needs such as hunger, thirst, sleep, relaxation and bodily integrity. His second level includes safety needs. His third level includes love and belongingness needs. His fourth level includes self-esteem needs. His fifth level includes self actualization. One expert claimed that self actualizers are able to submit to social regulation without losing their own integrity or personal independence, i.e., their freedom. Thus, self actualization, or spiritual or moral freedom, is the ultimate level that man can reach and we believe that it results from surrender to G-d and the observance of the *Torah*. *Pesach* demands that we smash any idea, passion or desire that inhibits our spiritual freedom because in spiritual growth there should be unrestricted freedom. We deserve no less.

Finally, it was critical that these two freedoms, physical and spiritual, occurred simultaneously because not only are they related, but they are inseparable. Secularists may believe that physical freedom and equality are derived from secular thought, but the holiday of *Pesach* teaches us that this is not true. The fundamentals of freedom and equality are undoubtedly rooted in religion. It was G-d who freed us from Egypt and it was G-d who demonstrated concern for the oppressed. This is what we say in the second blessing of the *shemona esrei* – *someikh noflim v'rofei cholim u'matir asurim* – G-d helps those who have fallen, who are sick and who are chained. G-d helps the underdog. In Judaism, we believe that ethics stem and are not separate from the *Torah*. Perhaps, this is why it was so critical for our physical and spiritual freedom to occur simultaneously upon the exodus from Egypt, to teach us their inseparability.

Hopefully, when we re-experience this transformation on the night of *Pesach* from slavery to freedom, we will recognize that as the *Bnei Yisrael* were given the gift of freedom, they introduced two new categories of freedom to the world, both physical freedom, which includes concern for the weak and the oppressed, and spiritual self-actualization. Hopefully, we will sensitize ourselves to both these types of freedoms and ultimately realize that they emanate from the very same source, from the word of G-d.

BAYAMIN HAHEIM: B'ZMAN HAZEH CONTINUED

events were created at the twilight of the sixth day of creation. Among these were the faculty of speech for Bilaam's donkey and the Mon that fed Bnei Yisrael in the desert. Rambam³ uses this Mishna to prove that miracles are natural events. They may seem supernatural, but are in fact examples of Hashem's omnipresent stewardship through the pre-coded laws of nature. If this were not so, why would these miracles need to be created before the world as we know it began? Tosfos Yom Tov⁴ is somewhat troubled by Rambam's explanation. Why would the Mishna only list ten miracles as having been coded for in creation? This would imply that all other miracles were beyond nature! Yet, the Rambam uses this Mishna as a paradigm and writes that *all* miracles were hardwired into nature. Tosfos Yom Tov answers that all miracles not mentioned on the list, even the awesome events of Yetzias Mitzrayim are completely natural and consonant with the defined laws of nature. There was no need for specific 'coding' of these events into the fabric of creation. *continued on page 5*

DEFEATING THE ENEMY OF “HERGEL”

AARON
KATTAN
Senior

In the beginning of *Parshas Achare Mos*, *G-d* instructs Moshe to warn his brother, Aharon, against entering the innermost sanctum of the *Mishkan*: “Speak to your brother Aharon, that he should not enter the sacred [chamber] at any time...” (16:2). It was only on the day of *Yom Kippur* that Aharon was to enter this chamber, as part of the special service conducted on this day.

The obvious question arises as to why *G-d* discouraged, let alone forbade, Aharon from entering the sacred chamber whenever he wished. Rashi explains, “For I am always seen there... And since My *Shchina* is revealed there, he must ensure not to grow accustomed to entering.” In other words, Aharon may not enter the chamber because that is where the Divine Presence is seen at all times. At first glance, this seems very difficult to understand. If that is where a person can experience the Divine Presence, then why shouldn't he visit that site every day? If there a person can experience the *Shchina* to the very fullest, why not spend as much time there as possible?

Rav Chaim Shemuelevitz explained that *G-d* did not want Aharon to grow accustomed to this experience, for if he did, the effect of this experience would diminish. A person is awed upon beholding something grand and wondrous, but only if he beholds the sight infrequently. Somebody who visits the Swiss Alps for the first time is awed and enamored by the majesty and beauty of the snowcapped hilltops, while the tour guide who brought him there looks at his watch wondering when they could leave. Similarly, *G-d* did not want Aharon to become a frequent visitor to the sacred chamber of the *Mishkan*, so that the power and effects of this experience will always be felt, each and every time he entered the chamber to perform the annual *Yom Kippur* service.

Rav Chaim added that this phenomenon of “*Hergel*,” growing too accustomed to uplifting experiences, is the single greatest enemy of a Jew aspiring for spiritual perfection. Human nature is such that adults don their *Tefillin* with mindless rote, while the new *Bar Mitzva* boy puts on his *Tefillin* with intense fervor and enthusiasm. And this is true of all *Mitzvot*. As we perform the *Mitzvot* consistently, each and every day, we run the risk of “*Hergel*,” of performing them mindlessly and without any emotion or feeling. When this happens, the *Mitzvot* become a burdensome task, rather than a precious opportunity to connect with our Creator.

How can we overcome this tendency? How is it possible for somebody to defeat this dangerous enemy of “*Hergel*” and retain a constant sense of excitement and zeal in *Mitzva* performance? It is told that the Vilna Gaon could not sleep on the night after *Pesach*, because of his eager anticipation of the opportunity he would have the next morning to finally don *Tefillin*, for the first time in a week. How can a person maintain such an emotional bond with an activity he performs daily for so many years?

One way is through the study of *Mussar*, ethical and religious teachings. Books of *Mussar* act like “lighter fluid,” capable of transforming the small flame inside a person's soul into a raging fire. It directs a person's attention onto the importance and centrality of

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TRUE REDEMPTION

YECHIEL
SCHWAB
Senior

Parshas Acharei Mos teaches “*Kima'aseh eretz mitzrayim asher yishavtem bah lo sa'asu*—like the acts of the land of Egypt in which you dwelled you shall not do.” The Ibn Ezra comments that this verse refers to the section preceding it, discussing *Avodah Zarah*, implying that we should not worship *Avodah Zarah* like the Egyptians. The Ramban relates this *Pasuk* to the *issurim* that come after it, those of forbidden relations. However, I think we can learn a much broader lesson from this Ramban.

The *pasuk* right after this says that we should follow the ways of *G-d*, and walk in his ways. The one after that says that we should follow the ways of *G-d* “*Vchai bahem*—and you shall live by them”. I think we can relate these two *pesukim* to the *pasuk* before, and to a *Perush HaRamban* in *Shemos*.

The Ramban explains in his introduction to *Sefer Shemos*, that the entire *Sefer Shemos* is related to the redemption from *Mitzrayim*. How do we explain the later *parshiyos*, which discuss the giving of the Torah, and the building of the *Mishkan*? The Ramban explains that those too

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They were executed by Hashem in the same fashion that He allows us to breathe and read this paper. They were no more miraculous than these fascinating phenomenon, they simply did not occur with the same frequency. The novelty of the ten listed in the Mishna is just of function of their having been uniquely coded as a response to scoffers against Hashem's divinity, and for no other purpose. The Gra⁵ adds a compelling proof to Rambam's theory that miracles are natural phenomena based on a Pasuk in Koheles "There is nothing new under the sun. There is a thing of which [someone] will say, See this [phenomenon], it is new!" It has already been for ages which were before us.⁶ In other words, miracles appear to be supernatural, when in fact they are a part of the natural order.

Why do miracles occur? Because Hashem has some master plan for the universe. Humans may try to interfere, but ultimately, they will not succeed. As the Navi Yeshaya wrote⁷: "Utzu Eitzah VeSufar, Dabru Davar, Velo Yakum, Ki Emanu Kel- Contrive a scheme, but it will be foiled; conspire a plot, but it will not materialize; for Hashem is with us." The Egyptians sought to destroy us. As Paroh said⁸: "Arik Charbi, ToReShaymo Yadi- I shall unsheath my sword, my hand shall annihilate them!" Hashem had other plans for Bnei Yisroel.

In addition to their function in Hashem's master plan, Nissim have a message to convey to humanity.⁹ That is, Hashem is the Master of the Universe, he is pulling the strings. Often, that knowledge is supposed to spur positive action. There is a startling Medrash¹⁰ which seems to belie this point, though. When recounting the departure of Bnei Yisroel from Egypt, the Pasuk says "VaChamushim Allu Bnei Yisroel MeEretz Mitzrayim". The Medrash interprets this to mean: Four-fifths of the original population perished in Egypt, leaving only one in five Jews to participate in Yetzias Mitzrayim. The majority of Jews did not merit redemption as they as they did not acknowledge Hashem or Moshe. Those who did failed to make a tangible commitment to follow Hashem and his laws. How could this have happened? Hashem clearly revealed himself to all through the Makkos! We must remember that miracles are natural phenomena; manifestations of the divine to the pure of heart, but easily rationalized by disbelievers. Let us imagine the occurrence of *Krias Yam Suf*. A powerful wind¹¹ blows and slowly parts the sea into rising walls of water leaving the space in the middle empty. A somewhat similar phenomenon occurs relatively often in modern times: we call it a tsunami. The cynical observer would attribute this event to coincidence and deny Hashem's role in *Kerias Yam Suf*. An objective observer however would draw the logical conclusion that this "tidal wave" rose at such a time because G-d was intervening. Even the Egyptians recognized the mighty hand of Hashem as they sped to their watery grave¹². *Ramban* explains that Hashem specifically causes miracles to occur within nature so that disbelievers will have the free choice to continue on their erroneous path.

To practically apply the aforementioned ideas it behooves us to critically examine world events and wonder; are they a heavenly sign? Nissim are not restricted events from the past, they happen before our eyes. The challenge is for us to recognize them. This Chag HaGeulah, may we endeavor to understand the "signs and wonders" that Hashem is sending us. Let us follow in the footsteps of our forefathers who answered Hashem's clarion call, and in this merit we will usher in the final Geulah with Mashiach Tzidkeinu, Teikef Ummiyad Mamash! (speedily and powerfully in our days)

Notes

1. [Apple Dictionary](#). 2.1.3.
2. Avos 5:6
3. Perush Mishnayos L'HaRambam, ad loc.
4. Tosfos Yom Tov, ad loc.
5. BiUrei HaGra ad loc.
6. Koheles 1:10-11
7. Yeshaya 8:10
8. Shemos 15:9
9. See Shemos 7:7:3-9 and 14:4 along with many other sources in Tanach
10. Tanchuma and Mechilta to Shemos 13:18
11. Shemos 14:21
12. *ibid.* 14:25

DEFEATING THE ENEMY OF “HERGEL” CONTINUED

Mitzvos, injecting him with the passion and fervor that is otherwise lost in the day-to-day routine of religious observance.

Secondly, a person must learn, plain and simple. As the Sages admonish in *Pirkei Avos* (2:5), “*Lo am ha'aretz chassid* - An ignoramus cannot be pious.” By engaging in intensive study and analysis of the laws and concepts of the *Torah*, a person becomes more sensitized and will then approach them with greater zeal and concentration. Perhaps the most common example of the importance of study is the area of *Brachost*. So many of us recite *Brachos* much too quickly and without any concentration or feeling. Often, we say the words so carelessly that we mispronounce them. A brief review of the *Halachos* in the *Shulhan Aruch* about the proper recitation of *Brachos* will remind a person of how attentive and focused he must be each and every time he recites a *Bracha*.

Through the regular study of both *Mussar* and *Halacha*, we will hopefully stay attuned to the value and centrality of every *Mitzva* we perform. We will then be able to observe the *Torah* with great joy and emotion, rather than through mindless rote and emotionless habit.

TRUE REDEMPTION CONTINUED

are part of the redemption from Egypt. People often discuss regarding the holidays of Chanukah and Purim, the distinction between a savior on a physical level, and one on an intellectual level. The Ramban explains that Pesach contains both of these themes. The beginning parshiyos, with the makkos, and the splitting of the sea, deal with the physical redemption. However, the second part of the Sefer is also part of the redemption. Parshas Yisro and Mishpatim, which discuss the giving of the Torah, deal with the intellectual redemption. In Egypt we were slaves not just on a physical level, but also to their ideology. We were first redeemed on a physical level, but this did not save us from their ideology. Through the giving of the Torah, Hashem rescued us from the ideology of Egypt. The redemption from Mitzrayim led to Hashem establishing within us the ideology of Torah, the true way of life. This fits well into the Ramban's understanding of the Mishkan. Unlike Rashi, the Ramban maintains that the Torah was written in chronological order, and that the Mishkan was supposed to be built, even before the sin of the Golden Calf. This is because part of the redemption from Egypt, required the Jews to return to the level of their forefathers, a plane of Hashra'as HaShechina, which necessitated the Mishkan.

The Ramban's principle about our redemption from Egypt fits nicely into the section from our parsha. Hashem is telling us not to do like the acts of the Egyptians, but instead to live by the Torah, because the two are integrally related. Part of our redemption from Egypt, was our redemption from their ideology, which was not complete until we had obtained the Torah, built the Mishkan, and established a relationship with Hashem. We may explain that the reason the Torah reminds us so often not to do a certain action, which the Egyptians did, is because an integral part of our belief in Hashem, derives from Matan Torah, which came about as part of our redemption from Egypt.

This lesson can also explain another principle of the Ramban. In Parshas Emor the Ramban explains that Pesach and Shavuos share a relationship, similar to that of Succos and Shemini Atzeres, and the weeks of sefirah, are like the chol hamoed of this combined Pesach-Shavuos holiday. This is consonant with Ramban's explanation of Yetziyas Mitzrayim. Part of our redemption from our Egypt, and therefore part of Pesach, is Matan Torah, and Shavuos, and this is why the holidays are connected, because our redemption from Egypt was not complete until we got the Torah.

Using these principles we can explain the connection of the pasuk in our parsha, to those after it. Hashem tells us not to sin like the acts of Mitzrayim, and to follow the ways of the Torah, because part of our redemption from Mitzrayim was the establishment of the Torah.

We can take this lesson and apply it to our lives this Pesach. We should remember that our redemption from Egypt was not just a physical one, but a spiritual one. We should remember that an integral part of our lives is our commitment to Torah. At our Seder, we should not only be thanking Hashem for having redeemed us from the physical slavery of Egypt, but also the intellectual one. This explains the part of the Hagaddah where it says that if Hashem did not take us out of Egypt we'd still be slaves. We would not be slaves on a physical level, for surely their civilization eventually would have crumbled. But ideologically we'd still be Egyptians. Let's keep this in mind this Pesach, and live our lives by the ideology of the Torah.

THE RAMBAM APPROACH TO A SEDER

YEDIDYA
LEVY
Junior

Toward the end of the Maggid section in the Haggada we declare that “In each and every generation, one is obligated to see himself as though he himself left Egypt.” This phrase epitomizes the objective of the Halachik obligation to tell the story of the “Jewish slavery and ultimate redemption” known as Sippur Yetzias Mitsraim. It is a profound awareness that we too were affected by the Exodus and are by extension part of the redemption that took place. In this way the obligation of Sippur extends beyond a mere recollection of distant, past event and becomes a personal and intimate experience.

However, the Rambam has a slightly different text of the above phrase in his Hilchot Chametz U-matza (7:6): “In each and every generation, one is obligated to show himself as though he himself has now left the Egyptian bondage...” In the Rambam’s version of the Haggada he uses the active verb “to show” rather than the passive verb “to see.” For the Rambam this minor alteration in text means a universe of difference for the Halachik obligation of Sippur and the experience of the Pesach Seder. Our connection to the Exodus takes on an active element in which we embody and bring to life our forefathers and brethren that were enslaved Egypt. The Rambam furthers this idea by requiring one to “le-har’os es atzmo-show himself,” actively as though he were the newly freed and redeemed slave. This idea is contrasted by the Ashkenazic obligation “Liros es atzmo-to see himself,” passively with a deep sense of understanding. The impact of this significant difference is beautifully illustrated by Rabbi Reuven Bulka, in his work Torah Therapy (pp. 147-8);

“It is the difference between passivity and activity. It is the difference between a cardiac identity and one which is contagious. It is the difference between keeping one’s feelings to oneself and sharing them with others, so that they can feel them, gain from them, and even be overcome with the same feelings. Maimonides insists that the Pesach experience of release from bondage is not one which should be buried in the recesses of one’s subconscious or preconscious; instead it is a feeling which must be evoked verbally, it is a feeling and a radiation of joy which must be shown to others so that they can identify with it.”

Maggid for the Rambam was an active and realistic recreation of the Jews in Egypt. In this way, the Rambam is teaching us about the powerful experience of the Seder night but more importantly he is giving us deep insight into a valuable educational truth. It is impossible to forget about an Exodus if we ourselves were there and it is inconceivable to forget a redemption that we are ourselves witnessed come about. The Rambam is not only giving life to the Seder night but rather he is changing the dynamic by which we live our lives. On Pesach we ourselves leave Egypt and experience the miracles of Hashem thereby making each and every day of the year a time for reflection and appreciation for the freedom to worship Hashem and the ability to practice Judaism.

THE HOLY NATION

CHANAN (EVAN)
LINDER
Senior

The Rambam says that there are two aspects to the four cups of wine: The physical drinking which signifies our freedom, and the brachos which we say at the point in the seder that the drinking takes place. Two cups which need explanation in so far as their placement in the structure of the seder are those of: Kiddush and Bircas HaMazon; if the seder is supposed to be an indulgence in the story and laws of pesach and yitzias Mitzrayim, how do these two cups add to salvation?

Let us first analyze Kiddush. It is the cup of “chag hamatzos”, celebrating and praising the cause of the holiday. Meaning, if I wasn’t celebrating the holiday and the salvation I wouldn’t be having this cup. This is the basic pshat; however, let us look at the words of the Kiddush and find a deeper reason as to why this cup is so essential to the complete majesty of the night. What is the main theme of the Kiddush? It’s bichiras Yisrael, as we say “asher bachar banu mikul ha’amin”. Why are we starting off the Kiddush and the entire seder, which presumably would consist of grand praise to Hashem for the salvation he provided and continues to provide us with the simple declaration that Hashem separated us from the other nations? It is simply because Pesach is our “independence day” however it has a different nature than the independence days and general independence of other nations. The “freedom” of the other nations is their ability to vote for their own government officials and things of the like; however, the freedom which the Jews longed for in Egypt before their birth as a nation and,

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the freedom which we long for today is one deeply rooted in our love of G-d and truth which is best demonstrated in the performance of mitzvos. On the birthday of our nationhood we were taken out of Egypt but there was another phenomenon taking place; it was the birth of our ability to perform mitzvos with the special bond between the Jews and the Creator. This is why we say “asher bachar banu mikul am...kadshenu b'mitzvosecha” because the freedom wasn't special in its own right. The most important part was the fact that this nationhood was the starting point for the national acceptance of mitzvos. All the poskim hold that if a non-Jew wants to immigrate to Israel as a Jew but doesn't want to keep halacha we shouldn't allow it to happen (ex of posek-Rav soloveitchik). The reason why we don't let the non-Jew immigrate is not only because we are a nation, but also because there is another facet to our nationhood. We have kedusha and Torah. That's why we start off with these words in Kiddush at the beginning of the seder.

We often use this term “am kadosh” however, in order to fully appreciate the aforementioned psbat. We must understand what the definition of kedusha is specifically regarding am Yisrael. Kedusha is directly correlated with freedom. It is the freedom to make the right choice, but even more so to fully understand the depth of every choice we make in our lives. This freedom is much deeper than simply being out of any other human being's jurisdiction in order to be a slave to one's own desires. Therefore, by definition true freedom has within it a level of control and abstinence. Instead of just following what will provide immediate physical gratification, a man of kedusha (and freedom) recognizes in every choice he makes, exactly what he is choosing. This means to say that if the man of kedusha chooses to wake up for davening he consciously thinks about every possible action he can be doing at this very moment, and is gladdened by the fact that he is controlling himself and saying no to doing these actions. Since every action of this man is based off of recognition of many possible actions, it is in essence an action containing multiple non-actions. When he consciously does good as well as not doing bad, he then becomes truly kadosh. In fact the Torah tells us all the specifics of what is good and bad. This is the psbat in Tehillim “sur merah va'aseh tov” as well as the pasuk in Devarim “I give before you today the good and bad, life and death, and you should choose life!”

So this Pesach when we begin the seder with our glasses raised high in an outpouring of praise to Hashem, We should realize how special it is to be part of the Am Kadosh and the nation which truly lives freely. May our seder next year be performed with complete freedom and highest level of service with the Bais Hamikdash!

This Devar Torah is based on a Shmuess delivered by HaRav Herschel Reichman delivered at Rambam Mesivta

Dedicated B'Birchas Mazal Tov to our dear Assistant Principal Mar Hillel Goldman and his Eishes Chayil on the birth of a baby boy this past Tuesday. May their son be blessed to have his Bris in good health and its proper time and then merit to have Torah, Chupa, and Ma'asim Tovim.

In this final article for the current Hamasmid staff, we would like to thank Mar Goldman for his expert advisement and stewardship of Hamasmid. His imagination, skill, capability, and ready smile helped us make many tight deadlines and overcome the obstacles we faced.

מזל טוב ותודה רבה!!!

שבת שלום וחג שמח