

OHR NET

PARSHIOT ACHAREI-KEDOSHIM-EMOR · NISSAN 5774 / 2014 · VOL. 21 NO. 32

Pass the Bitter Herbs!

By Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

Seder night, such anticipation! It is perhaps the night that is most looked forward to by the children – to be part of the intense preparations that precede it, to feel the sense of urgency as Pesach draws closer and closer and then to come home on Pesach night to be met with a table that is laden with all the unique details that are the Seder Night. The matzot. The bottles of wine. The sparkling crystal. The glistening silver cups. The special Seder plate that is reverently taken out only for Seder Night. The shank bone. The burnt hard-boiled egg. The bitter herbs.

Bitter herbs?? What are bitter herbs doing here? Why would anyone want to eat bitter herbs of all things on such a festive and joyous day? It would be understandable if we ate bitter herbs before the saddest day of the year. But why now?

Because without the bitter herbs we would not have a Seder Night.

There is a seemingly simple passage in the Haggadah that we recite on Pesach night that reads, “Therefore, it is our duty to thank, praise, pay tribute, glorify, exalt, honor, bless and acclaim Him who performed all these miracles for our fathers and for us. He brought us forth from slavery to freedom, from grief to joy, from mourning to festivity, from darkness to great light, and from servitude to redemption...”

It sounds innocuous enough – we were in dire straits and G-d saved us. End of story. Apparently not. The Maharal from Prague, one of the greatest Jewish scholars in history, explains that we are not beholden only to thank G-d for what is obviously good – the freedom, the joy, the festivity, the great light, the redemption. That is too simplistic. Rather, we have to thank G-d for everything, the bad and the good! Not five things that we have to acknowledge and express our gratitude to G-d for but ten separate dimen-

sions. Each opposite also requires our attention and each “negative” feature needs to be understood and recognized for what it really is. Why? Because without feeling and living the so-called bad it is not possible to appreciate the good! Without truly experiencing what slavery is it is not possible to plumb the depths of what real freedom entails. Without knowing first-hand what darkness, is there is no way that a person can really be conscious of just how wondrous light is. According to the Maharal it transpires that one of the most important messages of the Seder night is that the “bad” is a prelude to a true understanding of what is good!

There is a cutesy story that Rabbi Nachman from Breslov used to tell over to try and convey that idea. A non-Jew once went to Jewish friend to experience Seder Night. Everything looked exquisite and the smells emanating from kitchen were beyond tantalizing. But the food didn’t seem to materialize. First they began to read (for ages!), then, just as thought they were finally going to eat, each person present was given a large dose of bitter herbs and told to eat it. At that point he got up and left (rather quickly!) terrified at what might be next on the “menu”. The next day he went to complain to his friend about his “mal-treatment”. His friend looked at him and, instead of apologizing, he scornfully told him, “You fool! It is only after bitter herbs that the delicious food is served!”

Rabbi Nachman from Breslov used to explain that the Jewish Nation has swallowed an awful lot of “bitter herbs” over the generations – but however much it is, it is all preparation for the most sublime feast in the world!

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein points out a seemingly anomaly in the way that the rabbis decide which is the best choice of vegetable to use for the bitter herbs on Seder Night. The Rabbis list five different possible varieties that can be used and the least desirable choice is actually the most obvious

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ACHAREI

The Emperor's New Clothes

"After the death of the two sons of Aharon" (16:1)

Sometimes in our great enthusiasm to follow our heart's desire, we can twist logic into something resembling a pretzel.

The Midrash tells us that Aaron's sons Nadav and Avihu died because they entered the Holy of Holies without dressing in the long robe-like garment of the *Kohen Gadol* (high priest).

This Midrash is difficult. Why should Nadav and Avihu have dressed themselves in this "*meil*"? They weren't *kohanim gedolim*. They were regular *kohanim*. So why should they have worn the garments of the *Kohen Gadol*?

The answer is that if Nadav and Avihu gave themselves permission to enter the Holy of Holies and offer the *ketoret*

incense which was an offering exclusive to the *Kohen Gadol*, perforce they must have seen themselves as *kohanim gedolim*. According to their own logic they should have "dressed for the part." They should have worn the clothes of the *Kohen Gadol*.

The fact that they didn't was indeed a valid allegation against them.

But maybe there's another way to understand why Nadav and Avihu didn't dress for the part.

There can be no question that Nadav and Avihu's actions came from an overwhelming desire to serve G-d. It was this unbridled love that led them to make serious and fatal errors. Maybe the fact that they didn't dress in the clothes of the *Kohen Gadol* revealed that, in their own heart of hearts, they themselves knew the nakedness of their claim.

• Source: Based on *Responsa of the Rosh*, 13

KEDOSHIM

I-Sight

You shall not hate your brother in your heart. (19:17)

One of the most difficult emotions to deal with is resentment. Resentment can come from many different sources. It can result from someone genuinely wronging us. Or we may feel wronged by someone even though an objective third party would say that we were being over-sensitive. Resentment can come from plain old jealousy — someone is brighter than us, or seems to have an easier life, or is more successful. Or resentment can come for no good reason at all. It may result from the way that someone speaks or dresses or expresses himself. As they say in the North of England, "It's the way he hangs his face".

The spiritual masters teach that this is the worst kind of hatred. In Hebrew it is called *Sinat Chinam*, literally Free Hate. Hate that has come from no injustice, real or perceived, but just the way someone is.

"You shall not hate your brother in your heart."

In this week's Torah portion the Torah categorically prohibits that gnawing worm called resentment.

Fine.

The Torah says that we mustn't feel resentment. But isn't that more easily said than done? How are we supposed to put this into action?

First of all, we cannot work on our feelings until we understand them. This requires objectivity and the help of someone who is impartial to help us objectivize our emotions. Only when we can delineate our feelings will we have a chance of changing them.

If this analysis shows that we have been genuinely

wronged, the proper mode of conduct will depend on the circumstances. It may involve a direct confrontation, or a rebuke from a third party, or legal recourse in *Beit Din* religious court. When we act to deal positively with our resentment in one of these ways, the poison of the resentment is very often vitiated or extinguished.

However, there may be circumstances where a genuine grievance has no outside recourse and we may just have to forgive and forget. In this last scenario (and in the others too), we should remember that it is G-d who runs the world and we should analyze why G-d has put us in our present situation.

As far as jealousy is concerned, we should remember that each of us is on our own separate monorail in life. The fact that someone else has something that I don't have, be it brains or money or looks, in no way means that they are taking away from me. The root of jealousy is a lack of trust in G-d's Providence. Each of us is born with unique capabilities with which to fulfill our potential in this world. If G-d hasn't given me something, it's because I don't need it to complete my mission on this earth.

And as far as *Sinat Chinam* is concerned, we should remind ourselves that we are all created in G-d's image. If there is something that I hate about my fellow for no objective reason whatever but just because it's "the way he hangs his face" it means that I am despising the image of G-d Himself.

However, if we look carefully with a positive eye at those whom we resent and try and divorce our egos from our emotions, we might begin to see all kinds of positive traits that they possess.

It all depends on our I-sight.

EMOR

Bored With Breathing

"And you will bring a new *mincha* offering (meal offering) to G-d." (23:16)

Are you 'burned out'? You seem to hear that phrase a lot these days. I'm 'burned out' from this; I'm 'burned out' from that; I'm bored with this; It's just lost its excitement for me.

Why do people 'burn out'?

Take two people working hard. One self-employed, the other working for a salary. There's a big difference between them. Someone who works for a salary has no particular interest in the company, except that it provides him with a living. And his apathy only increases if the company doesn't do well and there is no bonus to look forward to.

Someone who is self-employed, on the other hand, puts his very soul into his work. He is the company. He enjoys the moments of triumph and he grieves over the disasters, but

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bored and burned out? Never.

Unlike the salaried employee whose remuneration is fixed from the beginning, with only limited scope for profit participation, the self-employed person knows that the sky's the limit. The company's success is his success.

When we learn Torah we should think of it like it was our own "business". In your own business if things aren't going right who is there to put them right? Only yourself. If it takes extra time at the office, we would certainly and gladly put in the extra hours.

When we sit down to learn do we mentally 'punch in'? Are we waiting for the next coffee break? For the check at the end of the month? Or do we feel the exuberance and challenge of our learning as though it was our own business?

How does the Torah refer to the monumental event of its being given at Sinai?

"And you will bring a new mincha offering to G-d."

Why is the reference so oblique? It's true that at the festival of Shavuot there is a command to bring a new *mincha*

offering to G-d. But is that the most conspicuous aspect of Shavuot? How about the giving of the Torah? Wouldn't it have been more appropriate to spell that out on this day the Torah was given at Sinai? And yet it is with these few covert words that the Torah hints to the central event of Judaism.

Why?

The Torah doesn't specify the date it was given because it doesn't want us to feel that it was given as a 'one-off' event. Rather, it wants us to feel like it's being given to us *every day*, and for us to receive it every day as though we were hearing it for the first time at Sinai.

The Torah is our life's breath. Even though a person breathes millions of times in the course of his life, *does anyone get tired of breathing?* Why not? Because we understand that our life depends on breathing; it's not a subject for boredom. Boredom can only set in when a person sees something as optional. Breathing isn't optional. It's obligatory.

This is the way we should feel about the Torah, for "It is our life and the length of our days".

PARSHA Overview

ACHREI

G-d instructs the *kohanim* to exercise extreme care when they enter the *Mishkan*. On Yom Kippur, the *kohen gadol* is to approach the holiest part of the *Mishkan* after special preparations and wearing special clothing. He brings offerings unique to Yom Kippur, including two identical goats that are designated by lottery. One is "for G-d" and is offered in the Temple, while the other is "for Azazel" in the desert. The Torah states the individual's obligations on Yom Kippur: On the 10th day of the seventh month, one must afflict oneself. We abstain from eating and drinking, anointing, wearing leather footwear, washing, and marital relations. Consumption of blood is prohibited. The blood of slaughtered birds and undomesticated beasts must be covered. The people are warned against engaging in the wicked practices that were common in Egypt. Incest is defined and prohibited. Marital relations are forbidden during a woman's monthly cycle. Homosexuality, bestiality and child sacrifice are prohibited.

KEDOSHIM

The nation is enjoined to be holy. Many prohibitions and positive commandments are taught. *Prohibitions:* Idolatry; eating offerings after their time-limit; theft and robbery; denial of theft; false oaths; retention of someone's property; delaying payment to an employee; hating or cursing a fellow Jew (especially one's parents); gossip; placing physical and spiritual stumbling blocks; perversion of justice; inaction when others are in danger; embarrassing; revenge; bearing a grudge; cross-breeding; wearing a garment of wool and linen; harvesting a tree during its first three years; gluttony and intoxication; witchcraft; shaving the beard and sideburns; tattooing. *Positive:* Awe for parents and respect for the elderly; leaving part of the harvest for the

poor; loving others (especially a convert); eating in Jerusalem the fruits from a tree's fourth year; awe for the Temple; respect for Torah scholars, the blind and the deaf. Family life must be holy. We are warned again not to imitate gentile behavior, lest we lose the Land of Israel. We must observe *kashrut*, thus maintaining our unique and separate status.

EMOR

The *kohanim* are commanded to avoid contact with corpses in order to maintain a high standard of ritual purity. They may attend the funeral of only their seven closest relatives: father, mother, wife, son, daughter, brother, and unmarried sister. The *kohen gadol* (High Priest) may not attend the funeral even of his closest relatives. Certain marital restrictions are placed on the *kohanim*. The nation is required to honor the *kohanim*. The physical irregularities that invalidate a *kohen* from serving in the Temple are listed. *Terumah*, a produce tithe given to the *kohanim*, may be eaten only by *kohanim* and their household. An animal may be sacrificed in the Temple after it is eight days old and is free from any physical defects. The nation is commanded to sanctify the Name of Hashem by insuring that their behavior is always exemplary, and by being prepared to surrender their lives rather than murder, engage in licentious relations or worship idols. The special characteristics of the holidays are described, and the nation is reminded not to do certain types of creative work during these holidays. New grain may not be eaten until the *omer* of barley is offered in the Temple. The Parsha explains the laws of preparing the oil for the menorah and baking the *lechem hapanim* in the Temple. A man blasphemes G-d and is executed as prescribed in the Torah.

TALMUD Tips

Beitza 14-40

“All of a person’s income is determined and fixed from one Rosh Hashana to the next Rosh Hashana, except for expenses for Shabbat and Yom Tov and teaching one’s children Torah — for these, if a person spends less he will receive less in return; and if he spends more he will receive more in return.”

Rabbi Tachlifa the brother of Ravnai Hoza’a teaches this far-ranging statement of financial matters, and Rabbi Abahu cites a number of verses to show the source of this teaching in the Written Torah. Rashi explains that there is a message of financial management taught here. Generally a person should be careful not to spend too much if possible, since he doesn’t know how much was allotted him for the year. This limitation does not apply, however, to what he spends for Shabbat, Yom Tov and providing a Torah education for his children.

• Beitza 15b, 16a

“An extra neshama (soul) is given to a person on erev Shabbat, and is taken from him when Shabbat ends.”

Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish states this well-known concept on our daf, and he derives it from the verse which says, *“Shavat v’yimafash”* — which he explains as “once a person has finished with Shabbat” then *“Oy nefesh!”* — the extra neshama is lost. Rashi writes that the *“neshama yetera”* the person is given on Shabbat allows him to enjoy the rest of Shabbat and the extra food of Shabbat to a greater degree than he could normally do during the weekdays when he lacks the extra neshama.

• Beitza 16a

“One should not drink his cup down in one gulp, and if he does so he is a ‘guzzler’; two gulps is the normal way; and one who finishes it in three is from the haughty ones.”

This *beraita* in our *gemara* categorizes three various types of drinkers (of wine). These three types are codified in the Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim (170:8) as the halacha according to Rabbi Yosef Karo (*“The Mechaber”*, author). Rabbi Moshe Isserles, however, writes that if the cup is very small (less than a *revi’it*) it is permitted to drink it in one go. And likewise, if the cup is very big, three or four gulps are certainly acceptable. The Mishna Berura there (22) adds that if the wine is sweet or the person has a large stomach it is also okay to drink the cup in one time.

• Beitza 25b

“Why was the Torah given to the Jewish People? Because they are the boldest (brazen) of all nations.”

The above statement is taught on our daf in the name of the Tana Rabbi Meir. Why is boldness a reason to

receive the Torah? One reason is that it weakens the strength of one who learns it and humbles the heart of the person to rely on G-d (Rashi). Another reason is that “One who is shy (not bold) will not learn Torah” as Hillel taught in Pirkei Avot (2:6), and only a person who speaks up to ask in order to understand will learn Torah properly (Maharsha).

• Beitza 25b

“It is preferred that they will be (transgressing) unintentionally rather than being intentional transgressors.”

The *gemara* teaches to apply this principle and not rebuke another person who is transgressing without being aware that the act is forbidden — if you know that the doer will transgress even if he is made aware of the transgression.

In practice there are other factors that are important to consider, and for the halachic parameters of this teaching see Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 608 and the *poskim* there (and ask your Rabbi in any actual halachic matter as always).

• Beitza 30a

“Whoever is merciful to others is clearly a descendant of Avraham Avinu, and whoever is not merciful to others is clearly not a descendant of Avraham Avinu.”

The Sage Shabbatai ben Marinus taught this on our daf, and derives it from a verse in Sefer Devarim (13:18). Rashi clarifies that it means “descended from the Avot” as is stated in this verse, “G-d will give you (the attribute of) mercy as He swore to your forefathers.”

• Beitza 32b

“I deserve this punishment for not acting according to the teaching of my Rabbi.”

The Sage Abaye said the above when his mill collapsed due to a flood, but could have been saved had he accepted and obeyed the ruling of Rabah, his Rabbi (Rashi).

• Beitza 36b

“May it be the will of G-d that the words of Torah that I will say will be accepted.”

Rabbi Aba would say this prayer when he travelled from Bavel to Eretz Yisrael as a petition to G-d that his words would be accepted by the rabbis there and he would not be embarrassed (Rashi).

• Beitza 38a

LOVE_{OF} THE LAND

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and Eretz Yisrael

Yerushalayim – Service, Peace and Perfection

The eternal capital of the Jewish homeland has a name bestowed upon it by the Creator as a combination of names given to it by two of His favorite sons.

After brilliantly passing the Divine test of his faith by being prepared to offer his beloved son as a sacrifice on Mount Moriah, the Patriarch Avraham called the location “Yireh”. He prophetically anticipated that this would be the site of the Beit Hamikdash and named it in honor of the service to G-d which would take place there.

In an earlier phase of his life, Avraham was welcomed, after his miraculous military victory over four mighty kings, by Malki-Tzedek, King of “Shalem” who

brought out bread and wine to greet him. The welcomer is better known to us as Shem, the righteous son of Noah, who gave the city he ruled its name.

The Midrash describes the Divine consideration that went into endowing the city with its final name.

“If I call it *Yireh* like Avraham did, the righteous Malki-Tzedek will feel slighted, and if I call it *Shalem* like Malki-Tzedek did, the righteous Avraham will feel slighted. I will therefore call it ‘*Yireh Shalem*’ Yerushalayim to satisfy both.”

“*Shalem*” means peace and perfection while “*Yireh*” means service of G-d. Only when man serves G-d can he hope to achieve the peace and perfection symbolized by *Yireh-shalem* Yerushalayim.



Gilgal – The First Korban Pesach in the Land We Love

Although you will find nothing on the map or in geography books about this place, it was the most important site in the first years of the Nation of Israel in Eretz Yisrael. Here is where the Israelites under Yehoshua camped after their miraculous crossing of the Jordan River, and here is where they placed the twelve large stones which they had removed from the river bed to serve as a remembrance for generations of that miracle. (*Yehoshua* 4:20-24)

The name Gilgal comes from the Hebrew word for “removing.” Gilgal became the name for this site because here is where Yehoshua carried out a mass circumcision for all those who had been born during the

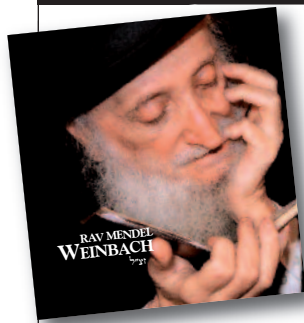
40 years in the wilderness, whose climate made such an operation too dangerous to life. “Today I have removed from you the shame of Egypt,” said G-d, “and the place shall be called Gilgal.” (*Yehoshua* 5:9)

This removal of the foreskin which distinguished them from their former masters made the entire nation eligible to offer a *korban Pesach*, the first one in forty years.

The Mishkan (Sanctuary) which the Israelites had carried with them throughout their wandering in the wilderness stood in Gilgal for 14 years, until the land was conquered and divided amongst the tribes, after which it was transferred to Shiloh.



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OHRNET magazine is published by OHR SOMAYACH Tanenbaum College

POB 18103, Jerusalem 91180, Israel • Tel: +972-2-581-0315 • Email: info@ohr.edu • www.ohr.edu

Love of the Land, What's the Right Thing to Do?, The Human Side of the Story written by Rav Mendel Weinbach, ז”ל

Parsha Insights written by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair • General Editor and Talmud Tips: Rabbi Moshe Newman • Design: Rabbi Eliezer Shapiro

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It's Not Quite THAT SIMPLE

The Case of the Homemade Matza

BY RABBI DR. YITZCHAK GREENBLATT

David loves Pesach. The Seder is the highlight of his year, and in particular he loves matza. He spent some time in yeshiva and remembers learning all about the deeper meaning of this mitzvah and it has always inspired him. He decides one year that he is going to make his own matza from scratch. He buys a little piece of land, grows his own wheat, grinds it by himself into flour and bakes it into his very own, perfectly rounded, delicious *matzot*.

David invites his friend Aaron to join him for his Seder, at which his proudly produces his homemade matza and explains to Aaron how he painstakingly made them. Aaron is very impressed with David's dedication. "What did you do with the *ma'aser*?" Aaron asks him. David looks puzzled: "The what-now?" "You know," Aaron continued, "you're supposed to give 10% of the grain to charity. Otherwise we can't eat it!"

David is crestfallen. All his hard work has been for nothing. And then, somewhere in the back of his mind, he remembers something he learned in yeshiva. A glimmer of hope, something ... something ... "Positive, negative ... cancels out ... matza ... I think we can eat it!" he blurts out. What is he talking about?

There are two types of *mitzvot* in the Torah: positive ones ("do this, do that") and negative ones ("don't do this, don't do that"). In some circumstances there can be a clash between a positive and a negative mitzvah. The *Gemara* tells us:

"Whenever you encounter a positive mitzvah and a negative mitzvah, if both can be fulfilled, that is ideal. But if not, the positive mitzvah supersedes the negative one." (Menachot 40a)

Elsewhere the *Gemara* gives the source for this concept. It's based on two verses in the Torah:

"Do not wear *sha'atnez* — wool and linen — together. Make fringes for yourself on the four corners of your clothing..." (Numbers 22:11-12)

From the juxtaposition of the two notions: 1) not wearing *sha'atnez* and 2) wearing *tzitzis* — the *gemara* in Yevamot 4a expounds that it is permissible to wear wool and linen together in order to fulfill the mitzvah of *tzitzit*. This serves as the paradigm for the rule that a positive mitzvah trumps a negative one. (It is important to stress that this is only where there is a *clash* between the two. But in a case where there is no pressing need to cancel out the negative mitzvah because there is some other way to perform the positive mitzvah, this rule obviously does not apply.)

In any event, this was David's idea. Of course, there is a prohibition to eat anything from which 10% hasn't been

given to charity. But there is a positive mitzvah to eat matza on Pesach! This seems to be a classic case of a positive/negative clash. Surely the rule should kick in and the positive mitzvah should cancel out the negative one! It's a Pesach miracle! Matza for everyone!

But, as with seemingly everything in Judaism, it's not quite that simple.

Sadly, David is mistaken. There is a subtle but important distinction between the matza case and our general positive vs. negative mitzvah idea. In the matza case we want to use an object which itself is forbidden to perform a mitzvah. Contrast this with our paradigm case of *tzitzit*, where we wanted to use wool to make fringes on a linen item of clothing (or vice-versa) where there is nothing forbidden about the wool itself, the *object*. It is only that the *action* of tying the wool onto the linen creates a forbidden garment. So when the action is also a positive mitzvah, the positive mitzvah overrides the negative mitzvah. But in the matza case, David and Aaron would be trying to perform a mitzvah with a forbidden object. It would be comparable to trying to do a mitzvah by eating stolen matza, or to putting on stolen *tefillin*. This is referred to as a "*mitzvah by means of a transgression*" and is forbidden. Rambam says about such an action that "G-d hates it." (Issurei Mizbe'ach 5:9)

So poor David and Aaron will have to make do without their homemade matza this Pesach. But let's return to the idea of a positive commandment overriding a prohibition. We have seen that the source of this idea is a verse in the Torah. But perhaps we can attempt an approach towards understanding the philosophy underlying this concept.

Nachmanides explains that fulfilling a positive precept of the Torah is greater than refraining from doing something which is forbidden, because fulfilling G-d's command to do something expresses a love for G-d and a desire to connect to Him spiritually by performing the *mitzvah* he gave. (In fact the word mitzvah itself comes from a root meaning "connect" — "commandment" is a very rough translation!) Not doing something forbidden stems from a type of trepidation — a fear and awe of G-d — a desire not to incur His wrath. Love is a more powerful than fear, and therefore, when there is no way to fulfill both, and one has to be sacrificed, a positive commandment will trump a prohibition. True as this idea undoubtedly is, we should strive to refrain from doing things which G-d has forbidden not just out of fear and awe, but out of love. In fact, our fear of G-d should be the fear of disappointing him, of harming our relationship with him. We should aim to build our connection with good acts, with positive *mitzvot* (from the root meaning "connect") and to refrain from doing anything to sabotage that connection.

THE Pesach Relay Race

"In every generation a person is obligated to see himself as if he had come out of Egypt." (Pesach Haggada)

The night of Pesach, one of the most festive and well known of the year, memorializes the birth of the Jewish Nation. We drink lots of wine as we tell over, in detail, the age-old story of the exodus from Egypt. Recalling the great miracles and events that were witnessed by over three million people, we are meant to connect with the story in a personal way. In fact, many consider this story as their own.

But can this story which happened so long ago really have anything to do with the Jews of today?

According to Kabbalah the Jewish People, although innumerable, are in truth all individual parts of one general soul. Just as a body, despite being made up of two hundred and forty eight limbs and three hundred and sixty five sinews, is one entity, so too the countless individual souls of Israel are in essence united as one. With this in mind we can gain a deeper understanding of how the story of Egypt affects us.

Let us consider a relay race. When each individual runner is running, he represents all of the runners. If he takes the leading position, all of the future runners share in that position. And if he falls back, they all fall back.

What the Jews accomplished through the harsh Egyptian exile is shared by all of the future generations as well. So although a Jew living today was not actually a slave in Egypt, by virtue of his connection to those that were, he benefits. And in turn, he must also allow those

that were in Egypt to benefit from him as well.

How does he do that? When he continues to race forward towards the finish line, he does it for all of the past generations of Jews that lived before him, including those that actually left Egypt. While if he were to quit racing for whatever reason, then all of the generations of Jews that came before him would also be out of the race.

In light of the above we can gain new insight into one's obligation to see himself as if he went out of Egypt. Since a person living today was obviously never in Egypt, this cannot be taken literally. However, in a deeper sense, if a Jew of today has a connection to the Jews that left Egypt, then, by virtue of that connection, it is as if he went out of Egypt too. As mentioned above, the implied message is that it is also as if I, through my actions, take the Jews that left Egypt with me, affecting them for good or bad depending on what I choose to do.

Now if there was a Pesach Seder in Heaven, so to speak, we could say that their Haggada would read, "We are obligated to see ourselves as if we are experiencing what our descendants are doing in the world today."

We specifically focus on those who were redeemed from Egypt, because spiritually, if they never left Egypt, the burden to escape from there would fall on us. However, through their suffering we were spared from the burden of the Egyptian slavery, and we are therefore indebted to them and must continue to work for their sake, as well as our own, for the future redemption. May it be speedily in our days.

PASS THE BITTER HERBS *continued from page one*

choice – horseradish. And the one that is universally accepted as being the best choice of all is the rather mundane romaine lettuce. Romaine lettuce is not very bitter at all and even after it has been chewed thoroughly it still cannot be compared to horseradish! However Rabbi Feinstein explains that romaine lettuce may start off sweet but the longer it is chewed the more bitter it becomes. And that is why it is the very best kind to use. Very often the onset of something bitter is actually quite sweet and pleasant. It is only as we sink deeper into it that the sweetness wears off and the bitterness is felt. That is what happened to the Jewish People in Egypt. What started off as a pleasant sojourn as exiles waiting to be returned to the Land of Israel turned into something indescribably bitter. Why? Because we stopped acknowledging that G-d placed us in Egypt for

a specific reason and we began to imagine that it was a pretty comfortable place to be. The minute that happened the sweetness began to wear off bit by bit until we were left with only the bitter and harsh reality of enslavement.

That is why the bitter herbs play such a central and important part on Seder Night. They are there to let us know that things don't have to reach a level of bitterness that is untenable as they did in Egypt and as they have done throughout Jewish history. In fact, things do not have to be bitter at all. "All" we have to do is to recognize the messages that G-d is transmitting to us and to live our lives accordingly.

And if we do that, then this year as we sit at the Seder table we can truly savor the delicious sweetness that are the bitter herbs!

Abarbanel

ON THE PARSHA

By Rabbi Pinchas Kasnett

ACHAREI

Prohibition against Eating Blood

The prohibition against eating an animal's blood is explained by Abarbanel in the context of the subtle differences in the relevant verses in the Torah:

1) Parshat Noach 9:4: "But flesh, with its *nefesh* (soul or life essence) — its blood — you shall not eat."

2) Parshat Acharei Mot 17:11: "For the *nefesh* of the flesh is in the blood..."

3) Parshat Acharei Mot 17:11: "...for it is the blood in the *nefesh* that will atone."

4) Acharei Mot 17:14: "You shall not consume the blood of any creature, for the *nefesh* of any creature is its blood."

5) Parshat Re'eh 12:23: "For the blood, it is the *nefesh*, and you shall not eat the *nefesh* with the meat."

Abarbanel begins by explaining that this prohibition is based on the principle that we are enjoined to strive to maintain the spiritual purity of the *nefesh*, or life essence, of every individual. For this reason the Torah in this Parsha states (Acharei Mot 17:12) "Any *nefesh* among you may not consume blood". Normally the Torah would have stated, "Any person among you..." Clearly the Torah is telling us that blood has a direct negative effect on our very spiritual essence.

From the juxtaposition of the relationship between blood and *nefesh* in the above verses, the Torah is telling us that an animal's blood, although it is obviously technically a physical entity, is synonymous on a very real level with the non-physical life essence of the animal itself, unlike the other parts of the animal's body. Abarbanel explains that when someone ingests the other parts of an animal, those parts are broken down and completely transformed by the digestive process. Blood, on the other hand, is essentially already "digested" and retains its original nature when eaten. Thus, some aspect of animal nature is incorporated into the consumer of the blood. Even though the animals that are permitted for our consumption are not violent, cunning, or predatory, their spiritual essence is far below that of man, who is the unique pinnacle of G-d's creation. From the verses above we see that the blood is *in the nefesh*, the *nefesh* is *in the blood* and finally, the blood *is the nefesh*.

Because of the severity of this prohibition the Torah emphasizes that it applies to converts as well, an emphasis which is generally not found in regard to other *mitzvot*. Even though in regard to certain situations a convert is considered on a slightly different halachic plane (such as for marriage eligibility), here we are specifically told that every Jew must be vigilant.

The significance of animal blood also explains its importance in the procedures of the sacrificial offerings. An offering expresses man's desire to give himself over completely to

G-d. The animal takes the place of the individual, since human sacrifice is obviously prohibited. Since we want to dedicate our very essence to the service of G-d, the blood of the animal, which is its very essence, becomes an essential component of the service.

Based on this analysis, Abarbanel offers a final unique perspective on the rationale for the prohibition. He compares eating an animal's blood to eating the limb of a live animal, a prohibition which applies not only to Jews, but to all of Mankind as well, as one of the seven Noachide Laws. Since blood retains the life force and essence of the animal at all times, it is no different than actually eating any other portion of the live animal itself.

KEDOSHIM

In this Parsha (Vayikra 19:16-18) there are three apparently unconnected verses describing our obligations to our fellow Jews. Abarbanel ties these verses together and provides interesting insights into the nature of these obligations:

"You shall not be a gossipmonger among your people; you shall not stand aside while your fellow's blood is shed — I am G-d. You shall not hate your brother in your heart; you shall reprove your fellow and do not bear a sin because of him. You shall not take revenge and you shall not bear a grudge against the members of your people; you shall love your fellow as yourself — I am G-d."

One who spreads gossip will almost certainly create contention between his fellows. In some cases this contention may even turn violent and may result in the spilling of blood. The command to not stand idly by while blood is being shed adjures us to do our utmost to prevent such an occurrence. The Torah places the two *mitzvot* together to remind us of the possible dire consequences of malicious gossip. The addition of the words 'I am G-d' reminds us that even though the connection between slander and bloodshed is not always readily apparent, it is certainly known to G-d.

The next verse is a continuation of the subject of slander. Abarbanel explains that the Torah now tells us that when one hears that he has been slandered by another individual he should not let it fester, but should rather approach that individual in order to ascertain the truth. Reproof here means first finding out if reproof is even required. Unlike other commentators, Abarbanel explains that the expression "do not bear a sin because of him" does not refer to a transgression for not reproofing someone's behavior. Rather it refers to the individual who supposedly slandered. Perhaps there was no slander at all and he should not bear any sin due to the false reports of the spreader of gossip.

Another dimension of the commandment not to hate is based on our obligation to imitate G-d's ways. Just as the

Continued on page nine

Abarbanel

ON THE PARSHA

By Rabbi Pinchas Kasnett

'heart of G-d' is one and has no place for hatred, only love, our hearts should be the same. The commandments not to take revenge or bear a grudge are exemplified by the following scenario: If your fellow refuses to do you a favor you cannot retaliate in kind. Likewise, if you do decide to do him a favor you cannot do so in a begrudging manner by telling him that you are doing so even though he refused to come to your assistance previously. The verse ends with the words, "You shall love your fellow as yourself — I am G-d" to point out to us that avoiding the negative behavior of taking revenge and bearing a grudge is not sufficient. We cannot say, "I will avoid taking revenge and bearing a grudge against my fellow, but I don't have to love him as myself." Rather, we must make every effort to create a positive connection with our fellow Jews, just as G-d has created the ultimate positive connection with his creations.

EMOR

One of the main topics of this Parsha is a description of the holidays that constitute the cycle of the Jewish year. In regard to Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, Abarbanel raises a number of questions that provide a unique insight into G-d's relationship with all the nations of the world and Israel in particular. First of all, why is Rosh Hashana, the first day of the month of Tishrei, singled out as *the* day of judgment for the entire world? G-d is not like a secular judge who, after gathering all the facts and witnesses, needs to set aside a particular day for judgment. Secondly, if Rosh Hashana is a day of judgment for all of Mankind, why is Yom Kippur, the day of repentance and atonement, only designated for the Jewish People? Likewise, it is clear from numerous sources that repentance is necessary and accepted throughout the year, not just on the ten days between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. This is actually a Talmudic dispute, with one side stating that we are judged for the year on Rosh Hashana, with the judgment being sealed on Yom Kippur, while the other side states that we are judged every day of the year. Finally, there is a famous statement in the Talmud that G-d, as it were, opens three books on Rosh Hashana. The righteous are inscribed for life, the wicked are inscribed for death, and those in-between have their judgment suspended until Yom Kippur in order to give them time to repent. The most common interpretation of this statement is that the righteous are defined as those whose *mitzvot* outnumber their transgressions, the wicked are defined as those whose transgressions outnumber their *mitzvot*, while those in-between are exactly balanced between the two. Abarbanel finds this interpretation extremely difficult to accept as it would be almost impossible to have exactly an equal number of *mitzvot* and transgressions, which means that Yom Kippur would only be rel-

evant to an infinitesimal percentage of the people.

Abarbanel explains that in order to understand the meaning of Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur we have to be aware of the influences of the stellar configurations of the Zodiac. Rosh Hashana occurs during the influence of the sign of Libra, or the scales of justice (*Ma'aznayim* in Hebrew). The various natural forces and influences that G-d created are represented by the twelve signs of the Zodiac. This natural order determines the fate of all of the nations of the world, with one notable exception: Israel. On Rosh Hashana the nations of the world are judged according to this Divinely-ordained natural order. Israel, however, is judged differently. It is not subject to this order, but rather to the specific will of G-d Himself. By performing the *mitzvot*, which were given exclusively to the Jewish People, we are removing ourselves from that broader influence and placing ourselves under G-d's direct protection. We are given the ten days between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur to make that distinction a reality by looking deeply into ourselves and repent with utmost sincerity. Since the goal of Yom Kippur is to bring us to this unique state of Divine protection, it is relevant only to the Jewish People but not to the other nations of the world which are subject to a different form of Divine influence which is symbolized by the signs of the Zodiac.

Based on this understanding, the Talmudic dispute can be easily resolved. Judging Israel on Rosh Hashana and sealing that judgment on Yom Kippur refers to our general responsibility to free ourselves from being solely subject to the stellar influences. This is dramatically symbolized by the sound of the shofar with its numerous symbolic meanings. These include awakening us to the reality of our unique direct Divine protection, calling us to appoint G-d as our King, awakening us to repent and defeat our evil tendencies and reminding us of the giving of the Torah at Sinai and the eventual ingathering of our exiles and resurrection of the dead. The other side of the Talmudic argument, the concept of daily judgment and repentance, refers to our relationship with G-d and responsibilities on a daily basis, after having accepted the uniqueness of G-d's relationship with the Jewish People.

Finally, Abarbanel explains that the three types of individuals referred to are those that are *completely* righteous, those that are *completely* wicked and those that are somewhere in-between. Obviously, this last group comprises the overwhelming majority of Mankind. In reference to the Jewish People the first two categories of individuals are completely removed from the natural forces and are subjected to G-d's immediate Divine intervention, one to their benefit, one to their detriment. G-d then gives the last group the opportunity of Yom Kippur.

PARSHA Q&A

ACHREI

1. Why does the Torah emphasize that *Parshat Acharei Mot* was taught after the death of Aharon's sons?
2. How long did the first *Beit Hamikdash* stand?
3. What did the *kohen gadol* wear when he entered the Holy of Holies?
4. How many times did the *kohen gadol* change his clothing and immerse in the *mikveh* on Yom Kippur?
5. One of the goats that was chosen by lot went to *azazel*. What is *azazel*?
6. After the Yom Kippur service, what is done with the four linen garments worn by the *kohen gadol*?
7. What is the penalty of *karet*?
8. Which categories of animals must have their blood covered when they are slaughtered?
9. What is the difference between "*mishpat*" and "*chok*"?
10. May a man marry his wife's sister?

KEDOSHIM

1. Why was *Parshat Kedoshim* said in front of all the

Jewish People?

2. Why does the Torah mention the duty to honor one's father before it mentions the duty to honor one's mother?
3. Why is the command to fear one's parents followed by the command to keep Shabbat?
4. The Torah obligates one to leave the "*leket*" for the poor. What is "*leket*"?
5. In *Shemot* 20:13, the Torah commands, "Do not steal." What does the Torah add when it commands in *Vayikra* 19:11 "Do not steal"?
6. In verse 19:13, the Torah commands, "Do not wrong your neighbor." To what "wrong" is the Torah referring?
7. When rebuking someone, what sin must one be careful to avoid?
8. How does one fulfill the command "*v'hadarta p'nei zakein*"?
9. What punishment will never come to the entire Jewish People?
10. When the Torah states a death penalty but doesn't define it precisely, to which type of death penalty is it referring?

Answers to Acharei and Kedoshim's Questions

All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary, unless otherwise stated

ACHREI

1. 16:1 - To strengthen the warning not to enter the Holy of Holies except on Yom Kippur.
2. 16:3 - 410 years.
3. 16:4 - Only the four linen garments worn by an ordinary *kohen*.
4. 16:4 - Five times.
5. 16:8 - A jagged cliff.
6. 16:23 - They must be put into *geniza* and not be used again.
7. 17:9 - The person's life is shortened and his offspring die.
8. 17:13 - Non-domestic kosher animals and all species of kosher birds.
9. 18:4 - A "*mishpat*" conforms to the human sense of justice. A "*chok*" is a law whose reason is not given to us and can only be understood as G-d's decree.
10. 18:18 - Not during his wife's lifetime.

KEDOSHIM

1. 19:2 - Because it contains the fundamental teachings of the Torah.
2. 19:3 - Since it is more natural to honor one's mother, the Torah stresses the obligation to honor one's father.
3. 19:3 - To teach that one must not violate Torah law even at the command of one's parents.
4. 19:9 - "*Leket*" is one or two stalks of grain that are accidentally dropped while harvesting.
5. 19:11 - The Torah in *Vayikra* prohibits monetary theft. In *Shemot* it prohibits kidnapping.
6. 19:13 - Withholding wages from a worker.
7. 19:17 - Causing embarrassment.
8. 19:32 - By not sitting in their seat nor contradicting them.
9. 20:3 - "*Karet*" — the entire Jewish People will never be "cut off."
10. 20:10 - "*Chenek*" (strangulation).

PARSHA Q&A

EMOR

1. Which male descendants of Aharon are exempt from the prohibition against contacting a dead body?
2. Does a *kohen* have an option regarding becoming ritually defiled when his unmarried sister passes away?
3. How does one honor a *kohen*?
4. How does the Torah restrict the *kohen gadol* with regard to mourning?
5. The Torah states in verse 22:3 that one who “approaches holy objects” while in a state of *tumah* (impurity) is penalized with excision. What does the Torah mean by “approaches”?
6. What is the smallest piece of a corpse that is able to transmit *tumah*?
7. Who in the household of a *kohen* may eat *terumah*?
8. If the daughter of a *kohen* marries a “zar” she may no longer eat *terumah*. What is a *zar*?
9. What is the difference between a *neder* and a *nedavah*?
10. May a person slaughter an animal and its father on the same day?
11. How does the Torah define “profaning” the Name of G-d?
12. Apart from Shabbat, how many days are there during the year about which the Torah says that work is forbidden?
13. How big is an *omer*?
14. On what day do we begin to “count the *omer*”?
15. Why do we begin counting the *omer* at night?
16. How does the *omer* differ from other *minchah* offerings?
17. The blowing of the shofar on Rosh Hashanah is called a “*zichron teruah*” (sound of remembrance). For what is it a reminder?
18. What is unusual about the wood of the *etrog* tree?
19. Who was the father of the blasphemer?
20. What is the penalty for intentionally wounding one’s parent?

Answers to Emor’s Questions

All references are to the verses and Rashi’s commentary, unless otherwise stated

1. 21:1 - *Challalim* — those disqualified from the priesthood because they are descended from a relationship forbidden to a *kohen*.
2. 21:3 - No, he is required to do so.
3. 21:8 - He is first in all matters of holiness. For example, a *kohen* reads from the Torah first, and is usually the one to lead the blessings before and after meals.
4. 21:10-12 - He may not allow his hair to grow long, nor attend to his close relatives if they die, nor accompany a funeral procession.
5. 22:3 - Eats.
6. 22:5 - A piece the size of an olive.
7. 22:11 - He, his wife, his sons, his unmarried daughters and his non-Jewish slaves.
8. 22:12 - A non-*kohen*.
9. 22:18 - A *neder* is an obligation upon a person; a *nedavah* is an obligation placed upon an object.
10. 22:28 - Yes. The Torah only prohibits slaughtering an animal and its mother on the same day.
11. 22:32 - Willfully transgressing the commandments.
12. 23:7-36 - Seven.
13. 23:10 - One tenth of an *eipha*.
14. 23:15 - On the 16th of Nissan.
15. 23:15 - The Torah requires counting seven complete weeks. If we begin counting in the daytime, the seven weeks would not be complete, because according to the Torah a day starts at nightfall.
16. 23:16 - It was made from barley.
17. 23:24 - The *akeidat* (binding of) Yitzchak.
18. 23:40 - It has the same taste as the fruit.
19. 24:10 - The Egyptian killed by Moshe (*Shemot* 2:12).
20. 24:21 - Death.

ASK! the Jewish Information Service

Matza Split

From: Laura

Dear Rabbi,
What is the reason that we split the middle matza on Passover. Normally, we're so careful to use whole loaves for Shabbat and Holiday meals. Thanks for clarifying.

Dear Laura,

Before answering why we do the “matza split”, the point you make about whole loaves is exactly why we use three *matzot* on Passover. Since the matza for the mitzvah is split during *yachatz*, we place it between two whole *matzot* in order to make the *motzi* blessing on two whole “loaves”.

But why do we split a matza? Many answers are given to this question. I'll present a few of them.

Matza is referred to in the Torah as “the bread of suffering” for obvious reasons. This term may also be understood as “bread of poverty”. Since a poor person is often lacking a complete loaf of bread, we break the matza in two in order to indicate that without G-d we are like a poor and destitute vagrant.

G-d originally condemned the descendants of Avraham to exile in a foreign land for 400 years. But in His great mercy G-d terminated the exile after 210 years – cutting the allotted time roughly by half. We therefore break the matza — which symbolizes our suffering — roughly in half.

On the holidays, we are commanded to celebrate the special, bountiful nature of the day with a festive meal. Lest we come to indulge in the meal for the food's sake alone, we are told that half of our attention should be focused on ourselves and half for G-d – meaning for spiritual pursuits. The splitting of the matza on Passover reminds us that, despite the resplendent, holiday meal, we must simultaneously maintain our focus on the spiritual essence of the day.

When two beloved friends temporarily depart from one another with the intention of re-uniting, they split a precious object — like two halves of a pendant — which they each guard until they rejoin. Despite the continued exile we split the matza as a sign of the covenant with G-d that during the separation we will faithfully follow His ways and observe His commandments, as He will faithfully fulfill His promise to bring about the complete and final Redemption.

• Sources: *Seder Secrets*, Rabbi Dovid Meisels

PRAYER Essentials

The Cry of a Child

BY RABBI YITZCHAK BOTTON

And G-d said, “I have indeed seen the affliction of My people that is in Egypt and I have heard its outcry because of its taskmasters, for I have known of its suffering. I shall descend to rescue it....” (Exodus)

The exodus of the Jewish nation is celebrated each year, by telling over the story of how G-d rescued us from the hands of the wicked Egyptians. We are told of G-d's great power, controlling the forces of nature, turning water to blood, and hail to fire. Showing our total devotion we followed Him into the desert without the necessary provisions. At the Sea of Reeds G-d killed our pursuers by drowning them in the sea just as they drowned our children.

What suddenly changed for G-d to end our suffering? What caused Him to act just then? The Ramban explains that when the appointed time arrived for the Jews to be taken out of Egypt they lacked the necessary merit to leave. In fact, it is known that the Angels questioned G-d at the splitting of the Sea of Reeds saying, “Why are you saving the Jewish people and killing the Egyptians? Both of them are guilty of worshiping idols!” With such a severe sin as idol worship on our hands, it is understood why G-d did not want to save us; for there can be no greater betrayal

then to serve idols.

Thus, even though we were no longer required to serve the Egyptians, according to G-d's attribute of strict judgment we would have remained there without change. For G-d to go out of His way and rescue us required added merit.

From where did we get this merit? The verse says, “I have heard its (the Jewish People's) outcry.... I shall descend to rescue it.” We were saved in the merit of our prayers, for in turning to G-d amidst our suffering we showed our unbreakable faith in a loving G-d, despite the fact that we were left by that same G-d to suffer. Instead of questioning and resenting G-d's treatment, we had faith, and as a result G-d overlooked our sins and we were freed from both our physical and spiritual bondage.

The story of Egypt is a timeless one which applies to every exile. Today, just as then, we are also guilty of turning away from G-d. But this does not mean that He stops loving us. When a child cries out, a parent feels the pain and will do anything to help. In these times, just before we merit the final redemption, when we are so weak, we must strengthen our faith and cry out to the Merciful One to come and save us.

From Planet to Planet

Joshua Barrett - Age 27 - Albuquerque, NM

Texas Tech — Bachelor's Degree in Business - Shoresh and Center Programs Alumnus

Coming from New Mexico and attending university in Lubbock, Texas, Josh worked as an Emergency Medical Technician after college. After New Mexico and Western Texas he understandably had little in the way of Jewish education, but he always had a strong Jewish identity. Josh sent an email to Ohr Somayach asking for information and received a very encouraging response from Rabbi Lubow, which convinced him to give Ohr Somayach a try.

When he got to Ohr Somayach he initially felt that he had landed on another planet. Because he projected such a fierce desire to learn, he was not placed in the introductory *gemara* class but rather in Rabbi Salenger's *shiur* in the Shoresh program. He had no idea

what *gemara* was and was utterly clueless as to why those two "characters" Rava and Abaye were blasting away at each other with hair-splitting broadsides about decidedly unspiritual mundane concerns. Being somewhat shy he didn't pipe up about his cluelessness for almost a full week. Eventually, however, he was moved to a more appropriate

group, thus beginning a 7-month experience in the Shoresh program. A year and a half later he returned to the Center program for another two years. As Josh expresses it, "Only because of the great support of the staff and students of the Ohr Somayach programs am I still (a year and a half after having left the Yeshiva and having married) able to learn full time in *kollel* here in Toronto."



"The Talmud Navigator"

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What is Ohr Somayach's new and innovative feature for assisting everyone to learn, analyze and remember the Talmud? Especially helpful for those learning Daf HaYomi!

Talmud Navigator – "Excel" in Talmud

The Talmud, often referred to as "The Sea of the Talmud", is vast both in breadth and depth. The *gemara* (Megillah 18b) describes the difficulty of maintaining a hold on all the Torah you learn, quoting Proverbs (23:5): "When you lift (or close) your eyes from it – and it disappears".

Chazal (Eruvin 54b) prescribe a method for gaining a true understanding and making a lasting acquisition of all the material you learn. Rav Chisda is quoted as saying, "The Torah can only be acquired with signs."

Talmud Navigator is an attempt to organize the Talmud in database form, mapping and charting the Talmud by tagging the various components and building blocks of the according to type and hierarchy. It is

based on the system outlined by the Ramchal in *Derech Tvunos*.

This system of textual organization serves as a self-help way to outline the *sugya* in a clearer fashion. It assists in promoting a better understanding of the flow of the *Gemara* and in facilitating summary and review. It is also an excellent tool for a less advanced *Gemara* learner to identify and grasp the logical flow and interconnections of its various components.

Each Thursday we will post a PDF file which maps the *gemara* studied in that week's *Daf Yomi* cycle. G-d willing, we plan in the future to make available the Excel file which enables the user to make his own condensed selections of the *Gemara*. For example: Highlighting the main statements, arguments, questions, conclusions or personalized anchor points of the *sugya* determined by the learner to facilitate his own review.

Talmud Navigator is prepared by Rabbi Hanoach Zweig and is available at www.ohr.edu

Pesach Q&A

Q

1. What is the holiday of Pesach called in the Torah?
2. Why did our ancestors carry dough when they left Egypt?
3. Where is there a hint in the Torah to the four cups of wine we drink at the Seder?
4. What do we do on Pesach Eve to remember the Korban Pesach?
5. What do these numbers represent – 10, 50 / 40, 200 / 50, 250?
6. How many mornings on Pesach do we say the entire Hallel?
7. How do we refer to Pesach in our *kiddush* and in our *tefillot*?
8. What are the three prohibitions regarding *chametz*?
9. When is the eating of matza obligatory according to the Torah?
10. What was the date of the crossing of Yam Suf?
11. How many days of Chol Hamo'ed are there in Eretz Israel and elsewhere?
12. Is there any limit to what may be done during Chol Hamo'ed?
13. How many times do we wash our hands during the Seder?
14. What cannot be done after eating the *afikomen*?
15. Why do we recline when drinking wine and eating matza?
16. What unusual thing do we do to stimulate children to ask questions?
17. What is the meaning of *datzach*, *adash*, *beachav*?
18. Who are the four sons alluded to in the Torah as requiring us to inform them regarding Pesach?
19. What is the meaning of *Dayenu* that we sing?
20. What is the Torah term on which the word Haggadah is based?

A

1. *Chag Hamatzot* (The Festival of Matzot).
2. They left in such a hurry that there was no time for the dough to rise.
3. The four expressions of redemption found in *Shemot* / Exodus 6:6-7.
4. Place a shankbone or other piece of meat on the Seder plate.
5. The number of plagues with which the Egyptians were smitten in Egypt and at the Sea according to three different Sages.
6. One morning in Eretz Israel and two everywhere else.
7. *Zman Cheiruteinu* (The Season of Our Freedom).
8. To eat, to benefit from and to possess.
9. On the first night of the holiday at the Seder.
10. The seventh day of Pesach – the 21st day of the month of Nisan.
11. In Eretz Israel 5 days and elsewhere only 4.
12. Definitely! Study the laws or consult a rabbi.
13. Twice - once before dipping *karpas* into salt water and once before eating matza. (A third time is *mayim achronim* before saying *birkat hamazon* – Grace after meals.)
14. We cannot eat nor drink wine.
15. In order to express our sense of nobility as free men.
16. We dip a vegetable in salt water before saying the Haggadah.
17. These are acronyms formed by the first letters of the ten plagues.
18. The wise son, the wicked one, the simple one and the one who does not know how to ask.
19. "It would have sufficed for us" – a reference to all the stages of benevolence which G-d granted us.
20. "*Vehegadeta levincha* – And you shall relate to your child" (*Shemot* 13:8).

The Ohr Somayach family wishes
you a Chag Kasher v'Somayach.

שמע ישראל

Abarbanel

ON PESACH

By Rabbi Pinchas Kasnett

Symbolic Meaning of the Mitzvot of Pesach

The root of the symbolic meaning of the Pesach *mitzvot*, and indeed of all the *mitzvot* in the Torah, lies in the fact that it is the duty of all G-d-fearing individuals to strive to use their time wisely to do what is good and right. Everyone should understand that the seven decades of the average individual's lifetime are analogous to the seven days of Creation. Just as G-d was engaged for the first six days in creative activity, Man should also use the first six decades of his life for creative and productive interaction with the world. Just as G-d 'rested' on the seventh day, so too should Man withdraw from material pursuits and connect with higher spiritual pursuits in the last decade of his life.

G-d's removal of the Jewish People from Egypt is comparable to childbirth. Just as the fetus emerges from the darkness of the womb into the light of the world at the cost of the severe pains of childbirth, so too the Jewish People had to suffer the tribulations of servitude before emerging as G-d's chosen people. This emergence took place in the springtime, for just as there are four seasons in the natural world, there are four stages in a man's lifetime; our springtime is a time of emergence, growth and maturation into young adulthood, when knowledge, wisdom and understanding sprouts forth.

Unfortunately, this maturation is paralleled by the emergence of our physical and material desires. The prohibition against eating leavened foods (*chametz*) symbolizes our requirement to distance ourselves from these material temptations. For this reason when we bring a sacrificial offering to G-d we may not add leavening or honey, as the leavening represents succumbing to excessive physical temptation and honey represents the sweetness and pleasure that follows. One is not punished for giving in to negative physical temptation until the age of 13, or the beginning of his fourteenth year. This is symbolized by the total prohibition against eating, owning, or deriving any benefit from leavening which begins on the fourteenth day of the month of Nissan.

The *Mishna* tells us that we are to search for leavened food on the fourteenth of Nissan by the light of a candle, which represents the soul of Mankind, as the verse in Proverbs (20, 27) states, "A man's soul is the candle of G-d." It is our duty to use this candle to search out and eliminate this leavening which symbolizes our negative actions and motivations. However, the flame cannot be so strong as to injure us or burn our homes, nor too weak which would prevent us from finding the leavening in the first place. Our job is to control our relationship with the physical world, not to withdraw from or destroy it. At the same time we must be able to recognize our failings and correct them. The *mitzvah* is to refrain from eating leavening for the entire seven days of the holiday, symbolic of our requirement to control our physical existence for our entire lifespan of seven decades. It is no coincidence that the number seven appears in regard to a wide variety of *mitzvot*: seven days of wedding celebration, seven days of ritual impu-

rity, seven days of mourning, the seven-year agricultural cycle, and others as well.

On the first and last days of Pesach, *melacha*, or creative activity, is prohibited. The first day represents the beginning of one's life, before he is capable of creative interaction with the world, and the last day represents the last decade of one's life, when one tends to withdraw from the material world and focus on fulfilling one's spiritual goals. However, the middle decades, like the middle days of the holidays, connect us actively to the material world, and refraining from leavening reminds us to take care to manage our relationship with the physical world properly.

The matza that we eat must be completely pure and free of any trace of leavening. Furthermore, we must guard the flour from any contact with moisture which might result in leavening from the time that the wheat is ground. This symbolizes that Man must protect his spiritual essence from the time that he begins to surround himself with the 'daily grind' of worldly affairs and the quest for his daily sustenance. We are also commanded to eat the matza with bitter herbs in order to symbolize that for the sake of our spiritual essence we may have to endure a measure of bitterness and pain in our physical existence.

The Pesach sacrifice also represents the triumph of Man's spiritual essence over the physical, as eating it at night, which symbolizes death, alludes to the freeing of the soul from the body. Eating it with a group alludes to the groups of friends and relatives who come to mourn the deceased. Finally, it can only be eaten roasted, since the aroma of roasted meat is swiftly dispersed, which alludes to the transient nature of physical existence.

What is clearly apparent is that the holiday of Pesach hints at Man's creation, his lifespan, the conquest of his evil inclination, the pain associated with his physical existence and the eventual fulfillment of his goal of spiritual connection to G-d. This is why the holiday is described as applying to all generations. We are taught in the Talmud that everyone at the Pesach Seder should view himself as if he were actually part of the exodus from Egypt. This means much more than imagining oneself to be present at an historical event. Rather, it is the root of all the holidays and *mitzvot* of the entire Torah, as this injunction refers to the struggles and obligations over the entire lifespan of an individual.

After Pesach we are commanded to count seven weeks, culminating in the giving of the Torah at the holiday of Shavout. This is another reference to the seven decades of Man's life, all of which should be directed to attaining the spiritual perfection which the nation experienced at the giving of the Torah at Sinai. It was fitting that G-d arranged this when the Jews shed the shackles of Egyptian idolatry and were thus prepared to receive the truth of the Torah at Sinai.