

THE BENJAMIN AND ROSE BERGER TORAH TO-GO®

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ESTABLISHED BY RABBI HYMAN Z"L & ANN ARBESFELD

Who Am I? Jewish Identity in Our Times



Dedicated in memory of Cantor Jerome and Deborah Simons



Special Tribute Section to
Rabbi Zevulun Charlop zt"l



ישיבת רבנו יצחק אלחנן

Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary

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FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

“*Mi Anochi*,” Who am I? These are the words that Moshe expresses to G-d when he is tasked to lead the Jewish people out of Egypt (Shemos 3:11). Moshe’s question was not about his identity, but rather whether he was worthy (Rashi) or capable (Ramban) of leading the Jewish people. Yet we know that earlier in his life, Moshe asked “Who am I” in a different way. The Torah records that Moshe grew up in the house of Pharaoh and when he got older, he went out to see his brothers, saw the suffering of the Jewish people and immediately acted in their defense. Malbim explains that this was extraordinary. Moshe could have easily remained in the house of Pharaoh and lived a life of luxury, but instead, he chose to identify with his Jewish brethren which put him on a path that led to his exile.

Moshe’s Jewish identity story is just one of many. From a certain perspective, the Pesach story is about the Jewish

people reclaiming their identity. Rabbi Soloveitchik (*Festival of Freedom* pp. 46-54) describes how Pharaoh’s goal was to make the Jewish people slaves of the state. Rabbi Soloveitchik notes that “usually, the slaves of the state lose their identity.” However, the Jewish people didn’t consider themselves “Pharaoh’s slaves” (*avdei Pharaoh*) but rather slaves of Pharaoh (*avadim L’Pharaoh*) — “They did not completely lose their love of freedom and their spiritual heritage.” It was this spiritual identity that enabled the transition upon their freedom to become *avdei HaShem*.

Since Oct. 7, many Jews have started to think about their Jewish identity. For some, the question is very basic, “What does it mean to be a Jew in 2024?” For others, the question might be more nuanced: “What is my religious identity?”; “Which group(s) do I identify with?”; “Is my identity aligned with my values?”; “How does my identity impact and influence



those around me?” In this issue of the Benjamin and Rose Berger Torah To-Go®, we share insights into these questions and we encourage you, the reader, to continue this conversation with your family and friends.

It is our hope and prayer that G-d brings us ongoing salvation, that He brings the hostages home, and allows our people to live safely and securely. May He speedily end the galut and bring about the ultimate redemption.

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to hear
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Strengthening Ourselves, Healing our World

This has been a very challenging year for the Jewish people. Our sense of collective and individual vulnerability has been on display for the entire world to see.

A common refrain we have heard throughout the year is “I have no words.” And while that feeling may be true, the truth is we need words. In our darkest moments, we need to find words of self-expression, words of comfort and healing. In our tradition, we are blessed to have great repositories of these words.

The book I turn to in these moments, is Tehillim, the Book of Psalms.

In Psalms chapter 147 we read:

הַרְפָּא לְשִׁבוּרֵי לֵב וּמְחַבֵּשׁ לְעֵצְבוֹתָם:
God heals their broken hearts and binds up their wounds.

God is described as the healer of broken hearts and the mender of our wounds. And looking out at the Jewish people, this is the form of divine comfort we so desperately need in this moment. But how is this achieved? Two directions are suggested in the psalm.



Rabbi Dr. Ari Berman

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בוֹנֵה יְרוּשָׁלַם ה' נִדְחֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל יְכַנֵּס:
The Lord rebuilds Jerusalem; He gathers in the exiles of Israel.

הַרְפָּא לְשִׁבוּרֵי לֵב וּמְחַבֵּשׁ לְעֵצְבוֹתָם:
He heals their broken hearts, and binds up their wounds.

God gathers in all those suffering in exile, all those who feel homeless, rootless, disconnected, and disenfranchised. Healing begins with a sense of community. With knowing

that none of us are alone but we are here with each other and for each other.

Then Tehillim adds something else in the next verse:

מוֹנֵה מִסְפָּר לַכּוֹכָבִים לְכֻלָּם שְׁמוֹת יִקְרָא:

He reckoned the number of the stars; to each He gave its name.

God gives each star a name. What does that mean? God is not a scientist who classifies each star and galaxy in the universe. I would suggest that name here refers to purpose. *L'chulam sheimot yikra*—everything around us, and within each of us has a purpose. And sometimes when we are most broken, our lives can feel purposeless, empty and lost. *L'chulam sheimot yikra* – each person, every difficult story, every period of pain in our lives—each has a name, each has a purpose.

We heal through our collective identity by coming together and we heal by giving names to our struggles, by discovering the purpose of our individual lives, and creating meaning even in the darkest moments of our lives.

This is the central theme of Pesach, the holiday in which we anchor our individual identity within the context of our national identity. While Pesach is the celebration of the birth of the Jewish people, the Rabbis teach that each individual is to experience this night as if he or she was liberated from Egypt. In a broader sense, our personal stories are not only part of the greater whole but also run parallel to the story of redemption. We too have our struggles and triumphs. We too at times feel the weight of our surroundings and moments of liberation.

Perhaps this year, more than others, our individual feelings mirror those of the entire Jewish people. When our soldiers are at risk, we are all in fear. When our brothers and sisters are still being held in captivity, we are all in turmoil. When Israel is at war, we are all called to service.

We pray to the *rofei l'shevurei lev umechabesh l'atzvotam*, the healer of broken hearts and binder of their wounds: May he bring the hostages home, protect our soldiers and bless our students and families, our children and families. May we find the words, the strength, and the purpose to bring healing individually and collectively. May Hashem mend our wounds. And bring redemption to all.



See more shiurim and articles from
Rabbi Dr. Berman at
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PESACH: PERSONAL AND NATIONAL DIMENSIONS OF OURSELVES

A number of years ago, I accompanied students on a trip to Poland to visit various tragic sites of the Holocaust. One of my students approached me during the trip to discuss the complicated emotion she felt as a Jew of Sephardi descent who had no relatives who were killed or displaced by the Holocaust. While she experienced sadness, she also felt somewhat guilty and removed as others felt the devastation more personally than she did. She wondered what her place was in the tragedy. I reflected on this dissonance this past year when I watched the horrors of Oct. 7 play out from afar, across the world. I wondered, as my student had years before, did I have a place in this tragedy, which my friends and family were experiencing firsthand?

This question of personal experience, of both tragedy and redemption, is an important part of the Pesach story. One of the opening lines of the Haggadah, in which we begin to discuss the Exodus, directly addresses this disconnect.

Anyone reciting the words of the Seder was not present during the slavery nor at the redemption:

עֲבָדִים הָיינוּ לְפָרַעַה בְּמִצְרַיִם, וַיִּצְיָאֵנוּ ה'
אֱלֹהֵינוּ מִשָּׁם בְּיַד חֲזָקָה וּבְזֶרַע נְטוּיָה. וְאֵלֹהֵינוּ לֹא
הוֹצִיאָנוּ הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא אֶת אֲבוֹתֵינוּ מִמִּצְרַיִם,
הָרִי אָנוּ וּבְנֵינוּ וּבְנֵי בְנֵינוּ מִשְׁעָבָדִים הָיינוּ
לְפָרַעַה בְּמִצְרַיִם.

We were slaves to Pharaoh in the land of Egypt. And the Lord, our God, took us out from there with a strong hand and an outstretched forearm. And if the Holy One, blessed be He, had not taken our ancestors from Egypt, behold we and our children and our children's children would [all] be enslaved to Pharaoh in Egypt.

By immediately focusing us on our personal stake in the redemption, the Haggadah bridges the expanse of time and charges us with the mission to connect to the redemption story *as if* it had happened to us and our children. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, in explaining this verse, hones in on the idea of personal versus national identity:

As a nation, we have a national



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memory and identity. So when the Haggadah speaks of our experience in Egypt as slaves, while this refers to a specific generation and historical time period, as a nation we have that experience implanted in our memory and identity.¹

This idea of the implantation of national identity may be true for those who are descendants of the slaves who left Egypt, but does it extend to a convert who joined the nation later and is certainly not a personal descendant of the Egyptian slaves? Dr. Micha Goodman

¹ <https://rabbisacks.org/ceremony-celebration-family-edition/pesach-family-edition>.

posits² that the concept of a personal versus a national identity is reflected in the debate of two Tannaim, whose opinions are found in a Mishnah in *Bikkurim* and a Gemara Yerushalmi. The debate revolves around the main text of our Pesach Seder, the recitation of *mikra bikkurim*, a passage said by a farmer as he brings his first fruits to the Mikdash. In it the farmer recounts the history of the Jewish people starting either from Avraham or from Yaakov, until we reach the land of Israel. The text states:

(ה) וְעָנִיתָ וְאָמַרְתָּ לִפְנֵי ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֲרָמִי אֲבֹד אָבִי וַיֵּרֶד מִצְרָיִם וַיִּגְרֶשׁ שָׁם בְּמַטְי מִמֶּנּוּ וַיְהִי שָׁם לְגוֹי גָדוֹל עָצוּם וָרֹב. (ו) וַיִּרְעוּ אֲתָנּוּ הַמִּצְרָיִם וַיַּעֲבִדוּנוּ וַיִּתְּנוּ עָלֵינוּ עֲבָדָה קָשָׁה. (ז) וַנִּצְעַק אֶל ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ וַיִּשְׁמָע ה' אֶת קוֹלֵנוּ וַיִּרְא אֶת עַנְיֵנוּ וְאֶת עֲמָלֵנוּ וְאֶת לְחֻצְנוֹ. (ח) וַיִּצְאֵנוּ ה' מִמִּצְרָיִם בְּיַד חֲזָקָה וּבְזֵרַע נְטִייה וּבְמַרְא גֹדֵל וּבְאֹתוֹת וּבְמִפְתָּיִם. (ט) וַיְבָאֵנוּ אֶל הַמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה וַיִּתֵּן לָנוּ אֶת הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת אֲרָץ זָבַת חֶלֶב וּדְבָשׁ. ... My father was a fugitive Aramean.

*He went down to Egypt with meager numbers and sojourned there; but there he became a great and very populous nation. The Egyptians dealt harshly with us and oppressed us; they imposed heavy labor upon us. We cried to Hashem, the God of our ancestors, and Hashem heard our plea and saw our plight, our misery, and our oppression. Hashem freed us from Egypt by a mighty hand, by an outstretched arm and awesome power, and by signs and portents, bringing us to this place and giving us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey.*³

A question arises: Can a convert who brings bikkurim recite this text? The Mishnah in *Bikkurim* 1:4 states that in fact he cannot—Yaakov was not his forefather, his ancestors did not go down to Egypt, did not experience

the affliction or the salvation of yetziat Mitzrayim, and were not brought by Hashem to Eretz Yisrael. Hence, decides the Tanna in the Mishna, the convert bringing his bikkurim is silent.

R. Yehuda in a *baraita* brought in the Yerushalmi 1:4 disagrees:

תָּנִי בְשֵׁם רַבִּי יְהוּדָה גֵּר עֲצָמוּ מִבֵּיא וְקוֹרָא. מַה טְּעָמָא כִּי אֵב הַמוֹן גּוֹיִם נִתְתִּיד. לְשַׁעֲבַר הַיִּיתָ אֵב לְאָרֶם. וְעַבְשִׁיו מִיָּפוֹן וְהִילָךְ אֶתְהָ אֵב לְכָל-הַגּוֹיִם.

It was stated in the name of Rabbi Judah: The proselyte himself brings and makes the declaration. What is the reason? (Gen. 17:5) "For I made you the father of the multitude of Gentiles." In the past you were the father of Aram, from now onwards you will be father of all Gentiles.

Since Abraham was the father of many nations including gentiles, Rabbi Yehuda concludes that the convert is included in the history of the Jewish people and therefore would say the *mikra bikkurim*.

The Rambam⁴ rules in favor of R. Yehuda, explaining,

הַגֵּר מִבֵּיא וְקוֹרָא שְׂנַאֲמַר לְאֲבָרְהָם (בְּרֵאשִׁית י"ז ה) "אֵב הַמוֹן גּוֹיִם נִתְתִּיד" הָרִי הוּא אֵב כָּל הָעוֹלָם כְּלוֹ שְׂנַכְנְסִין תַּחַת כַּנְּפֵי שְׂכִינָה.

A convert may bring the first fruits and make the declaration, for [Genesis 17:5] states with regard to Abraham: I have made you a father to a multitude of nations. Implied is that he is the father of all those who enter under the shelter of the Divine presence. For he taught all mankind faith.

Rambam said as much in his letter to Obadiah the convert in response to Obadiah's question: was he as a convert allowed to say prayers that included words such as, "Our God and God of

our fathers," "You who have sanctified us through Your commandments," "You who have brought us out of the land of Egypt," and others? Rambam answers emphatically that he can.

...[S]ince you have come under the wings of the Divine Presence and confessed to the Lord, no difference exists between you and us, and all miracles done to us have been done as it were to us and to you ...There is no difference whatever between you and us. You shall certainly say the blessing, "Who has chosen us," "Who has given us," "Who have taken us for Your own" and "Who has separated us"; for the Creator, may He be extolled, has indeed chosen you and separated you from the nations and given you the Torah.

According to Rambam, anyone who accepts the ways of Hashem, which Avraham taught, is counted as one of Avraham's children, whether biologically related or not. It is the mandate, not the bloodline, that provides the identity. It is the association with the national mission—not the personal experience—that makes the convert a member of the Jewish people who experienced the history of the Jewish story.

According to this view of the Yerushalmi, which the Rambam learns *l'halacha*, the *mikra bikkurim* that forms the main structure of our Pesach Seder is not merely recounting the personal history of the Jewish people from their founding until their settling of Israel. If that were the case, the Rambam would have ruled like the opinion in the Mishnah in *Bikkurim*, which clearly reads the story as a personal and familial narrative. Instead, the *mikra bikkurim*

² Mifleget Hamachshavot podcast.

³ Devarim 26:5-9.

⁴ Mishneh Torah Hil. Bikkurim 4:3.

transcends the actual story and becomes a story about the national mission, the identity of the Jewish people—one that is open to and inclusive of anyone who partakes of the mission. Anyone who associates themselves with the children of Avraham Avinu becomes, de facto, an actual child of Avraham's mission. It was not necessary to personally experience the story of yetziat Mitzrayim, as certainly the ancestors of the convert did not; rather the message of yetziat Mitzrayim is the core identity that we are discussing at the Pesach Seder.

Our national identity is emphasized again at the crescendo of the Maggid ceremony. Before raising our glass of wine, we declare:

בְּכָל־דּוֹר וְדוֹר חַיֵּב אָדָם לְרַאוֹת אֶת־עַצְמוֹ כְּאִלוֹ
הוּא יֵצֵא מִמִּצְרַיִם, שְׁנֹאמֵר: וְהִגִּדְתָּ לְבִנְךָ בַּיּוֹם
הַהוּא לֵאמֹר, בְּעֵבוֹר זֶה עָשָׂה ה' לִי בְּצֵאתִי
מִמִּצְרַיִם. לֹא אֶת־אֲבוֹתַיִנוּ בְּלֶבֶד גָּאֵל הַקְּדוֹשׁ
בְּרוּךְ הוּא, אֶלָּא אַף אוֹתֵנוּ גָּאֵל עָמְהֶם.

In each and every generation, a person is obligated to see himself as if he left Egypt, as it is stated (Exodus 13:8): "And you shall explain to your son on that day: For the sake of this, did the Lord do [this] for me in my going out of Egypt." Not only our ancestors did the Holy One, blessed be He, redeem, but rather also us [together] with them did He redeem.

No longer is the story of Pesach one that happened to a distant people millennia ago, rather it recurs every day and every year to each of us as we annually accept the national mission of the Seder. What happened on a personal level is superseded by the national, by an examination of what this story means to us, generations later, who are picking up the mantle of that generation and dedicating ourselves year after year, to that very same covenant that the Jews dedicated

themselves to so many years ago. It is not the specific history of Avraham or Yaakov or the Jews who left Egypt and entered Israel, but what those Jews represented—a belief in one God, an understanding of God's role in history, a dedication to the mission of the Jewish people to spread the understanding of God and to build a just and moral society. All who include themselves in that covenantal experience are children of Avraham Avinu, and therefore say the *mikra bikkurim* as if it had actually happened to their family.

This is the answer I wish I had told my student sitting on a bus outside a mass grave in Poland. The Holocaust is indeed a personal story for so many, but more importantly it is a national story. It happened to some families and not to others, but it happened to all of Klal Yisrael and takes its place among the litany of tragedies that we memorialize at the Seder:

שבכל דור ודור עומדים עלינו לכלותינו והקדוש
ברוך הוא מצילנו מידם.

Rather in each generation, they stand [against] us to destroy us, but the Holy One, blessed be He, rescues us from their hand.

We memorialize the communities of Speyer, Worms and Mainz, the communities ripped apart by the Crusaders and other tragedies during the Kinnot recitation. Whether those tragedies happened to us or not, they have become part of our national memory and mourning.⁵ The Holocaust is not just a story of a tragedy that befell some of the Jews, but a tragedy that hit right at the heart of our mission, one that bound us together as Jews, and one that we feel as a Jewish people.

This sense of mission and purpose was not only reflected on Oct. 7 and the aftermath, but was awakened in Jews

across the globe. While we personally sit on the sidelines of the war, our national and covenantal identity is not only present, but strengthened. Earlier this year I had the honor of accompanying my Stern students and their Yeshiva College counterparts on Operation Torah Shield 3, visiting Israel to volunteer, learn Torah, and express our oneness with the Jewish people. One of the most common questions I heard over the course of the trip was, "Why are you here? Why did you leave your homes to enter a war zone?" The question took me by surprise; where else would I want to be? I had a hard time formulating an answer that summed up what it meant to me to have the privilege to come to Israel and show support for my nation. Perhaps the answer is this: *mikra bikkurim*, our national identity is bound up with those who live afar who are sacrificing not only for themselves but for the Jewish people.

As a Jew who lives in America, I cannot recite my personal story of being in Israel on Oct. 7. And while many, many of my friends' children are fighting in the IDF—my children right now are not. I certainly experience some of what my student felt visiting Poland—guilt at not being personally at the center of this Jewish story. And yet, the events of Oct. 7 and the aftermath have had the impact of reminding the Jewish people, not only in Israel but around the world, of the sanctity of the mission of the Jewish people, of the covenantal nature of our experience, of our unity as a nation that transcends the boundaries of the personal and enters the national story. When we raise our four cups this Pesach, let us tell our children and ourselves what it means to have a national identity, and to be part of the Jewish story, children of Avraham Avinu.

⁵ I am grateful to my colleague Dr. Yaelle Frohlich for this insight.

GENESIS

A BLUEPRINT FOR JEWISH IDENTITY AND MISSION

October 7 ignited an existential quest: some Jews re-examined the bedrock of their identity, others confronted its very presence in their lives for the first time. This introspective journey involves a challenge to pinpoint the defining principles that underpin their humanity. For some, Judaism itself has become a source of stigma and confusion. Faced with intense hostility from various external and internal sources, individuals are compelled to engage in a personal struggle, making choices that lead to the discovery of the essence of “Israel” within themselves.

Bereshit as the Blueprint of Jewish Identity

The book of Bereshit plays a pivotal role in the formation of the Jewish nation. It was during the time leading up to the giving of the Torah at Sinai that Moshe taught the nation of Israel, a group that had so recently sunk to unprecedented depths of spiritual depravity in Egypt,

the teachings of Bereshit (Exodus 24:7, Rashi). Despite witnessing miraculous events and undergoing a transformative journey with Moshe into the desert, their faith remained fragile until the Sinaitic experience. As Rambam notes, the miracles they had witnessed were performed by Hashem as responses to immediate necessities, and thus produced a faith that was lacking. Only at Sinai did a lasting national identity form.

מְכַלְל שְׂקֵדִים דָּבָר זֶה לֹא הָאֱמִינוּ בּוֹ נֶאֱמָנוּת
שֶׁהִיא עוֹמֶדֶת לְעוֹלָם אֲלֵא נֶאֱמָנוּת שֶׁיֵּשׁ אַחֲרֶיהָ
הִרְהוּר וּמַחְשָׁבָה:

It is implied that prior to this, they did not have everlasting faith but rather faith that was mixed with contemplation and consideration.

Hilchot Yesodei HaTorah 8:1

The lingering doubt among the people raises a profound question: What inspired their commitment to a God whose nature they were uncertain about? Rashi provides an answer by pointing to the book of Bereishit. It was



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this foundational text that convinced them and motivated them to declare the famous words of “*naaseh v’nishma*” a pledge of allegiance to obey and listen to the one God.

This essay will explore what makes the book of Bereishit unique in solidifying Jewish identity and mission. What about the book of Bereishit convinced the doubters of certainty and conviction? This book is fundamental—it is **reishit** it is the foundation on which all else is built. It

enabled the first generation to commit to God, to commit to our Jewish identity, and it contains the secret that enables each and every student of Torah to commit again—individually in his or her generation. To delve into this inquiry, we must examine the overarching themes, characters, and pivotal moments within the narrative.

God's First Attempt at Connection

Leon Kass, in his book *The Beginning of Wisdom*, offers insights into the first eleven chapters of Genesis, describing them as a response to the calamities resulting from “human life uninstructed.” The narrative unfolds as God attempts to connect with humanity, creating beings in His image. However, at each stage, there is failure, and man continues to devolve. Kass identifies five episodes marking this devolution: the temptation in the Garden, fratricide in the first family, the Flood as a response to societal violence, Ham violating Noah thereby destroying family sanctity, and the Tower of Babel representing an autocratic and god-like aspiration. The extremes of chaos and totalitarianism are both rejected by God (Kass, 2006, 10).

These initial chapters also depict humanity losing its way religiously. The verse (Genesis 4:26, Rashi, Rambam) indicates the beginning of idol worship in the third generation, and the Tower of Babel story reveals people seeking to make a name for themselves (11:4) rather than aligning with divine purpose. The Torah is leading us to see the misguided path humanity has chosen.

The reader begins to wonder if there is an alternative to all of this.

The Need for the Jewish People

With Avraham's entrance, God presents a different approach, seeking connection through a specific individual and family. Avraham is given a mission to be a blessing to all families of the earth and to teach justice and righteousness (*venivrechu becha kol mishpechot ha'adamah* 12:3)—Through you, God tells Avraham, blessing will flow to the families of the earth. Through you, my messages of “*tzedek umishpat*” will reach the world. God tells us (18:19), “I chose you Avraham because I knew you, and I knew that you would teach your children to do what is right and just.” Rabbi Menachem Leibtag writes, “Avraham Avinu was chosen to fulfill a **specific mission**—to become the forefather of a nation that will lead all others to a theocentric existence and refocus mankind's energies in the proper direction. Thus, Avraham Avinu's distinction came not as a **reward** for any specific deed, but rather for a **specific purpose**.” God chose Avraham for what he **will do**—And Avraham does! (Leibtag, n.d.)

Upon reaching the *aretz asher areka*, “land that God will show him (12:1),” he builds an altar and “calls out in the name of God” (12:8).

Ramban explains that Avraham built altars and taught people about God:

והנכון שהיה קורא בקול גדול שם לפני המזבח
את שם ה' מודיע אותו ואלהותו לבני אדם.
The correct explanation is that he would call out the name of God with a great voice in front of the altar in order to publicize Him and His divinity to other people.

God changes Avraham's name in chapter 17:5 from Avram to Avraham because: “*av hamon goyin netaticha*—You will be the father of many nations.” Rabbi Naftali Tzvi Yehudah Berlin in his

peirush, *Ha'amek Davar*, explains that this is not meant in the biological sense but rather in the ideological sense.

ולדבר זה הזהיר הקב"ה את אברהם שיהי רצונו להשקיע דעתו להיות לאב המון גוים להכירם את ה'.

On this matter, God commanded Avraham that he should commit himself to being the father of nations to teach them to recognize God.

Yitzchak consolidates this legacy, re-digging wells (ch. 26) and continuing his father's teachings. In 25:19 Isaac's main achievement is described as being the son of Avraham:

וְאֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדֹת יִצְחָק בְּרֵאֲבָרָה אֲבֵרָהם הוֹלִיד אֶת יִצְחָק:

This is the story of Isaac son Abraham. Abraham produced Isaac.

In his book, *Biblical Images*, Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz describes the contribution of Yitzchak in the following way: “This apparently was Isaac's essential problem: to find his own place in a world dominated by the genius of his father. He did the only thing left for him to do: he carried on... The capacity to persist is no less important than the power to begin” (Steinsaltz, 2010, 33). Yitzchak's role is to persist in the mission initiated by his father.

The More Yaakov Assimilates, the Less Assimilated He Becomes

The complexity of Yaakov's story presents a unique challenge involving a struggle for identity. In what might be argued as one of the most painful of all scenes in the book of Bereishit, Yaakov stands in front of his blind father Yitzchak, clothed in the hunting skins of his brother Esav, and his father asks him, “Who are you, my son?” He responds, “I am Esav your firstborn” (*anochi Esav bechorecha*).

As a result of this moment of falsehood, Yaakov will need to flee from the only life he has ever known. He will spend the next two decades living in a foreign environment and he will never see his beloved mother again. This moment that his father describes as trickery (*ba achicha b'mirma* 27:35) will echo painfully throughout the rest of his life, which will be marked by the trickery that others will impose upon him.

Yaakov flees from his brother Esav who wants to kill him in revenge for having stolen his blessings. He falls asleep on the way to the house of his uncle Lavan, effectively taking the reverse journey that his mother Rivka, and grandfather Avraham, had taken before him.

That night he had a dream. When he awakens, he cries out that God is in this place and he had not known. The exact words are *va'anochi lo yadati* (28:16), and I didn't know.

The reader of Chumash cannot help but hear the echo of the last time Yaakov used the word *anochi*—when he claimed to be someone he wasn't. Rabbi Dr. Zvi Grumet writes, "How those words, 'I am Esau, your firstborn,' must be haunting him the way they have made readers squirm for thousands of years. No wonder that when he is startled awake in the middle of the night he blurts out, '*Anokhi lo yadati*,' which

"To be complete we do not need Esau's blessings of wealth and power... The face we bear is the image we see reflected in the face of G-d when we wrestle with Him and refuse to let go."

can easily be read as, 'I don't even know who I am.' Jacob's loneliness is beyond words; he has lost even himself" (Grumet, 2017, 318).

How will Yaakov go about reclaiming himself? What is the process that he must undertake to rediscover who he is and reclaim his identity? This is not something that can happen in the house of Lavan. God Himself must come and tell him to return to the land of his forefathers:

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל יַעֲקֹב שׁוּב אֶל אֶרֶץ אַבְרָהָם וְלְמוֹלַדְתֶּךָ וְאֶהְיֶה עִמָּךְ.

Hashem said to Yaakov, "Return to the land of your fathers and to your family and I will be with you."

Bereishit 31:3

We hear echoes of the language used to motivate Avraham so many years before to leave this same location. But this time Yaakov is being told to **return** to the land of his fathers and birthplace.

The reader is left wondering, what would have happened had God not intervened?

וַיִּנְגַב יַעֲקֹב אֶת לֵב לָבוֹן הָאֲרָמִי עַל בְּלִי הַגִּיד לוֹ כִּי בָרַח הוּא.

Yaakov stole the heart of Lavan the Aramean in that he did not tell him that he was fleeing.

Bereishit 31:20

Yaakov goes, once again, running away. In the past, he had tricked his father. This time the Torah describes him as tricking his father-in-law. He is still lost.

The Struggle is the Essence

As he enters the land of his father and prepares to face his brother Esav for the first time in two decades, Yaakov hears that his brother is coming to greet him with four hundred men. Yaakov is terrified that this means war. He prepares gifts, divides his camp to fight

or flee, and prays to God for help.

The night before the reunion, he finds himself alone on the other side of the river. We read one of the most mysterious passages in the Torah. Yaakov has a wrestling match with an unnamed man. At the conclusion of the fight, Yaakov requests that the man bless him, to which he responds by changing his name from Yaakov to Yisrael, the name that our nation still carries. This episode is the key to discovering Jewish Identity in Tanach.

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks writes that Jewish identity is defined by Yaakov's shift from wanting to be Esav to embracing his unique destiny. The name change to Yisrael symbolizes a struggle not for wealth and power but to represent God and bring His messages to humanity.

It is equally clear what was transacted in the wrestling match the previous night. It was Jacob's inner battle with existential truth. Who was he? ... "I will not let you go until you bless me," he says to his adversary. The unnamed stranger responds in a way that defies expectation... It is as if the man said to him, "In the past, you struggled to be Esau. In the future you will struggle not to be Esau but to be yourself. In the past you held on to Esau's heel. In the future you will hold on to G-d. You will not let go of Him; He will not let go of You. Now let go of Esau so that you can be free to hold on to G-d."

... That is the stunning truth at which Jacob finally arrived, and to which the name Israel is testimony. To be complete we do not need Esau's blessings of wealth and power. Ours is another face, an alternative destiny, a different blessing. The face we bear is the image we see reflected in the face of G-d when we wrestle with Him and refuse to let go. Not by accident was this episode the

birth of our identity (our “name”) as Israel... (Sacks, 2009, 219)

So, what is the essence of Jewish identity as revealed through the book of Bereishit?

This mission is not one of material wealth or power but of a spiritual and moral calling. It is a journey that began with Avraham, continued through Yitzchak, and found its profound realization in Yaakov's wrestling match on the banks of the river. The Jewish people are in a continuous struggle to uphold the name of Hashem and to represent His teachings in the world. We have a mission, reiterated in daily prayers and emphasized during Passover, reminding the Jewish people of their unique calling:

אָנִי ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִי אֶתְכֶם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לְהִיוֹת לָכֶם לְאֱלֹהִים אָנִי ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם.

I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, to be your God. I am the Lord your God.

Numbers 15:41

Conclusion

As the Jewish people continue to navigate the complexities of our identity and mission, the book of Bereishit stands as a timeless guide, offering profound insights into the core of Jewish identity. It explores the nature of humanity, the challenges of faith, and the transformative power of our continuous struggle with nations and with God Himself to uphold the Divine name. It is a narrative that invites introspection and reflection, challenging us to rediscover our unique calling in each generation. At this historic moment in which we find ourselves, where so many of us are searching and so many of our brothers and sisters with little or no formal Jewish background are confronting their Jewish heritage for the first time, it behooves us all to reconnect and to connect others to our fathers, Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov.

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Reversing the Trend

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks on Jewish Identity

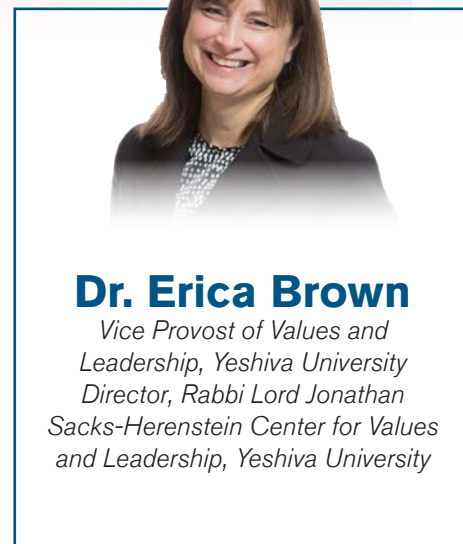
The Seder is our story-telling evening; we sit with family and friends around the table and discuss our ancient salvation and our belief in the Jewish present and future. In his Haggadah, Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, zt”l, writes that “Pesach is the festival of Jewish identity. It is the night on which we tell our children who they are” (*The Chief Rabbi’s Haggadah*, p. 15). For so many of us, our children already know who they are. The Seder is a confirmation of a story we are continuously reviewing and telling.

As religiously observant Jews, we center our lives around *tefilla*, *Talmud Torah*, and *halakha*: prayer, Torah study, and Jewish law. We build our distinctiveness through the constancy of synagogue and school attendance. In-marriage is the norm. We are defined and nourished by our relationship to Israel, which does not waver with changing political winds. The current war has only bolstered that commitment.

Jewish identity feels secure across the generations. It is, for us, a thick identity, but one which, nevertheless, we cannot take for granted.

Yet the majority of diaspora Jewry does not share this confidence. In an August 2023 study conducted by the Institute for Jewish Policy Research, Dr. Daniel Staetsky concludes that nearly 70% of secular Jews in the United States and almost 50% in Europe are married to non-Jews. As these numbers grow, the practical implications for Judaism are staggering and shattering. As a people, we are simply losing too many to attrition. Jewish identity for most is thin, precipitously thin.

The distinction between thick and thin identities was first made by Gilbert Ryle in his 1949 book *The Concept of Mind*. The anthropologist Clifford Geertz used this categorization in his famous work of ethnography, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, and political theorist Michael Walzer used it in *Thick and Thin: Moral Arguments at Home and Abroad*. It is



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instructive when thinking about Jewish identity. Thick identities are generally comprised of emotional, cognitive, and behavioral commitments. We are who we are, and we care what we care about no matter the time or circumstance. Race, religion, gender, and familial relationships usually represent thick identities for most of us.

Thin identities are those we choose to adopt, even take seriously, but are

often temporary or do not involve deep practices or beliefs. They shift, morph, or disappear over time. All of us have aspects of our identities that are more stable and those that are more fluid and malleable.

Unfortunately, we often keep the gift of Jewish belonging, literacy and observance that thickens Orthodox identity to ourselves. Most of us do not share our Judaism broadly enough. If anything, we invest time and resources in protecting our spiritual lives and communities, tightening our hold on tradition, and closing others out, advertently or inadvertently. While the Haggadah opens with an invitation to all those who are hungry, the spiritually starving and those who do not even know how to ask are far away from our tables. The invitation to participate was never issued.

Rabbi Sacks, however, gave Judaism's gifts to the masses, distilling complex ideas into accessible teachings. He dedicated much of his writing and his rabbinate to strengthening those with thin Jewish identities. He understood that engaging and inspiring the community's margins was an act of Jewish leadership and responsibility. His very first book after he became Chief Rabbi was actually devoted to the subject, as is evident from its title: *Will We Have Jewish Grandchildren?* This is perhaps his shortest book, and since its publication in 1994, almost thirty years ago, we are still asking the same question.

Aware of the statistics, Rabbi Sacks used

his platform to contribute positively to changing the demographics by mining ancient wisdom and using it to address contemporary familial and social problems. He created a broad agenda for Jewish continuity in the United Kingdom and said that the first task is to create "a vision and a sense of urgency" (p. 119). He did not shy away from the truth and the difficult data: "There is nothing inevitable about Jewish identity in the diaspora, and there never was. In Israel one is Jewish by living in a Jewish state, surrounded by a Jewish culture and Jewish institutions. But elsewhere, being Jewish means going against the grain, being counter-cultural" (p. 38). He understood that there was a communal reckoning that needed to take place to reverse the trend and saw other Jewish leaders as accountability partners in the work with him.

Returning to the Passover theme, in *Will We Have Jewish Grandchildren?*, Rabbi Sacks cites the Gerrer Rebbe that the Four Sons of the Haggadah represent four generations. The wise son represents the traditions of home in the immigrant generation. The rebellious son assimilates. The simple son, the third generation, is confused; he has religious grandparents but not religious parents. The child of the fourth generation does not know how or what to ask. In each generation, there is a dilution of tradition. Rabbi Sacks addresses this directly:

"Our children are children of the fourth generation. Already it is clear that what we took for granted, they do not. They

do not take it for granted that they will belong to an Orthodox synagogue or indeed any synagogue. They do not take it for granted that they will marry, or marry another Jew, or stay married. They do not take it for granted that they will have Jewish children or that it is important to do so. Nothing can be taken for granted in the fourth generation, least of all in the secular, open society in which even a common moral code is lacking." (p. 60)

Rabbi Sacks challenges us to care about the loss of Jewish community and tradition not only through his writings but also, and primarily, through his personal leadership. This is what he paid attention to and asked the same of us: "The secret of Jewish continuity is that no people has ever devoted more of its energies to continuity. The focal point of Jewish life is the transmission of a heritage across the generations" (p. 34). Investing energy in the Jewish continuity of those most at risk was the focus of much of his rabbinate, his writing, and his teaching; he created a communal agenda and brought others into his vision so that he could answer the question that formed the title of the book in the affirmative.

Within our families and enclaves, we, too, can answer affirmatively that we have thick Jewish identities, Jewish grandchildren and students who will share and pass down the story of our people. But can we say that we have done all we can as individuals to strengthen the thin Jewish identity of our neighbors, friends, and colleagues? As Orthodox institutions, is this on our communal agendas? If it is not, then what kind of Jewish future will we have together?

Let all who are hungry, come and partake. There is always room for you at our table.



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THE BAD DAYS

גר שבא להתגייר בזמן הזה אומרים לו מה ראית שבאת להתגייר אי אתה יודע שישראל בזמן הזה דויים דחופים סחופים ומטורפין ויסורין באין עליהם.

When someone comes to convert nowadays, we say to him, "Why do you want to convert? Don't you know that the Jewish people nowadays are depressed, persecuted, subjugated, harried, and subject to suffering?" (Yevamos 47a)

When I began my tenure as Administrator of the Manhattan Beth Din for Conversions in 2010, we always made a point of asking the would-be convert whether he or she was prepared to be subject to antisemitism. The question and answer (it was always "yes") seemed *pro forma*. Antisemitism in 2010 seemed like a distant memory in most of the West. Sure, occasionally one dealt with a bigot, but that was the exception to the rule, and even the bigots tended to be verbally abusive at most.

Over the past fourteen years, I have often observed to conversion candidates that the question has become progressively less *pro forma* and more of an actual question. That slow progression became an avalanche after Oct. 7, when antisemitism erupted worldwide. Suddenly, the question was real: Do you really want to join us? As you can see, there are many people out there in the world today who hate us and are actively working to kill us

So ... what's the answer when the question is "real"? How has the explosion of antisemitism impacted potential converts?

While I'm not sure that there are hard statistics, anecdotally, antisemitism does not seem to have diminished the number of prospective converts. There are some indications that interest in conversion has even increased. But why? Why would someone want to join a people who are "depressed, persecuted, subjugated, harried, and subject to suffering"?



Rabbi Zvi Romm

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The beginnings of an answer may lie in a text forwarded to me by a friend and rabbinic colleague. It was sent to him by a convert (one of our "graduates") in his community, shortly after the events of Oct. 7:

I'm not sure if you remember, but in the mikveh they asked me a TON of questions that I had to answer yes and no to, and one I remembered the most often since has been, "do you understand that you are joining a persecuted people who are discriminated against, etc etc?" And I thought, "what a question to ask during this beautiful moment?!" Lol

Dedicated in loving memory of my father, Rabbi Judah Leonard Romm, Rav Yehuda Leib ben Avraham Dov ה"מ

Then, I didn't get it. Now, I completely get why Rabbi Romm asked it. It's part of the essence of our being, along with all the good, even if it's hard to face and stomach. It's who we are and what we continue to face and push through the next wave of darkness.

This convert felt that antisemitism was not simply an unfortunate byproduct of being Jewish. Somehow, being subject to antisemitism expressed the very essence of Jewishness. There is almost a sense of pride in being the target of antisemites.

The notion that experiencing antisemitism is an essential aspect of a full Jewish identity seems to find halachic expression in the Talmud's insistence that the prospective convert not only be aware and accepting of antisemitism, but likely to actually experience it:

ת"ר אין מקבלין גרים לימות המשיח כיוצא בו לא קבלו גרים לא בימי דוד ולא בימי שלמה.

The Rabbis taught: We will not accept converts when Mashiach comes. Similarly, converts were not accepted during the days of David and Shlomo.

Yevamos 24b

The Talmud goes on to explain that this refusal to accept converts during messianic times stems from an interpretation of a verse in Yeshaya (54:15): "He who comes to convert can only do so when I—Hashem—am 'absent' (i.e. at a time where the Jewish people are persecuted and G-d seems to be 'absent')."

We might be tempted to explain that the refusal to accept converts in messianic times stems from the suspicion that they are converting for ulterior motives. Indeed, the same passage in the Talmud teaches that we should not accept converts who convert for the sake of marriage or political prominence (literally "the table of kings"). This suspicion of motives does seem to be the reason behind converts not being accepted during the reigns of David and Shlomo, as implied by the Talmud's statement (*Yevamos* 76b) that Pharaoh's daughter was able to convert during Shlomo's reign because she already had a position of political prominence and thus had no political motivation to convert. In a similar vein, Rambam (*Issurei Bi'ah* 13:15) writes explicitly that converts were rejected during David and Shlomo's reigns because of concerns about their motivations, while Ritva (*Yevamos* 79a) suggests that sincere converts were accepted even during those periods.

However, the fact that the Talmud utilizes a verse to teach that converts are rejected during messianic times seems to convey that the issue is not merely one of motivation. Even if we are convinced that the would-be convert is motivated by altruistic motives—indeed, those living during messianic times will realize the truth of G-d and His Torah—he cannot convert during messianic times because he will not experience one of the core aspects of Jewish identity: antisemitism. His motivation is pure, but his Jewish

identity is, by definition, incomplete.

My friend and colleague Rabbi Chaim Packer shared an original insight that reinforces the centrality of accepting antisemitism to a complete Jewish identity. Rashi (*Shemos* 18:1) writes that Yisro was prompted to come to the Jewish people to convert after hearing of the splitting of the Red Sea and the war with Amalek. What prompted Rashi to single out these two events specifically?

Rabbi Packer suggested that the news of the splitting of the Red Sea demonstrated to Yisro that the Jewish people had a unique role to play in the world and solidified his decision to cast his lot with theirs. However, after the splitting of the Red Sea, the Jewish people were in a highly protected position. As the Torah itself describes (*Shemos* 15:15), "Then the chieftains of Edom were startled, the mighty ones of Moav were seized by trembling, the inhabitants of Canaan all melted away." In light of the ascendant position of the Jewish people, Yisro was prohibited from joining them, even with the purest of motives.

It was only after the Jewish people experienced the bite of antisemitism with the war against Amalek that Yisro felt that he could attempt to join the Jewish people. His motives had not changed, but he was now able to join a people who were subject to antisemitic attacks and thus experience the Jewish identity in its fullness. It was not the miraculous victory against Amalek that prompted Yisro's readiness to join the Jewish people; it was the attack itself, reminding the world that being Jewish still meant being vulnerable, even after the miracle of the splitting of the Red Sea.

Why is the potential of experiencing antisemitism so central to a Jewish



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identity? Why can't we be Jewish without feeling hated?

I believe the answer may lie in an issue dealt with by commentators throughout the ages: Why was it necessary for the Jews to be enslaved in Egypt? While many commentators—indeed, the Talmud itself (Nedarim 32a)—point to sins that brought about the Egyptian slavery, others see that experience in a different light. They argue that the Egyptian slavery was not punitive; it was a necessary prerequisite for the Jewish people to become worthy of receiving the Torah. The suffering the Jews experienced shaped them in the following ways:

First, being the object of persecution made it easier for the Jews to accept a system of rules that governed their lives from morning until night. Someone who has only experienced a pampered existence is less likely to embrace any restrictions which limit their lifestyle choices. (*HaKesav veHaKabbala* Devarim 16:10, *Rav Kook Haggadah* “Maggid”)

Second, the suffering of persecution impressed upon the Jewish people that they needed G-d's assistance constantly to achieve whatever they would achieve. Just as it was clear that they were only able to exit Egypt through divine intervention, so too the Jewish people needed to absorb the idea that any success in life, whether spiritual or physical, only comes about through divine intervention (*Sefas Emes*, VaEira 5631 “viYedatem”).

We might add that the experience in Egypt sensitized the Jews to the suffering of others, as stated in Shemos

22:20 and elaborated upon by Ramban there.

All of these reasons can explain why experiencing antisemitism is a critical part of a religious Jewish identity. Antisemitism reminds us, in a decidedly negative fashion, that life is difficult. It reinforces the truth that we do not have the luxury to simply seek pleasure and self-indulgence in life. Our enemies will constantly remind us of our status, but that reminder, in turn, forces us to focus on eternal values and commitments which are only upheld through hard work and difficulty.

Antisemitism reminds us, in a decidedly negative fashion, that life is difficult. It reinforces the truth that we do not have the luxury to simply seek pleasure and self-indulgence in life.

Similarly, antisemitism is a constant reminder of how we are ultimately dependent on G-d. We do not embrace a philosophy of quietism; we seek to proactively combat antisemitism. But the fact that the dragon seems impossible to vanquish should remind us of our fragility and dependency on G-d for assistance and protection. Whenever Jews have thought that they have defeated the problem of antisemitism, they are sadly proven to

be incorrect. As frustrating as this is, it serves as a blessing in many ways, emphasizing for us that any success we make in combating antisemitism is only with divine assistance.

Finally, antisemitism, like the Egyptian slavery, serves to sensitize us to the suffering of others, both within the Jewish community and without. We know what it feels like to be hated.

Maharal (*Netzach Yisrael* chapter 46) expresses succinctly how the essential quality of antisemitism and Jewish suffering is a necessary prerequisite for conversion:

הרי לך שאין מקבלים גרים כאשר יהיו ימי הטוב, לפי שאין לעשות התחלה מימים טובים, כי בודאי אדם בזה הוא עובד השם יתברך כאשר יראה הטוב. ולפיכך צריך שיהיה תחלתו קודם, ואז יקנה עולם הבא אף בימים טובים.

We see (from the Talmud) that converts are not accepted when only good days will lie ahead of them, since the “good days” can never be the beginning (of one’s service of G-d) ... One must begin (serving G-d) beforehand, and then one acquires the World to Come when the days are good.

Indeed, our convert is correct: *It’s part of the essence of our being, along with all the good, even if it’s hard to face and stomach.* As all of us struggle with the explosion of antisemitism, let us take comfort in the knowledge that we grow as a people from all the horrific phenomena around us. At the same time, let us daven that we speedily enter into the “good days” when we acquire the World to Come.



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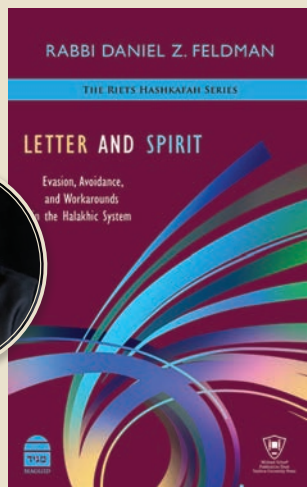
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LETTER AND SPIRIT:

Evasions, Avoidance, and
Workarounds in the Halakhic System

by Rabbi Daniel Feldman

Halakha contains apparent “workarounds” – such as the sale of chametz to non-Jews before Pesach or the use of the *prozbol* to avoid the cancellation of loans. Rabbi Daniel Feldman draws upon the history and halakhic treatment of these mechanisms to consider when and why some of them are accepted, some are resisted, and some find mixed responses but all are attempts to remain loyal to the letter and the spirit of the law.



DIVREI SOFERIM:

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by Rabbi Hershel Schachter

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The Importance of Jewish Identity in Non-Jewish Spaces

The concept of Jewish identity varies with every Jew you meet. The conversation, often dependent on personal upbringing, will include religion, culture, ancestry, ethnicity, and morality. Each Jew's identification with being Jewish is an individual experience and process.

According to Dr. Manfred Gerstenfeld, formerly of the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, Jewish identity can be determined in three ways. How do Jews see themselves? How are they seen by other Jews? And how are Jews seen by the outside world? It is the interaction of the first and last of these questions that I would like to focus on for the purposes of this article.¹

In a post-Oct. 7 world, the question of Jewish identity, as viewed by the outside world, has never been closer to that of Germany in the 1940's. The Nazi determination of who was Jewish

did not follow self-identification. The identification of a Jew was based on the infamous Nuremberg Laws, by which even a *halachic* non-Jew could be considered Jewish by the Nazi regime. Similarly, there are non-Jews in the post-Oct. 7 world who would like to define the terms of being Jewish as well as the terms that affect Jews in ways that fit their own narrative.

The difference between then and now is very simple: the existence of the State of Israel and the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF).

My grandfather likes to talk about the "yarmulke boom" of the late 1960s. Following the Six Day War in 1967, many Orthodox Jews started wearing yarmulkes outside of their homes and synagogues. The sudden confidence of modern Jews to walk around New York City (and elsewhere), proud of their identity in a non-Jewish society, suddenly had the backing of a strong

Elliot Steinmetz

Head Men's Basketball Coach, YU
Founding Partner, Rosenberg &
Steinmetz PC

army capable of protecting the place we call home. Menachem Begin's destruction of the Jew with trembling knees was progressing.

The self-view of the Jew in a non-Jewish world changed drastically following the war in 1967 and again after the Yom Kippur War in 1973. Israel, while sustaining heavy losses, asserted military dominance in a region surrounded by enemies on all sides (and within). This evolution of Jewish confidence still exists today, despite the constant attempts by enemies to bring us back to our knees. The 21st-century Jew maintains an identity that includes valuable tenets of education and entrepreneurship along with

¹ How Jews are seen by other Jews is an age-old issue that is not specific to Judaism alone. Various religions and ethnicities have sects within them that at best have different traditions, and at worst are completely polarizing to a point of ostracism and violence. Books have been written about this subject and even if I was qualified to opine, it is too involved and complicated for this article.

goal-driven success. In all fields, Jews are shattering stereotypes with their accomplishments. While this leads to the resurfacing of ancient antisemitic tropes, it no longer discourages a population whose identity has taken on confidence as a character trait. *Reishit tzemichat geulatenu*—the formation of a Jewish state on ancient Jewish land, coupled with a strong and courageous IDF that has proven itself through the harshest tests, stands as the backing for this new adopted trait of confidence. Primarily because, well, we can always go home. A concept that did not exist in modernity until 1948.

Dr. Gerstenfeld's first question of how the Jews see themselves has certainly evolved over the last eighty years. What about the ever-changing third question regarding the outside world's view of the Jews?

Well, it depends...

From the times of Pharaoh and ancient Egypt, the world has always been intimidated by the successful Jew. Joseph had set up his family for success following their migration to Egypt during the famous biblical famine. Eventually, Pharaoh became anxious about the Jewish community's growth, which led him to turn against his previous allies and force them into years of slavery and torture, even going so far as to decree the murder of newborn males to help reduce the population. History has since repeated itself many times, albeit with different perpetrators and different methods.

We find ourselves once again in a period of Jewish confidence and strength. Not surprisingly, we simultaneously find ourselves in a period of increasing antisemitism and violence against Jews. While the anti-Israel and anti-Jewish sentiment seems loud, it is still

the minority for now. More than ever, Jewish identity is supremely important in non-Jewish spaces to keep it that way and change the momentum. Less important than how individual Jews identify their own relationship with Judaism is how they outwardly portray that identification in the space they exist. As mentioned above, religion, culture, ancestry, and morality are various identification factors that Jews will point to when describing their association with their ethnic background. All are acceptable and important, so long as they are portrayed with strength and confidence, and communicated with respect. Our goal should be — to use the words of the Rambam (*Yesodei Hatorah* 5:11) in describing the mitzvah of Kiddush Hashem — that through our actions others praise us, love us, and desire to follow our ways.

As a partner in a law firm owned by only two Jewish partners with employees of various faiths, decisions must be made regarding the Jewish holidays. Does the firm look for a halachic workaround to stay open and allow its non-Jewish employees to work? Or does it close, thus forfeiting financial gain to maintain the Jewish religious identity in its highest form? The decision (which should be discussed with a rabbi) is not quite as important as the communication surrounding it. Corresponding with outside parties, both clients and adversaries, expecting responses and progress on various legal matters, as well as internal communication with employees, always raises the potential for conflict between Dr. Gerstenfeld's first and third questions. How Jews communicate their view of self-identity in a non-Jewish space will inevitably factor into how the outside world sees and identifies the Jew.

Personally, when my firm closes for Jewish holidays, we communicate that proudly. At the same time, we make sure our clients and adversaries are aware in advance and that time-sensitive issues are dealt with so that nobody feels the burden and stress of our decision besides us. This approach has been successful over the years, and we have never experienced any issues from any third parties with respect to religious observance by our law firm.

Over the last few years my firm has hosted a holiday party in December. It is our opportunity to thank our clients and colleagues for their loyalty, business and cooperation. Following the events of Oct. 7, my partner and I made the decision not to go forward with the annual event. We sent an email to each invitee letting them know that in light of the situation in Israel, the ongoing war being fought by our brothers and sisters, we did not feel it was appropriate to host a celebratory event. We put forth our Jewish identity with confidence and a full understanding that it might not be accepted the same way by all. While it is important to communicate with respect, it is also important to do so with confidence, regardless of whether the information being disseminated will be considered controversial by some. Because, as much as there is importance in how the outside world sees the Jew, the eternal survival of the Jewish identity resides in how the Jews see themselves.

As the head men's basketball coach at Yeshiva University, when dealing with collegiate athletics or sports generally, it is a different dynamic than the business world. We are in a primarily non-Jewish space with very few Jewish participants. There is a lack of basic understanding of the religious aspect of Judaism and, at best, a vague familiarity with Jewish culture.

Sports, stereotypically, have not been a space where Jews have been known for their triumphs. That too has changed in recent decades. The often referenced, but slowly becoming irrelevant, scene from the movie *Airplane* depicts a flight attendant responding to a passenger's request for light reading with a leaflet called "Famous Jewish Sports Legends." Since then, the world has seen Jewish Olympic gold medalists, Euro-League champions, Orthodox Jews drafted to professional leagues in various sports, and of course a 50-game win streak by our Yeshiva University Maccabees, which included a trip to the Sweet 16 (before Covid interrupted) and a #1 overall national ranking. The landscape has changed. The self-view as well as the world's view of the Jewish athlete has evolved.

It is not without challenges. The lack of understanding of the religious schedule or cultural and ethical obligations causes friction in the non-Jewish space. With antisemitism on the rise globally, the high-profile nature of athletics creates an easy target for those looking to throw their hate around. Our team social media as well as my personal social media have been hit with hateful comments as a result of a post-Oct. 7 world of uneducated college students consuming information from Tik Tok and other propaganda sources.

The responsibility of Jewish athletes and coaches to preserve their identity with confidence is as imperative as the obligation to be educated about Jewish culture, religion, ancestry, and morality. Unbiased people who don't know will ask questions. They will formulate opinions based on the answers. Athletes and coaches in the sports space have a

platform to provide answers. Therefore, the identity of the Jewish athlete and coach in the non-Jewish space of sports is critical in properly managing the relationship between Dr. Gerstenfeld's concepts of the Jews' view of self and the outside world's view of the Jews.

I am privileged to have a front-row seat as I watch the professional development of a former YU player, Ryan Turrell, currently of the Motor City Cruise,² and my son, Jacob Steinmetz, a pitcher for the Arizona Diamondbacks. Both of their Jewish identities will be on display to their teammates and organizations, as well as to increasing numbers of sports fans, as they continue to rise through their respective organizations. From a purely cultural and social perspective, their decisions on how to handle their Jewish identities will directly impact many in the outside world's view of Jews. They have not only been accepted by their colleagues, often receiving text messages on Jewish holidays from teammates and coaches, but by the front offices as well. The Diamondbacks have gone above and beyond to make Jacob feel welcome, as was summarized in a recent Washington Post article by Zach Buchanan.³ From speaking with Ryan, the Pistons have done the same for him, making sure he has proper hotel and food accommodations both at home and on the road. The willingness of these organizations to pioneer the handling of the self-identifying Orthodox-Jewish athlete will be significant in laying the groundwork for these athletes' success and their ability to impact the global view of Jews in the space of professional sports.

In both the legal and business worlds, as well as sports, the ability to communicate

with respect and understanding is vital to success, tolerance, and acceptance. We as Jews are unique. We make up less than half of one percent of the world population. We have unique practices and a different upbringing than over 99.5% of the world. The outside world does not always understand Jewish culture and practices. Ignorance very often leads to hate, or at least to intolerance. The importance of Jewish identity in the non-Jewish space is crucial to fighting intolerance and antisemitism. The more confident and educated Jews are with their self-identification, the greater their ability to have a positive effect on the outsider's view of the strong, confident, successful Jew.

The role of the career-driven professional, as well as the athlete and coach is essential. Our ability to deal ethically in business while communicating with clients, partners, and adversaries on a daily basis provides many opportunities to not just strengthen our own Jewish identity but to positively impact the non-Jewish view of Jewish culture and religious practice. The athlete or coach as a role model has a built-in platform to express their identity both publicly and positively. The Jewish athlete and coach are in a unique position to embrace their Jewish identity in a public forum that will undoubtedly impact the outside world's view of the Jewish people. This complicated, but achievable, bridging of the self-view and outsider's view of the post-1967 Jewish identity may very well be an important factor in combatting the rise in antisemitism globally.

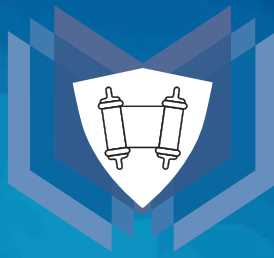
² The Motor City Cruise is the National Basketball Association G League affiliate of the Detroit Pistons.

³ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/sports/2023/08/31/jacob-steinmetz-orthodox-jewish-diamondbacks/>.

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Jewish Identity in our Times

An Interview with

Rabbi Reuven Taragin

Rabbi Reuven Taragin is the Educational Director of World Mizrahi and the RZA (Religious Zionists of America), and the Dean of Overseas Students at Yeshivat Hakotel. In those roles, he interacts with and brings together Jews from different backgrounds in Eretz Yisrael and the Diaspora. We asked Rabbi Taragin about Jewish identity in Eretz Yisrael and the Diaspora.



For a religious person, are Jewish identity and religious identity synonymous?

A Jew should see himself as an *eved* Hashem, and his observance of mitzvot should define his identity. With that, a pasuk in Yeshaya (44:5) says:

זֶה יֹאמֵר לֵה' אֲנִי וְזֶה יִקְרָא בְּשֵׁם יַעֲקֹב וְזֶה יִכְתֹּב יָדוֹ לֵה' וּבְשֵׁם יִשְׂרָאֵל יִכְנֶה.

One shall say, "I am G-d's," Another shall use the name of "Jacob," Another shall mark his arm "of [G-d]" and adopt the name of "Israel."

Rav Tzadok HaKohen, *Tzidkat HaTzadik* no. 54, writes that this pasuk teaches us that the foundation of everything is Jewish identity. Even before we talk about religious observance, this identity itself is valuable.

When Yonah was asked (multiple questions about) who he was, he responded simply, "*Ivri anochi.*" He saw that as independently significant.

Rav Kook, who had to deal with a Jewish society that identified strongly as Jews but was mostly non-

observant, also discusses this topic. He distinguishes between *segulah*, the innate connection to Judaism, and *bechirah*, the connection we forge through our actions and choices. Rav Kook writes:

ובדורנו נתרבו נשמות רבות שאע"פ שהן שפלות מאד בענין הבחירה, וע"כ הם נגועים במעשים רעים רבים ובדעות רעות מאד ד' ישמרנו, מ"מ אור הסגולה מאיר בהם, וע"כ הם מחבבים מאד את כללות ישראל וחושקים בא", ובכמה דברים טובים ויקרים מהמדות שהם באים מסגולת ישראל בטבע נפשם הם מצוינים בהם.

In our generation, there has been an increase in the number of souls that are very lowly in the matter of bechira, and therefore they are afflicted by many evil deeds and bad value systems, may God protect us. Nevertheless, the light of segulah shines in them; hence, they love



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the concept of Israel and greatly desire the Land of Israel. They naturally excel in several good and precious things based on the special qualities of Israel. (Igrot HaRa'ayah no. 555)

What are the key differences between Jewish identity in Eretz Yisrael and Jewish identity in the Diaspora?

In Rav Kook's time (his aforementioned letter was dated 1913), many Israelis were less observant and saw their Jewish identity as disconnected from religion. In fact, in their attempts to create a "new Jew" with a new Jewish identity many secular Zionist/Israeli intentionally worked to distance people from their traditional Jewish values and Judaism's traditions.

In the Diaspora, the situation was the opposite. The connection of the less observant was through whatever traditions they maintained (Pesach seder, attendance in synagogue on the High Holidays, etc.).

Nowadays, things are much different. In the Diaspora, many of the children and grandchildren of those who were "traditional" have assimilated. The Jewish identity that remains is a (weak) sense of "belonging" to the Jewish people.

In Israel, there has been a shift in the

opposite direction. With the weakening of the secular Zionist ideology (and nationalism worldwide), Israelis are turning to Judaism to try to connect spiritually. Even before the war, studies showed that very high percentages of Israelis were fasting on Yom Kippur and joining Pesach Seders. This direction has intensified since Oct. 7. (The term "October 8th Jews" is used to refer to Jews who returned to Judaism after Oct. 7.) There is still a long way to go, but we are moving in the right direction.

There are two additional notable differences between the Diaspora and Israeli communities: the connection to Eretz Yisrael and the connection with Am Yisrael.

The connection to Eretz Yisrael is more obvious, yet worth discussing. There are indeed Jews in the Diaspora who are deeply connected to Eretz Yisrael. However, when someone lives in Eretz Yisrael, it becomes part of their daily experience and in a holistic way. Even menial tasks have great significance. Construction workers in Israel fulfill prophecies when they build Highway 16, while their peers in America merely pave the road to the Garden State Plaza Mall.

Very little in Eretz Yisrael is purely *chol*. It's all *kadosh*. Just being here transforms everything you do. To flip the famous comparison of the Gra,

living in Eretz Yisrael is like sitting in a Sukkah.

We have mitzvot that relate specifically to being in Eretz Yisrael. You can even feel it in the weather patterns, as the Jewish calendar is heavily connected to Eretz Yisrael's agricultural cycle.

Rav Nachman MiBreslov, based on Bamidbar 13:32, described this as the Land of Israel "digesting" its inhabitants. Eretz Yisrael "swallows" its Jewish inhabitants and digests and links us to her.

The connection to Am Yisrael is also different. The *Gemara, Horayot 3a*, based on a pasuk in Melachim, asserts that only Eretz Yisrael communities constitute authentic communities (*kahal*). While this is more of a halachic/ontological observation, it is also true on a practical level.

When I lived in America, I connected only to other religious Jews in my local community. I did not have much to do with Jews in other communities or with the non-religious Jews locally. There isn't much that connects the Jews of the Diaspora to one another.

When you live in Eretz Yisrael, you feel strongly connected with Am Yisrael. There is an inherent connection to the people and to those of all stripes. There is more interaction and connection between groups, not just in times of

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war, but even in times of peace. Any national event allows for a shared experience. In the Diaspora, there are fewer shared experiences (the recent Washington rally was a rare exception, generated by the current situation).

Israel sees itself as responsible for all Jews around the world. We felt responsible for capturing and punishing Eichmann and freeing the Entebbe hostages. The Israeli government has an entire ministry devoted to Diaspora Jews and the challenges of anti-Semitism. The State of Israel sees itself as responsible for Jews everywhere and acts upon it.

For many, the deep connection to Eretz Yisrael and Am Yisrael enhances the Jewish identity of those who live in Eretz Yisrael. However, for some, there is a downside. As Jewish identity in the Diaspora is defined mainly by religious practice, some Olim have difficulty transitioning to life in Israel, where our national identity is more pronounced. Instead of the national identity supplementing religious identity, it often replaces it. They can experience a form of Jewish identity without observance, and this sadly leads to a weakening in observance of Torah and mitzvot.

What has Changed Since October 7?

The attacks on Oct. 7 and the subsequent pervasive open anti-Semitism have caused a surge in Jewish identity. Being attacked because we are Jewish reminds Jews of our unique identity. In fact, the Navi Yechezkel (perek 20) says that Hashem uses anti-Semitism to drive Jews back to him when we have become too assimilated.

Additionally, people from the Diaspora have strengthened their connection to Eretz Yisrael. Mizrachi has organized over 100 missions to Israel, and there have been other opportunities to connect for those who can't come on a mission. Mizrachi has held mass tefillah events bringing communities in the Diaspora together, programs to say Kaddish for victims, and opportunities to send supplies and letters to soldiers. People in the Diaspora, even those who do not consider themselves Zionists, are closely following the news in Eretz Yisrael and are deeply concerned about the welfare of the hostages, our soldiers, and the people of Eretz Yisrael.

Additionally, in times of crisis, people turn to religion. We see that now as well. Almost everyone, even in the Diaspora, has a friend or family member serving in the IDF, and there is a sense of people wanting to do their part spiritually to help protect our soldiers.

In a recent *Hamizrachi* (Purim 5784), Rabbi Elie Mischel highlighted the impact of Oct. 7 on some high profile people. New York radio talk show host Sid Rosenberg visited Israel for the first time and said that “[Hamas] brought the Jew out in me.” He started going back to shul and started learning Torah with a rabbi. Matisyahu the musician, who moved away from Judaism in recent years said that Oct. 7 awakened his “pintele Yid” (Jewish spark). In a Chabad survey conducted recently, 86% of respondents found that members were experiencing a “deeper connection to their own Jewish identity.”

Obviously, the other change is newfound *achdut* in Israel and around the world. We all remember how deeply divided Israeli society (and the Jewish people in general) were before Oct. 7.

The divisions reached a point where it seemed like there was no way to bring the two sides back together. Oct. 7 changed everything. People started to volunteer for many different chesed projects and there is a real sense of caring for one another, regardless of political views. A sense of solidarity formed.

In addition, anti-Semitism around the world (in every country) has connected Jews to one another and to those in Israel. We very much feel like one people in “the same boat.”

How Do We Ensure Lasting Change?

“B”H we are more unified now, but the unity is rooted in the common enemy we face. The common threat posed by a genocidal enemy and the hypocritical anti-Semitism we are experiencing unify us and direct our attention to the existential threat we face. If it runs no deeper than the common enemy or threat, it will dissipate when that enemy is defeated.

True *achdut* is achieved when we emphasize what we have in common and downplay what divides us. We must respond to the common threat by focusing on our shared values and mission. We must focus more on what we agree upon, including our connection to Eretz Yisrael and Am Yisrael.

We also want to sustain the spiritual awakening that has taken place. After the Six-Day War, there was also a spiritual awakening, but not enough was done to maintain it. Nowadays, many organizations are positioned to help nurture spiritual growth, and we hope that they will be successful in doing so.

An “U” Identity in the Workplace and in the Beis Medrash

This quote from a recent article about Rabbi Dr. Avraham Steinberg,¹ who, among other things, is the editor of Encyclopedia Talmudit, caught my eye:

Rabbi Steinberg ... passionately advocated that more professionals fuse their Torah study with their profession of choice. ... “If you are a businessman, learn business halacha.” ... In fact, he emphasizes, it’s in the interface between Torah and your profession where your learning is most valuable, because you are an expert in your field.

In YU’s long-time motto of Torah U’Madda (or, for our business school, “Torah U’Business”), what is the most important single letter? Rabbi Dr. Steinberg is highlighting that it is the “U”—the “and”—that connects the Torah grounding with the secular knowledge.

Without active integration, these tend to remain separate compartments of life and of our identities. Our natural inclination is often to fit in at work, to tone down the signs and practices of our Judaism, and to save the “Jewish” side of us for shul. “There’s the Torah

side of me, and then there’s the work side of me.” Or, for YU students, “I have shiur in the morning and secular studies in the afternoon.”

However, we are weaker if we make them into disconnected entities in which we try to separately excel in each and avoid mixing the two. Before compartmentalizing those parts of our lives, please consider an alternative. Consider that our power comes from finding the connections between the two and from developing an “U” identity.

From Business to Torah

When we are in shiur, we should tap the secular knowledge we have gained. I saw a great application of this during a recent trip to Israel. I was scheduled to give a lunchtime talk at Yeshivat Shaalvim, where my younger son is in Shana Aleph. I was privileged to come a couple of hours early and attend Gemara shiur with him. During the shiur, R’ Noam Koenigsberg touched on such topics as consistent income, budgeting, and liability.

When such topics come up during our



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Torah learning, who is more likely to excel at understanding them, seeing key nuances, and being able to have richer insights emerge from the learning: Someone who has learned about income, budgeting, and liability from courses like “The Legal & Ethical Environment of Business” or “Foundations of Personal Finance,” or one who is just being introduced to those concepts?

Similarly, when the YU Beis Medrash is learning about contracts and incentives in *Meseches Gitin*, those who have learned about contracts and incentives in class are likely to have the richest grasp of the content of the shiur. In *Bava Basra*, to name another *masechta* recently studied at Yeshiva, those

¹ <https://www.jewishpress.com/sections/features/the-inspiring-story-of-rabbi-dr-professor-avraham-steinberg/2024/02/15/>.

who have learned about interpersonal dynamics and microeconomics will be able to grasp (and hopefully shed light for everyone else) halachic arguments and decisions more quickly and at a deeper level.

This is one direction of the “U” in Torah U’Business: Developing business depth that can help enrich our Torah learning.

From Torah to Business

The other direction affects how we bring our Yiddishkeit into the workplace.

When I graduated from college and entered the workplace, I wasn’t ready for many of the ways in which work demands would challenge my Jewish values. Honesty in interviewing (do I tell them at my initial interview that I won’t be available to them for 25 hours a week, even if our biggest client has a pressing Saturday deadline?); mandatory business lunches in non-kosher restaurants (e.g., is it better or worse if the restaurant can order from outside caterers a similar-looking meal to the one the non-kosher restaurant will be serving everyone else?); holiday parties; and a wide range of other daily issues.

Anticipating these issues—and even practicing difficult discussions about them ahead of time—is key to our preparation to be Torah-grounded professionals excelling in the workplace.

Learning about them in different contexts might also shape our decisions about our careers. If my top career choice will pose intense challenges to my Jewish values, should I choose my second-best alternative if it will be more aligned with those values? It is key to learn the halachic sources ahead of time, develop a roadmap of the challenges, and be more prepared to identify solutions.

My Personal Experiences: Torah U’Entrepreneurship

For 25 years, I have conducted research on entrepreneurship—specifically, the early decisions founders face that tend to get them into trouble.

Some of my most important insights into founders came from our Mesorah. In turn, my view of the Mesorah was further enriched by new insights that emerged from the founders I had studied.

On Day 1 of the founding-team module of the Founder’s Dilemmas course I taught at Harvard Business School, I would ask the mostly non-Jewish students, “Are there any Bible fans here? Who knows who the founding team of the world was?” When someone answered, “Adam and Eve,” I would highlight for them the two-word description of what their relationship should be: “*eizer kenegdo*” (a helper opposite him, Bereishis 2:18), and then describe the Netziv’s view of

what it means: That the *kenegdo*—the pushback—is the *eizer*, assisting the other by highlighting where s/he is falling short and thus helping the person reach his or her potential.²

We then discussed the importance of founders learning “how to fight well” rather than smoothing over differences until they become much bigger and far less solvable. That was followed by a negotiation exercise over founder ownership that had them practice fighting well.³

On the last day of the course, we would tackle founder failure, examining our natural inclination to recoil from failure rather than seizing on it to get stronger. Our “case study” that day? R’ Akiva’s attempted journey to a town in which he suffered failure after failure: No housing available during dangerous times, forcing him to be stranded outside town, his donkey killed by a wild animal, his candle blown out by the wind.⁴ At each step, we would see how the typical reaction would be “woe is me,” but that R’ Akiva’s approach—learned under Nachum Ish Gamzu for 22 years⁵—replaced the recoil with a drive to persist on his way to finding how it would be for the best. When he woke up the following morning, R’ Akiva saw that the town had been attacked overnight and realized that that would have been him if he had not experienced apparent failure the prior day.

In the other direction of the “U,” we can

² In contrast, Rashi—based on *Yevamos* 63a—says that if we aren’t worthy of getting *eizer*/support, then we’ll get the *kenegdo*/pushback. This captures the natural human recoil when getting criticism, compared to seizing on the criticism to get stronger, as per the Netziv.

³ Also informing this lens on founding teams was the dynamic between the most iconic chavrusas in Shas, R’ Yochanan and Reish Lakish (*Bava Metzia* 84a), who embodied the Netziv’s dynamic. Note that this *daf* also highlights the failed chavrusa relationship between R’ Yochanan and R’ Elazar ben Pedas, due to R’ Elazar’s insistence on only providing *eizer* and refusing to provide *kenegdo*, despite R’ Yochanan’s pleading with him to do so. Interestingly, in *Yevamos* 63a (Rashi’s source in Bereishis 2:18), it is R’ Elazar himself who advocates the no-*kenegdo* perspective that Rashi quotes.

⁴ *Berachos* 60b. Note that this was the *daf* on the day that Covid first hit the frum community, on March 3, 2020. Through R’ Meir Shapiro’s world-changing innovation of *Daf Yomi*, Hashem was sending us a message about the worldwide challenges we were about to face and the need for us to find strength and light amongst the darkness and challenges of the pandemic.

⁵ *Chagigah* 12a.

see new things in our learning by seeing new dynamics in the business world. For instance, I gained insights into R' Akiva's mindset from studying founders who had experienced failure. The most productive of their failures came when founders seized on the setback to get stronger by realizing an incorrect assumption, thinking differently about something they had taken for granted, or increasing their drive to turn things around. I realized that R' Akiva's *emunah* had been stunningly admirable, but that the rest of us could benefit from seizing on failures to partner with Hashem in making it a *gam zu l'tova* (this too is for the best) rather than waiting for the good to emerge. That proactive approach was an important complement to R' Akiva's reactive approach.

Sy Syms as a Case Study

Shifting gears from the universal to the particular, at Sy Syms, Yeshiva University's values now permeate the curriculum at two levels.

The "U" finds its most explicit expression in our Jewish Values curriculum, which we introduced in the Fall of 2020 to actively help our students achieve our "U" mission: To develop Torah-grounded professionals who excel in the workplace and in the community.

At any other business school, the scope of the mission is, in so many words, "To develop professionals who excel in the workplace"—i.e., to develop the "9-to-5" of their students. Preparing students to be Torah grounded and to also excel in the community is not part of their mission. At YU and Sy Syms, we know that many of the most important

contributions of our alumni come from 5 p.m. to 9 a.m., and that we must prepare our students for the "24 hours" of life, not just the 9-to-5.

The Jewish Values curriculum includes required courses on Practical Workplace Halacha (the challenges of being Torah-grounded in the workplace, and solutions to those challenges), Jewish Public Policy (how to think at a communal level and contribute to the Klal), and Jewish Business Law. It includes electives on leadership in the Jewish community, the business and communal interactions between Jews and non-Jews over the centuries with lessons for today, and Designing Your Jewish Life (key inflection-point decisions that will change the trajectory of your life—e.g., choice of community in which to live, choice of career, choice of spouse). Students learn how to adopt the mindset, practices, and identity of an "U" Jew.

However, development of the "U" identity isn't limited to our Jewish Values curriculum. This was encapsulated beautifully by a student, Tomer Wieder, in the weekly Undergraduate Torah Studies newsletter a couple of years ago. In response to a question about his favorite part of YU, Tomer said, "...many of my Sy Syms classes have been infused with Torah values. My finance, accounting, and other secular professors deliberately include topics about—and stress the importance of—acting honestly and amicably in business." Professors will end their classes with *divrei Torah* that are relevant to that day's topic, include reflections and stories from when they faced workplace challenges and how they dealt with them, and provide role modeling for the students.⁶

Building a Foundation for Decades

Rabbi Dr. Steinberg's advocacy for integrating Torah study with our profession underscores the profound significance of the "U" in Torah U'Madda or Torah U'Business. Expertise in our field enhances the value of Torah study, enabling us to provide valuable insights in halachic decision-making. In turn, the Torah's teachings offer profound wisdom that enriches our understanding and approach to secular endeavors, and enables us to add unique value to our professions.

By embracing this integrated identity and approach, we can navigate the complexities of both the workplace and the Beis Medrash with a deeper understanding and a more holistic perspective. It also can yield unique insights. Personal experiences like my own, integrating entrepreneurship with the Torah and with Gemara learning, illustrate the reciprocal relationship between Torah and business.

The college years are a key time to develop this "U" identity in our next generation. These formative years will serve as the foundation for decades of life. Helping students build their "U" muscles will pay dividends long into the future. Yeshiva University is not "a yeshiva alongside a college" (or vice versa); done right, it integrates the two in powerful combinations.

Ultimately, the "U" identity in the workplace and in the Beis Medrash serves as a reminder of the interconnectedness of all facets of life. By embracing this unity, we can unlock new depths of understanding, wisdom, and fulfillment in both our professional and spiritual pursuits.

⁶ This is no longer only true at the undergraduate level. Now, with our new Semikha+MBA joint program with RIETS, our graduate students can develop their "U" muscles, too.



YU GRADUATE SCHOOL ENROLLMENT IS UP 60% SINCE 2016.

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Sepharadim

Living in an Ashkenazi Community



Shema beni mussar avicha: Shelomo HaMelekh adjures us to preserve our communal heritage and traditions — significant elements of our identity. In our diverse American communities, Sepharadim are blessed to live in some communities that have a strong Ashkenazi identity. Is it possible for a Sepharadi to be a part of the community while following Sephardic traditions, or are the differences too far apart?

Overall, Sephardic communities adhere strictly to the rulings of the *Shulchan Aruch*, with specific communities placing more emphasis on the Rambam, Arizal, and Chida. Oftentimes these halachot are unknown, overlooked, or perceived to be impossible to maintain in an Ashkenazi world, but some familiarity and forethought can go a

long way to make it easy, manageable, and maintainable.¹ Below is a brief survey of some of these halachot with some simplified citations for further enrichment.

Tefillah

1. Although the Torah prohibits us from creating subsects within a community by being different, *lo titgodedu* is not as significant of a prohibition for Sepharadim as it is for Ashkenazim. Due to the well-known nature of the differences between Sepharadim and Ashkenazim, among other factors, one does not need to conform to our surroundings at the expense of our own *minhagim* (*Yabia Omer* 6 OC 10). [See also the excellent monographs *Tal Imrati*,



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by R' Tal Doar of Sanhedria, and *Banim Chavivim* by R' Eli Yanay of Lakewood for full comprehensive expositions of this topic.]

2. One should pronounce the words according to his own custom, not the Ashkenazi pronunciation (*Yabia Omer* 6 OC 11, *Yechaveh Daat* 7:150).
3. Ideally, Sepharadim should always pray in their own minyan, given the

¹ See Rashi, Bereshit 32:5.

primacy of *Nusach Edot HaMizrach*. Certainly, one who must pray with Ashkenazim should still pray from his own siddur and avoid being *shaliach tzibbur* (Chida, *Yabia Omer* 6 OC 10, *Yechave Daat* 4:36 and 6:6, *Ohr LeTzion* 2:7:38).

4. A single boy may wear a tallit in an Ashkenazi yeshiva where nobody else is doing so (*Vayashov HaYam* 1:5).
5. Prevalent Sephardic practice is to sit for Kaddish. In an Ashkenazi congregation, one may sit for Kaddish as long as he does not stick out. For example, if there are elderly Ashkenazim who are not standing, people still reciting Tachanun, learning Torah, etc. then one does not have to stand, since he is not the only one sitting. If he was standing at the beginning of Kaddish, he should remain standing. (*Yechaveh Daat* 3:4, *Ohr LeTzion* 2:5:9).
6. The mourner's kaddish may be recited according to the Sephardic text, but one may abbreviate the *Yehe Shelama Rabbah* section as the Ashkenazim do in order to keep up with other mourners (*Yalkut Yosef* 56:25, *Ohr LeTzion* 2:5:11).
7. Without a minyan reciting the 13 Middot ("*Vaya'avor*") together, one should either recite the pasuk with the *te'amim* (cantillation) or just skip it altogether (*Yalkut Yosef* 131:14).
8. According to Chacham Ovadia Yosef, just as Sephardic women do not recite berachot on lulav or

shofar, they should also not recite *Baruch She'amar*, *Yishtabach*, or *Birkot Keriat Shema* with Hashem's name, as they are exempt. Those Sephardim who are lenient on lulav and shofar are also lenient with these parts of tefillah (*Yechaveh Daat* 3:3; *Yabia Omer* 2:6, 8:8, 9:108:28 and 32; *Ohr LeTzion* 2:5:3).

Shabbat

1. Sephardim should not light Shabbat candles if there are already other Shabbat candles lit in the same room. If one is a guest with the privacy of his/her own bedroom, and the host is lighting in the dining room, it is best to light in the bedroom (with a beracha). Given the potential fire hazard and host discomfort, one should use a (preferably incandescent) night light (and if needed to turn off, a timer) and recite a beracha on the night light (*Shulchan Aruch* OC 263:8; *Chazon Ovadia*, Shabbat vol. 1 page 203).
2. Any bread that is sweet or hard and crunchy is *Mezonot*, not *Hamotzi* according to most Sephardic posekim (*Shulchan Aruch* OC 168:7, *Yabia Omer* 10 OC 18, *Ohr LeTzion* 2:12:4). As such, when visiting an Ashkenazi family (Ashkenazim consider sweet or crunchy bread to be *Hamotzi*) one should bring along pitas or ask his host to also have a bag of pitas or other water-based challah available

for *Hamotzi*. Afterwards, one can enjoy the host's egg challah.

3. Ashkenazim and Sephardim each have many stringencies and leniencies in the realm of cooking and heating food on *Shabbat*. Each should familiarize himself with and follow his own tradition; nevertheless, each may certainly eat from the other's kitchen on *Shabbat* (*Shulchan Aruch* OC 252, 253, 318).

Moadim

1. One should expend extra effort to spend *Selichot*, *Rosh Hashanah*, and *Yom Kippur* in a Sephardic *Minyan* in order to pray in a minyan that is aligned with Sephardic custom (*Yalkut Yosef*, OC 582:1, *Shemesh uMagen* 4:72).
2. On *Chanukah*, only one *chanukiah* is lit per family (*Shulchan Aruch* OC 671:2). After the head of household lights the first candle, some say the children may light the remaining candles (*Chazon Ovadia* pg. 21).
3. One may only purchase *kitniot* products for *Pesach* that are approved by a recognized *kashrut* organization as being truly *chametz* free. The OU and JSOR do a great service by providing this information. In general, a woman must follow her husband's customs and *halachot*. [It should be noted that for an Ashkenazi woman marrying a Sephardic man, eating *kitniot* is a relatively insignificant change compared to the changes that relate to prayer, *Shabbat*, and *kashrut* that are relevant on a daily or weekly basis.] A Sephardi can cook for an Ashkenazi in his *kasher lepesach kitniot* utensils (Rav Schachter).



See more shiurim & articles from Rabbi Djavaheri at www.yutorah.org/teachers/rabbi-mordechai-djavaheri/

4. Sukkahs with canvas walls are insufficient for the mitzvah. One should ensure in advance that there are hard walls or elastic straps that can create halachically suitable walls (*Yechaveh Daat* 3:46, *Yabia Omer* OC 9:59, *Chazon Ovadiah*, Sukkot pg 1-5).

Kashrut

1. Ideally, one should only purchase meat that is *cholak Bet Yosef*. If one is eating in someone else's home, he may rely on a *safek sefekah* (double doubt) to eat without asking (*Yabia Omer* 5 YD 3).
2. Perhaps the most difficult issue for a Sephardi in an Ashkenazi community to navigate is eating at restaurants. For Ashkenazim, *bishul akum* is easily avoided by having the mashgiach ignite the flame on the stove or oven; for Sephardim, the food must be more actively cooked by a Jew, such as by putting it on the fire. Given this is not at all economical in our restaurants, they are basically all off limits unless one relies on a major leniency issued by Chacham Ovadia for restaurants owned by Jewish people, by combining various lenient opinions (*Yechaveh Daat* 5:54).
3. Glass does not absorb or emit taste, so one could have one set of glass dishes for both meat and

dairy as long as they are cleaned well in between, and it would not need to be kashered for Pesach (*Yechave Daat* 1:6). However, since Ashkenazim act strictly in this regard, one should not serve Ashkenazim dairy food on plates he used for meat or vice versa (Rav Schachter).

Life Cycles

1. Sephardim have a number of differences in their *ketubot*, and many rabbanim advise making sure to use a Sephardic Ketubah and not just a modified Ashkenazi one (Rav Shlomo Amar).
2. Two *panim chadashot* (new people) are required for Sheva Berachot, but they can be anyone who did not eat bread at the wedding (and will eat bread now) (*Shulchan Aruch* EH 62:7).
3. Yichud room is best omitted from the wedding (*Yabia Omer* vol. 5 EH 8). This can be difficult for a Sephardi chattan who attends an Ashkenazi yeshiva where it is commonplace to have a yichud room or if the kallah is Ashkenazi and expects it. Peer pressure comes from all sides.
4. Many are of the view that, at any Sheva Berachot event that takes place outside the home of the new couple, one may not recite more

than just Hagefen and Asher Bara; many disagree. Each should consult with his rabbi and follow his community custom.

5. Strictly speaking, a woman should cover her hair with a hat or scarf (*mitpachat*) not a wig (*Yabia Omer* 5 EH 5); many are lenient. For a woman who lives in a predominantly Ashkenazi community, wearing a *mitpachat* can be challenging and the women of the community (as well as her husband) should be sensitive to this.

Closing

Rabbi Haim Jachter's *Bridging Traditions: Demystifying Differences Between Sephardic and Ashkenazic Jews*, and Rabbi Yonatan Nacson's upcoming *Mimizrach uMiMa'arav* are great resources where these issues are discussed at length. Rabbi Nacson's *Laws of Shabbat*, *Laws of the Holidays*, and *Laws of Niddah* are great handbooks for every Sephardic home.

In closing, with a little time, effort, and pita (and a little less takeout), it's very possible to maintain our traditions in communities that want to be united but not uniform. Be'ezrat Hashem, with the right motivation and information, we can succeed in imparting on our traditions to generations to come.





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A Crunchy Conundrum: Can Ashkenazim Eat Soft Sephardic Matzah?

Based on a shiur given by Rabbi Lebowitz,
adapted by Rabbi Jordan Auerbach.

Identity, to the surprise of some, actually plays a significant role in halacha. Whether examining familial or geographic identity, custom and the halachic practices of an individual are significantly formed and dictated by the individual's identity.

When Rabbi Maurice Lamm z"l davened at my shul, he approached me with some distress about his health situation. At that time, he was not well and was having difficulty with digestion and knew that he would be unable to eat the requisite *shiur* of standard matzah at the Seder. He wanted to know if I had any *eitzah* of what he could do to fulfill the mitzvah given the circumstances.

As Ashkenazim know, matzah is not necessarily the easiest food to eat in large quantities, let alone digest. Yet each year we sit around the Seder table and in our noble attempt to fulfill the mitzvah of *achilas matzah* in the most ideal way, we race to finish a *k'zayis* of the crunchy stuff. However, another form of matzah exists. There are

Sephardic communities which indulge in a soft, laffa-like, matzah that is much easier on the jaw as well as the stomach.

I suggested to Rabbi Lamm that perhaps he could eat the Sephardic soft matzos in lieu of the traditional Ashkenazic ones he had always eaten on Pesach. To say that Rabbi Lamm was initially uncomfortable with this suggestion would be an understatement. Years of observing the mitzvah in accordance with the Ashkenazic custom and halachic rulings had clearly formed a strong sense of Ashkenazic identity, particularly with regard to the *hanhagos* of Pesach, which was being challenged by my solution to this problem. While the idea of eating a different type of matzah on Pesach may certainly be jarring to many, there is certainly significant material in the sources to evaluate whether my suggestion was halachically sound.

In evaluating my proposal, the first question one must ask is whether an Ashkenazic Jew can eat the soft Sephardic matzos in the first place. When an Ashkenazi Jew, and for that matter many communities of Sephardic Jews, see what the soft Sephardic



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matzos look like their initial reaction would probably be along the lines of "that's not matzah that's like a laffa or pita bread, that's chametz!"

Let us look to the sources to clarify the issue and determine whether one can eat the matzos of other traditions within Klal Yisrael.

In *Maseches Pesachim* (36b-37), there is a debate that begins to shape our analysis of the question at hand. Beis Shamai, in the *beraisa*, state that it is prohibited to make thick breads (matzos) on Pesach while Beis Hillel rule that baking these thick breads

(matzos) is permitted. Rashi explains that Beis Shamai prohibit the baking of thick breads because it will be nearly impossible to prevent the leavening of the bread when the dough is kept at such a thickness. There is a lengthy discussion regarding the exact thickness these breads can reach within the opinions of Beis Shamai and Beis Hillel. The Gemara quotes Rav Huna who rules (according to Beis Hillel, see Rashi) that the thickness threshold for thick bread would be one *tefach* thick. This is a pretty significant thickness (approx. 3.5 inches) and this measurement is derived from the *lechem hapanim* which was present on the Shulchan in the Beis Hamikdash and could not be chametz. Rav Yosef disagrees and rules that the measurement for matzah cannot be derived from the *lechem hapanim* since the *kohanim* were charged with its preparation and would be extra careful to ensure that there would be no leavening taking place and therefore the maximum thickness is not a *tefach* and is instead some measurement less than a *tefach*. The implication is that even this stricter approach is still much thicker than our average Ashkenazic matzos.

The *Ohr Zarua* quotes the Ra'avya in *Pesachim* (Siman 470) who rules that we follow Rav Yosef that the matzah must be less than a *tefach* thick but up to a *tefach* is acceptable. Over the years, matzos became thinner and thinner until our crunchy variety became the norm in Ashkenazic and some Sephardic communities. This evolution probably stems from the halachic sources which highlight the risk of baking thicker matzos with the possibility of leavening occurring. Since there is an obligation to proactively guard against leaving, we have adopted the practice of baking thinner matzos to significantly reduce the risk of

the dough leavening and becoming chametz.

The *Shulchan Aruch* rules in accordance with the *Ohr Zarua*, *ein osin b'Pesach pas avah tefach* (OC 460:5) that we may not bake matzos that are a *tefach* thick. Interestingly, The Rema does not comment on the ruling of the *Shulchan Aruch* regarding the thickness of matzah. The *Mishna Berura* does provide some context and explanation for this ruling and explains the associated risks with baking matzos close to a *tefach* in thickness and cautions us to be careful with matzos that are close to the maximum thickness, recommending that we should bake them thinner.

But how much thinner? Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach z'l (*Halichos Shlomo*, Seder Leil Pesach: Matzah p. 281) writes that the Ashkenazic minhag is to make matzos as thin as possible and an Ashkenazic person should not be lenient to eat thicker than our typical matzos. Rav Shlomo Zalman does provide various options for someone who has a hard time eating or digesting Ashkenazic matzah.

However, it's not so clear that the extra thin, crunchy matzos which we know have been the customary option for so long. Moreinu HaRav Schachter quotes that when the *Mishna Berura* (OC 486:3) discusses the size of a *k'zayis*, the *Mishna Berura* writes that if there is an air pocket in the matzah, the pocket should be popped to ensure that the matzah is measured properly. This is because the air does not count towards the *shiur k'zayis*. In that context, the *Mishna Berura* writes that someone who is using soft spongy matzah can measure it without having to compress it, as long as there are no air pockets.

Rav Schachter writes in a teshuva (Dated Purim Kattan 5771) that

according to the *Shulchan Aruch*, the beracha on a hard cracker is *mezonos* unless someone makes a meal (*koveiah seuda*) out of crackers. Sephardim generally make a *mezonos* on crackers and hard (Ashkenazic) matzah certainly seems to be cracker-like. So what do Sephardim do at the Seder? Can they eat Ashkenazi matzah or do they specifically have to eat Sephardi matzah? The acharonim suggest that since the Seder is in the context of a meal (*koveiah seuda*), the beracha on Ashkenazi matzah is *hamotzi*, even for Sephardim.

What about the reverse? Can an Ashkenazi use Sephardic matzah? Rav Schachter notes that when the Rema (460:4) writes that matzah should be made *rekikin* "thin", he does not mean they need to be hard like crackers, but rather that they should be thinner than a *tefach* or even better, should be thinner than a finger's breadth. The Sephardic matzos are certainly thinner than a finger's breadth. Regarding the Rema and Ashkenazi tradition, Rav Schachter writes that we don't have a binding minhag to eat the cracker-like matzos. It is simply a common practice but not one that has acquired a halachically binding status.

It seems clear from the poskim that it is permissible for Ashkenazim to eat the soft matzos of the Sephardim. Although we generally feel a strong sense of identity linked to our family's lineage, which dictates our halachic practice, there are times when it may be necessary to follow the custom of another branch of the family that is Klal Yisrael.

SELECTED PESACH INSIGHTS FROM RABBI ZEVULUN CHARLOP ZT"l

Pesach 1965: Wither Automation? Machine Matzos vs Hand- Made Matzos

Yesterday's vision or nightmare is today's reality. Automation is here. It is working profound changes in our society and way of life. And not unexpectedly grave and urgent problems are following in its wake.

The machine is doing our work for us and even our thinking. This has resulted in vast amounts of leisure time and real anxiety over man's future usefulness or obsolescence. In sum, automation — its impact upon the human personality as well as its moral implications — is fast becoming a predominant concern of man.

It boils down to the question: The machine has come of age but has man . . . has he, in his new technology, fabricated a golem, which Frankenstein-like will turn on its creator and destroy him or has he, at long last, fashioned that marvelous and benevolent tool which will finally enable him to relieve

the burden of suffering and love his neighbor as himself?

Two recent stories that have become part of the burgeoning folklore growing around the machine and computer, seem to us, to trenchantly depict the alternatives that lie before man.

In one story, a high ranking general is pictured as asking the computer, "What would happen if the Russians in 1975 directed 200 missiles with hydrogen warheads against our leading urban and industrial areas, 28% of which would be shot down by our defense establishments before they reached their targets, and we, in turn retaliated by sending 200 of our own missiles headed towards their chief installations and of which they managed to intercept 24% . . . What would happen?" The machine lit up, bells sounded, a whizzing noise shunted back and forth, up and down, until finally the answer arrived, "Yes!" The indignant general fed back into the machine, "Yes, what?" Again, after going through all the motions, the machine replied, "Yes, Sir!"

The second story tells about some



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technicians with time on their hands who decided to give their computer a really hard question. They asked it, "Is there a G-d?"

The machine rumbled, lights flashed, and the current whirred through its millions of transistors and memory cells. After a time, it produced this answer, "There is now!" This is automation's challenge to man. Will he become a dehumanized robot, bereft of all freedom, serving his god the machine, or will he bend the machine to do his bidding and say "Yes Sir" to him.

No sector of society and life including religion have escaped the onslaught of automation. Probably its first intrusion

upon Jewish religious observance was the introduction of the automated, mass producing and electrically controlled matzos and machines. The advent of the machine matzo two and three generations ago occasioned heated controversy among the learned rabbis and though, today, they generally and unqualifiedly approve of the machine matzo, the dispute has by no means entirely abated. There remains a hard core of devout Jews who persist in using only handmade matzos.

The argument chiefly centers around the halachic requirements of matzos mitzvah — the unleavened bread which is consumed at the Seder in fulfillment of the commandment to eat matzo on Passover. This matzo, according to Jewish law, must be directly produced by the energies of an “intelligent” man — *koach adam*—who is deliberately aware during the entire matzo making process, of its special significance and purpose. The question automation poses is whether pushing a button in a matzo plant satisfies these requisites and can also be considered *koach adam*—whether it is true to say that the button pusher makes matzos in the same way as the baker who turns them down with his own hands. Some are not convinced that this is the case.

Perhaps they have never articulated

their opposition to the machine matzo in these terms of the dilemma of man and the machine. Yet deep down, subconsciously even, there is the suspicion that the machine is more than a servile extension of man and that, in some growing sense, it is apart from man capable even of exerting its mechanic’s will upon him. Only history can ultimately decide this issue.

Pesach 1982: Is Mashiach Here? The Song

The holiday of Passover celebrates the deliverance of old and prophesizes the redemption to come. Beyond this, Passover is uniquely a time for song. On Shabbos Chol HaMoed, the intermediate Sabbath of Passover, we chant the Song of Songs. On the 7th day of Passover we read Moses’ Song of the Sea, and the Haftorah is the Song of David. The emphasis on song on Passover is not accidental. Rather it bespeaks the unavoidable link between song and redemption, between *shira* and *geulah*.

The Talmud tells us that G-d had originally desired to make Hezkeyahu, King of ancient Judea, and the Babylonian Emperor Sennacherib, who laid siege to Jerusalem, Gog and Magog, whose titanic struggle in the

end of days was to herald the coming of Mashiach. But the *midat hadin*, “the quality of justice” demurred and asked: Almighty, if You didn’t make David Mashiach, who offered, in all circumstances, good and ill, hymns and songs of praise before You, then how can you consider making Hezkeyahu Mashiach, Hezkeyahu who failed to say *shira* in the face of the most incredible miracles including the abject routing of Sennacherib’s vaunted legions without the loss of a single Jewish life?

Hashem’s intention was stayed by the irrefutable logic of the *midat hadin*, and Mashiach is still to come.

Mind you, Hezkeyahu, next to Mashiach, was possibly the greatest promulgator of Torah in the whole history of learning.

Hezkeyahu had planted a sword by the door of the Bais Hamedrash and proclaimed; “He who will not study the Torah will be pierced by the sword.” Search was made from Dan unto Beer Sheva and not an ignoramus was found . . . There wasn’t a boy or girl, man or woman, who wasn’t thoroughly versed in the laws of cleanness and uncleanness.

There was never a time of greater Torah dissemination and observance than Hezkeyahu’s and indeed, “it was the oil of Hezkeyahu that destroyed the yoke of Sennacherib.” (*Sanhedrin* 94a) Yet, because he failed to say *Shira*, the coming of the Messiah was postponed for another 2500 years at least, and we have had to suffer the most harrowing succession of calamities ever sustained by any people in all the annals of history — the destruction of two temples, the expulsions, massacres, pogroms, humiliation and wretchedness of the *galus*, and finally in our time, the Holocaust: And all this because Hezkeyahu failed to say *shira*, to thank



G-d for the miracles wrought in his time and on behalf of the people of Israel in the Land of Israel. All his Torah and the Torah of his generation were to little avail and could not overcome the offense of silence, of not saying *shira*.

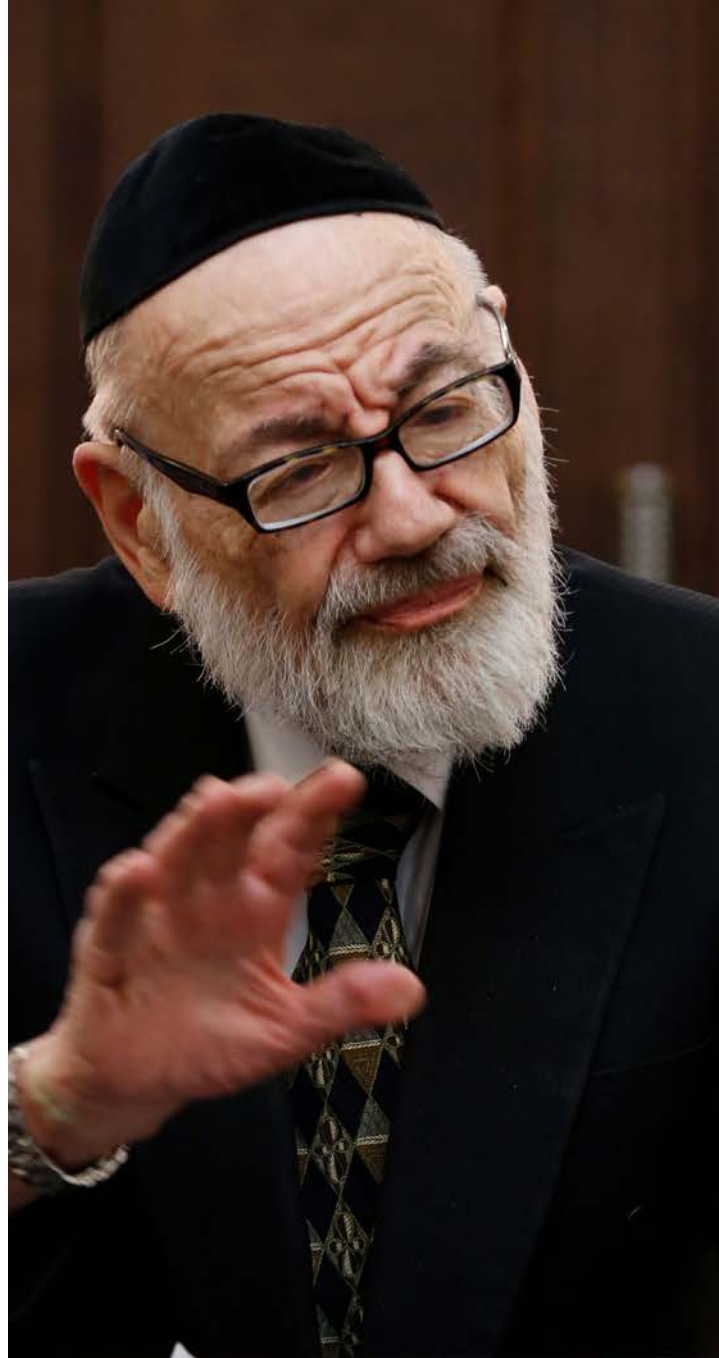
The transgression was compounded, it seems to me, by the fact that he, above all others, knew how to sing. For the Talmud, in Baba Batra 15a, tells us that it was none other than Hezkeyahu and his company who composed Shir Hashirim, the Song of Songs, which according to Rabbi Akiva, is *kodesh kadoshim*, the Holy of Holies of Scripture. To know how to say shira and not to say it when the moment for its saying finally arrives, is a cardinal lapse and forfeits Mashiach.

Implicit in all this is the unavoidable realization that whatever our preconception about Mashiach, he apparently is not a fixed being, destined to come at fixed time, but there are certain junctures in history which can indubitably be reckoned as Messianic times, and that there are certain personalities in those times who can just as indubitably be denominated as Mashiach. But the moment has to be grasped, otherwise the chance is muffed.

Our great teacher and mentor Rabbi Soloveitchik, once related to us an incident in the life of his grandfather, Rabbenu Chaim o.b.m., which seems to confirm this understanding of Mashiach. A learned *meshumad*, who became a missionary, presumed to bring his “message” to the Jews of Brisk. Understandably, Rabbenu Chaim could not abide this renegade in the midst of his town and moved heaven and earth to have him banished, warning the authorities that his presence was an incitement against the tranquility of the city and its environs. The powers that be relented in the face of Rabbenu Chaim’s unyielding demand, and the apostate was ordered to leave.

In one of those incredible coincidences, Rabbenu Chaim, precisely at that time, had to go to Warsaw and he happened to be on the same train as this self-same meshumad, who had just been run out of town. The meshumad brazenly approached Rabbenu Chaim and insisted that they engage in dialogue over the question of his apostasy and Rabbenu Chaim’s abhorrence of him and what he was doing. The apostate asked Rabbenu Chaim: “You know that Maimonides [*Hilchos Melachim*, Chapter 11, Halacha 5] tells us that Rabbi Akiva was entirely persuaded that Bar Kochba was Mashiach. But Rabbi Akiva was proven dead wrong. And if Rabbi Akiva erred then about Bar Kochba being Mashiach, how can you be sure that the Mashiach I worship is not mashiach?” Rabbenu Chaim answered: “And who told you that Bar Kochba was not Mashiach? He stopped being Mashiach when he turned against the sages and was killed because of his sins!”

We live now in the most portentous time; songs of messianism are all about us. Our eyes have seen wondrous evidencings of G-d’s intervention into the affairs of men and nations, not given to ancestors far worthier than us. Why? We know not. And there is one supreme obligation for Jews today, and that is to sing, to say



Have we sung the song of sure faith and profound appreciation, which can nail down this age as the long awaited Messianic epoch, or have we allowed the extraordinary transpirings about us to leave us unmoved without a song in our hearts?

shira, so that Heaven forbends, this once in a millennia opportunity is also not blown.

Isaiah (60:22) says: "In its time, will I hasten its redemption." Rabbi Joshua ben Levi (*Sanhedrin* 98) pointed to a contradiction here. It is written at once, "in its time [will the Mashiach come]", and "I will hasten [his coming]." If we are worthy, our deliverance will be hastened. If we are not worthy, it will happen only in its own good time.

Obviously, many factors go into the determination of worthiness and unworthiness, but there can be no question that one of the most important elements in this evaluation will be if we have met the challenge of our times appropriately. Have we sung the song of sure faith and profound appreciation, which can nail down this age as the long awaited Messianic epoch, or have we allowed the extraordinary transpirings about us to leave us unmoved without a song in our hearts?

Then, Heaven forfend, we will have crushed underfoot yet another golden opportunity for Mashiach.

Pesach 2006: The Trial of Affliction, The Trial of Affluence

Several years ago, a grandson of mine spent the last days of Pesach with us. It being the first time his family had not attended our Seder, my grandson wanted me to give him another chance to find the afikomen on Shvi'i shel Pesach, the last days of the Pesach holiday, to make up for the regular afikomen he had missed during the Seder nights. I explained to him that the afikomen is a mitzvah prescribed exclusively for the Seder night, and we would be guilty of the prohibitive

commandment of *bal tosif*—adding to the mitzvah—if we instituted an afikomen during the last days of Pesach as well ... he was not mollified.

My grandson nagging me for an afikomen opportunity, I had to devise another game plan: "The hunt for the *rechush gadol*." Whereas on the first days of Passover we recall through the matza the *oni*, the affliction of our ancestors, on the second days of Passover we focus on the *rechush gadol*—the great bounty. This is what Hashem promised Avraham when He told him that his descendants would leave with *rechush gadol* after serving the Egyptians for four hundred years (Bereishis 15:14). The idea conveyed by the *rechush gadol* fits more appropriately with the notion of prizes and expensive gifts, and I felt that the *rechush gadol* hunt was the perfect game for my grandchildren to play on the second days of Pesach. The game itself is "played" with the same rules as the afikomen search; the grandchild (I suppose all children can play this game as well) must look for the *rechush gadol* matza that has been hidden in a clever place by the father or grandfather. When the young boy or girl finds the *rechush gadol*, he or she receives a reward which ought to be even more valuable than the afikomen!

The Bnei Yisroel's collection of this "great bounty" came in two stages. The first stage occurred when the Egyptians, in a miraculous turnabout, sent the Bnei Yisroel away with expensive farewell mementos that they had ostensibly borrowed. The second stage, when the Bnei Yisroel picked up from the Red Sea shores on Shvi'i shel Pesach, a week after the initial Exodus, the gorgeous armor of their drowned, Egyptian pursuers. This armor surpassed by far the wealth they had collected in Egypt, and in fact, Moshe had to coerce Bnei

Yisroel to depart from their Red Sea riches (Shemos 15:22).

There are two explanations for the need for coercion here, which, superficially, seem altogether contradictory. Rashi says that Moshe literally had to tear them away from the Red Sea because they were so engrossed in accumulating the expensive remnants of the Egyptian cavalry. The Zohar, however, understands the need for force here in an entirely new perspective. The Jews did not want to depart from the Red Sea because never before had they sensed so vividly and unmistakably—the presence of the Shechinah.

My grandfather z"l saw no contradiction between Rashi's understanding and the Zohar's. There are two tests of faith—*nisayon ha'oni*, the test of affliction, and *nisayon ha'osher*, the test of affluence. When dark times hit, it is often difficult to recognize Hashem's Presence and believe fully in His ultimate guiding hand. However, even a more difficult test is the test of affluence: to believe in Hashem and heed His Word in times of well-being and ease. A person's recognition of Hashem even in affluent times can be an even more sublime vision than in a time of adversity. There is no contradiction here between Rashi and the Zohar. Bnei Yisroel's powerful awareness of Hashem came precisely because of their preoccupation with the riches at the sea. And this is what Chazal mean when they say: "What the plainest maidservant saw at the Red Sea was not seen even by Ezekiel in his marvelous conjuring of the chariot."

"We are expected," I told my grandson, "to feel the Shechinah when we are flushed with *rechush gadol*, and indeed, it is possible for us to reach higher peaks of *yedias Hashem* in wealth than in poorness.

B'RECHUSH GADOL WITH GREAT WEALTH

The timing is striking and the message seems peculiar. He had just been banished from the presence of Paroh under the threat of death and, according to Rashi, Moshe stubbornly faces off with Paroh as Hashem is about to announce the final plague: *makas bechoros*. It was precisely at that moment that Hashem reveals to Moshe that He does not want His children to leave Mitzrayim as penniless slaves.

דָּבַר נָא בְּאַזְנֵי הָעָם וְיִשְׁאַלּוּ אִישׁ מֵאַתְּ רֵעֵהוּ
וְאִשָּׁה מֵאַתְּ רֵעוּתָהּ כְּלִי כֶסֶף וְכְלֵי זָהָב.
*Please speak to the nation that each man
and woman must ask from their neighbor
objects of silver and gold.*

Shemos 11:2

As strange as it seems to be concerned with gold and silver as we complete a miraculous redemptive course, this materialistic initiative has been an integral part of Hashem's plan for us, ever since it was revealed to Avrohom at the *bris bain habisarim*:

וַיֹּאמֶר לְאַבְרָם יְדַע כִּי גֵר יִהְיֶה וְרַעַף בְּאַרְצִי
לֹא לָהֶם וְעַבְדוּם וְעָנּוּ אֹתָם אַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה.
וְגַם אֶת הַגּוֹי אֲשֶׁר יַעֲבֹדוּ דָן אֲנִי וְאַחֲרַי כֹּן יִצְאוּ
בְּרֶכֶשׁ גָּדוֹל.

Hashem says to Avrohom: Know with certainty that your children will be strangers in a foreign land, and they will be forced to work and will be oppressed for four hundred years. And I will judge the nation that is enslaving them and afterward they will leave with great wealth.

Breishis 15:13-14

Are we to imagine that Avrohom takes some comfort in the promise of his children's ultimate wealth? Would we in any way make peace with our children's terrible suffering through the knowledge that they will gain fortunes when it is all over? If there is to be some solace in the dreadful news of descendants' pain, should it not be in the spiritual strength that will give it all some meaning? To be sure, the significance of the "*rechush gadol*" is further underscored as it is represented as one of the "*simanim*" in the "*ma'aseh avos siman lebanim*" system of Sefer Bereishis, about which the Ramban elaborates. Accordingly, Avrohom returns from Mitzrayim as a wealthy man to pave the way for his children who will leave with a *rechush gadol*. The fact that it was important



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enough to be part of the prophetic journey of Avrohom Avinu begs us to consider it and attempt to understand its importance.

All of this culminates in Hashem's apparent anxiety to fulfill the good news of the covenant even as the bad came into being. That is why, according to Chazal quoted by Rashi, Hashem begins this request of Moshe with "please," as if to beg this generation to help Him maintain His integrity and assure Him that He will not disappoint Avrohom Avinu. Surely, we must be troubled by what seems to be confusing the moments of our national birth with the pursuit of material gain from our oppressors? Interestingly, Moshe,



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as he stood in front of Paroh, scolded and imperiled, and now hearing about the *rechush gadol* mission, may have wondered whether the Egyptians would share their wealth with their Israelite enemies. Perhaps that is why Hashem immediately continues with the details of His plan, all of which will begin to shed some light on the purpose of the “*rechush gadol*”:

וַיִּתֵּן ה' אֶת חַן הָעַם בְּעֵינֵי מִצְרַיִם גַּם
הָאִישׁ מֹשֶׁה גָּדוֹל מְאֹד בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם בְּעֵינֵי
עַבְדֵי פַרְעֹה וּבְעֵינֵי הָעַם.

Hashem made the Jews find favor in the eyes of the Egyptians. Moreover, Moshe was held in great esteem in the Land of Egypt and in the opinion of the servants of Paroh and in the opinion of the Egyptians.
Shemos 11:3

Whereas we would have expected the Egyptians to entirely dismiss us as lowly slaves who were bringing upon them unprecedented and unceasing curses, Hashem assured that the opposite will take place. With Hashem’s intervention, they found us altogether charming, and Moshe was off the charts!! Not to be believed? Watch how the Egyptians would freely and willingly give of their property to the Jews. The flow of the pesukim would suggest that through this exercise the Jews would come to learn of the respect the Egyptians accorded them. Indeed, when asking for the gold and silver, our forefathers were to learn an age-old truism: We will earn goodwill and respect when we act as courageous Jews and carry Hashem’s

blessings as rightful and deserving owners. In those circumstances Hashem will become known to all and revered by all both through our behavior and subsequently through the blessings that He showers upon us.

Thus our redemption was not confused by greed or by materialism, but rather through the *rechush gadol*, a historic moment became charged with outreach and mission. This was by no means the first time that our position amongst our neighbors took on great significance. In fact, this brings us back to Avrohom Avinu. In a narrative unusually rich in detail describing his efforts to secure a grave for Sarah, we read of every conversation and of every move that Avrohom made. The Ramban, wanting us to be alert to the messages of the details of any narrative, explains that these conversations are recorded for us in order to see the genuine respect that Avrohom had achieved. He is welcomed as “*nesi Elokim*,” a prince of G-d. His behaviors, words and accomplishments are watched carefully and are thus positioned to communicate Hashem’s presence, values and wishes.

Earlier in Avrohom’s life, when his nascent career brought him back from Mitzrayim to Israel, the Torah

emphasizes that he revisited all the places that hosted him on his flight from famine to Egypt. According to Rashi, he left as a poor man and was now repaying the credit that had been extended to him. Unwilling to accept that the repayment of debt is worthy of being recorded as it should be self-understood, many *darshanim* explain this detail much more dramatically. They suggest that the Avrohom who descended to Mitzrayim was perceived as abandoned by the G-d about whom he came to teach and terribly dependent on the people he came to inspire. Yet on his return, Avrohom, now a man of means, would revisit his doubters and skeptics. This was not about shallow triumphalism but about teaching faith, trust and patience.

Thus the *rechush gadol* was the prophetic promise to Avrohom that his children would leave Mitzrayim empowered to teach about Hashem’s presence and protection, about His demands and directions. The *rechush gadol* similarly signaled to us as we left Mitzrayim that we are a people who were and will be appreciated for our beliefs and behaviors and perhaps even envied for our faith and ideals. It is, no doubt, for the purpose of building on that knowledge that you and I were redeemed.



שמח זבולון בצאתך
Pesach Insights
In memory of Rabbi
Zevulun Charlop zt"l



SAVORING SPIRITUAL SPARKS

For many years, I had the honor of learning b'chavrusa with Rav Charlop zt"l. The anticipation of Yom Tov and delving into related topics together was always a highlight. He would often share his creative halachic analyses, lomdus, and drashos, encouraging me to incorporate them into my own sermons in shul. Here is one such drasha (delivered in Congregation Bnai Yeshurun, Pesach 5772), rooted in the Torah of Mori v'rabi, Rav Zevulun Charlop zt"l.

Rav Zevin recounts the story of the Sar Shalom from Belz, the first Belzer Rebbe, who was often approached by people sharing their *tzaros*, asking for blessings and for him to daven on their behalf. One day, a woman came to see him and listed a litany of terrible troubles, asking for salvation from her predicament. He told her she needed to have *emunah*, faith, in Hashem. Immediately she retorted, "First let me see salvation, and then I will have faith." The Sar Shalom was taken aback, and she explained her stance using a passage from the Torah: at the time of Kriyas Yam Suf, the Torah states:

וירא ישראל את היד הגדולה אשר עשה
ה' במצרים ויראו העם את ה' ויאמינו בה'
ובמשה עבדו.

And when Israel saw the wondrous power which Hashem had wielded against the

Egyptians, the people feared Hashem; they had faith in Hashem and in His servant Moses.

Shemos 14:31

First Bnei Yisrael saw the mighty hand of Hashem save them at the edge of the Yam Suf, and only then did they have faith in Hashem. She argued that, similarly, she wanted to see the salvation before having faith. The Sar Shalom related that this was the first time anyone, man or woman, had stumped him, and he couldn't refute her proof.

Rav Charlop related this story to me and suggested an approach to answering her proof that sheds some light on our Yom Tov celebration.

The Medrash makes a very striking comment on the passuk (Daniel 9:7) "*lecha Hashem hatzedaka v'lanu boshes hapanim*," to you Hashem is



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righteousness and to us is shame. The Medrash says, "What's this referring to? When Bnei Yisrael crossed the Yam Suf, they carried *avodah zara* with them." How could this be? They had just witnessed one of the greatest exhibitions of Hashem's power, and yet they were still susceptible to straying from G-d?

Similarly, we find a Medrash that says that the seeds of the *cheit haegel* were planted shortly after Matan Torah. How could this be? It seems unthinkable, even postposterous!

Rabbi Charlop pointed out that it's not just in the realm of the Medrash. If we look at Tehillim 106, the passuk says:

אבותינו במצרים לא השכילו נפלאותיהם לא
זכרו את רב חסדיהם וימרו על ים סוף.
*Our forefathers in Egypt did not perceive
Your wonders; they did not remember Your
abundant love, but rebelled at the Yam Suf.*
Tehillim 106:7

וישיעם למען שמו להודיע את גבורתו.
*Yet He saved them, as befits His name, to
make known His might.*
Tehillim 106:8

What's the common thread in all these cases? What ideas are the passuk and these Medrashim trying to convey to us?

How joyous it must be when G-d brings salvation — when, out of nowhere, G-d miraculously intervenes and shows us His all-powerful hand. What greater gift could there be? How much each one of us would love to so clearly witness G-d's strength and awesomeness, and allow that inspiration to shape us!

Hashem certainly, at times, immediately brings salvation perhaps even before the *emunah* is fully realized, but it comes with a risk. The risk is losing it all too quickly. When we work and prepare for something, we have the wherewithal, the tools to use the gift and hold onto it. But when it's given to us, when we're not holding on tight — when we're ill-prepared — the risk of losing it all is very real and very strong. We can be crossing the Yam Suf and still haven't let go of our idols! We can even witness the revelation at Sinai and already have thoughts of a *cheit haegel* brewing in our minds because we aren't fully prepared.

At times, we may see individuals who, in a moment of inspiration, change their lives drastically, and yet some time later, it seems to completely disappear, and they revert back to how they were.

How does that happen?

Perhaps the reason is this same *yesod*.

When the inspiration is too strong and isn't well-rooted, it is very difficult to hold onto it. When we work hard, prepare, and try to grow, then that change can last. As Ben Hei Hei said, "*lfum tza'ara agra*" or in the modern vernacular, "no pain, no gain."

So why does G-d do it if it doesn't always work? Why the sudden inspiration? The answer is that it's a gift and an opportunity, and it can work — but it requires effort.

I recall a conversation I had with an Israeli cab driver. When I was in Eretz Yisrael a few years ago, I was riding in a taxi, and the driver, a self-identified *chiloni* (secular), proudly told me about his children who had become *chozer beteshuva*. As for himself, he mentioned being in Yerushalayim the previous night for the first time in a while and deciding to go with his wife to the Kotel. He said it was amazing, expressing, "*hircashti chom babeten*," it made me feel so warm in the stomach. If people passively experience spirituality with the perspective of how warm and fuzzy it makes them feel, it can't last. But if we take the inspiration and use it to make positive changes, to act upon it — exerting effort — then the change can last.

So Hashem gifts us occasionally with salvation and revelation, even when we're not deserving — and we need to decide what to do with it. Do we sit back and enjoy the warm, fuzzy spiritual feeling inside our stomachs, or do we concretely find ways to improve our service of G-d?

Perhaps this is the answer to the woman who came before the Sar Shalom. Yes, Bnei Yisrael were saved, and subsequently believed in Hashem — but that's not the best way. It's not ideal; it's what was necessary. If we want to do our part in ensuring salvation, we need to take positive steps forward and hope that when Hashem sees us readying ourselves for Him, He will reach out and save us.

Pesach, particularly with the sedarim, is among the most inspirational times of the year. This presents us with both a challenge and an opportunity: to ensure that not only are we inspired in the moment, but that we have prepared for it in advance and can hold onto that inspiration tightly afterward.

It is not merely about experiencing moments of divine intervention, but about how we respond to them. Do we allow these moments to shape us and drive us toward greater faith and action? Or do we let them fade away, leaving us unchanged?

As we celebrate Pesach and reflect on the miraculous events of our history, let us remember that true salvation comes not just from witnessing divine power, but from actively embracing it, internalizing it, and allowing it to guide our lives every day.

May we all merit to experience the true redemption, both as individuals and as a nation, and may we always strive to be worthy of the salvation that Hashem graciously bestows upon us.

Chag Pesach Sameach!



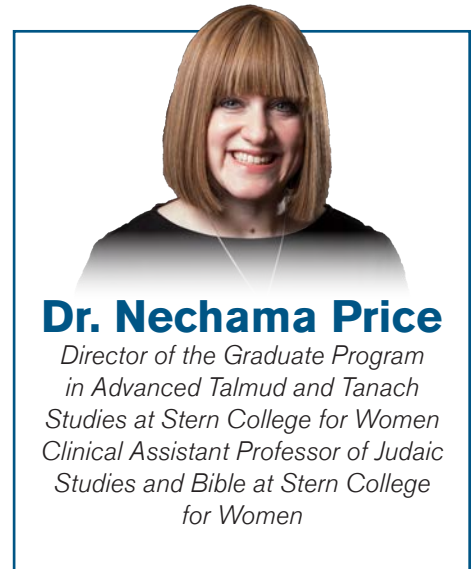
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Understanding the Unexpected

During the Pesach Seder's Maggid, we recount the Jewish people's journey from slavery to redemption and fulfill the biblical obligation of *ve-higadeta le-vincha*,¹ articulating the yetziat Mitzrayim narrative to our children. Thus, the intuitive choice for the Hagaddah's historical account of the Exodus would be a text written in the most organized and clearest fashion, ensuring that children of all ages can understand precisely what occurred and the lessons they are meant to glean from the story. In fact, that would seem to be the lens through which we consider Ba'al Ha-Hagaddah's choice for the

primary text selected to tell our national story.

Precisely for this reason, questions arise regarding the pesukim that the Ba'al Ha-Hagaddah chose to include or omit when relaying the story of yetziat Mitzrayim. It is quite unexpected, for example, that the Hagaddah begins with the tale of Avraham's father, Terach, and his idol worship.² But even stranger, the Ba'al Ha-Hagaddah selects pesukim from Navi, parroting Yehoshua's summary of Jewish history that he imparted just before he died (Joshua 24:1-4).³ Why does the Ba'al Ha-Hagaddah choose to retell the story



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in the past tense, from the perspective

1 Ex. 13:8. Also see Mishnah Pesachim 10:5; Sefar HaChinukh 21:1; Rambam Sefer HaMitzvot 157.

2 הגדה של פסח: מתחלה עובדי עבודה זרה היו אבותינו, ועכשיו קרבנו המקום לעבודתו, שנאמר: ויאמר יהושע אל כל העם, כה אמר ה' אלקי ישראל: בעבר הנהר ישבו אבותיכם מעולם, תרח אבי אברהם ואבי נחור, ויעבדו אלהים אחרים ואקח את אביכם את אברהם מעבר הנהר ואולף אותו בכל ארץ כנען, וארבה את זרעו ואתן לו את יצחק, ואתן ליצחק את יעקב ואת עשו. ואתן לעשו את הר שער לרשת אתו, ויעקב ובניו ירדו מצרים:

3 יהושע כד:א-ד: (א) ויאסף יהושע את כל שבטי ישראל שכמה ויקרא לזקני ישראל ולראשי ו לשפטי ולשטריו ויחיצבו לפני האלקים. (ב) ויאמר יהושע אל כל העם כה אמר ה' אלקי ישראל בעבר הנהר ישבו אבותיכם מעולם תרח אבי אברהם ואבי נחור ויעבדו אלהים אחרים. (ג) ואקח את אביכם את אברהם מעבר הנהר ואולף אותו בכל ארץ כנען [וארבה] (וארב) את זרעו ואתן לו את יצחק. (ד) ואתן ליצחק את יעקב ואת עשו ואתן לעשו את הר שער לרשת אתו ויעקב ובניו ירדו מצרים.

of Yehoshua, rather than quoting the original account of the story, namely the pesukim found in Parshat Shemot?

However, upon further examination, there is an even more basic question based on the selection of the Ba'al Ha-Hagaddah. When comparing the words found in the Haggadah to the words of Yehoshua, it is striking that the Ba'al Ha-Hagaddah seems to purposely end the citation from Sefer Yehoshua before the conclusion of the story! Yehoshua begins with Terach and Avraham and continues to describe Moshe and Aharon taking us out of Egypt, and concludes with a brief mention of the conquest of the land of Israel.⁴ However, the Hagaddah ends its quotation four pesukim early, leaving out most of the story: Moshe and Aharon being chosen and the miracles G-d performs in Egypt, which lead to our inheriting the land of Israel (24:5-8). Thus, we are forced to question: What is the objective of the Ba'al Ha-Hagaddah and how does his selection and omission of pesukim help him accomplish his goal, ultimately helping us to fulfill our obligation of teaching our children the story of the exodus from Egypt?

Fascinatingly, just a little further into the Maggid section of the Hagaddah, the Ba'al Ha-Hagaddah repeats this exact

pattern! A few paragraphs later, the Hagaddah begins a second rendition of the story of yetziat Mitzrayim, choosing yet again not to cite the pesukim from Sefer Shemot.⁵ This time, the Ba'al Ha-Hagaddah selects a quote from Sefer Devarim (21:5-8), citing a declaration made by a farmer bringing his first fruits (Bikkurim) to the Beit HaMikdash.⁶ These pesukim, once again, begin with a story from Sefer Bereishit, this time the tale of Lavan and Yaakov, followed by the narrative of the Jewish people's plight in Egypt.⁷ Additionally, once again the Ba'al Ha-Hagaddah stops quoting the farmer's speech before its conclusion, intentionally omitting the final verse that celebrates the bringing of the Jewish people to the land of Israel (v. 9).⁸

Thus, a very specific pattern emerges: Twice the Ba'al Ha-Hagaddah quotes pesukim of **someone** reciting the story of yetziat Mitzrayim to others rather than quoting the original story found in Sefer Shemot. Twice, he begins the story too early, citing narratives from Sefer Bereishit and ends the story too soon, purposely excluding the conclusions of the sources he is quoting.

To address these questions, we must consider the setting and context of each of these recitations of yetziat

Mitzrayim quoted in the Hagaddah. As mentioned earlier, the pesukim from Sefer Yehoshua are excerpts from Yehoshua's speech relaying his final message to Am Yisrael before his death. Under his leadership, the Jewish people successfully enter, conquer, and divide the land of Israel. Thus, his audience is the next generation, a Jewish people who are now living and settled in the land of Israel, who did not experience firsthand the freedom from slavery of their parents' generation. Similarly, the farmer bringing his bikkurim is simply reciting a story from the distant past. Since this farmer must be living in Israel, he must have acquired a piece of land, planted a field, produced fruit, and now brings his first fruits to the Beit Hamikdash. Both stories are being told from the perspective of Jewish people already living in the land of Israel, not those who have directly experienced slavery and redemption.

Indeed, further comparison of these two accounts highlights more similarities between them. First, both stories are being told specifically in the presence of G-d: Yehoshua gathers the nation to the land of Shechem, a location described in the pasuk as, "ויתיצבו לפני האלקים" *"they stood before G-d"* (Josh. 24:1).⁹ Similarly, when bringing the first fruit, the concept of

4 יהושע כד-ה: (ה) ואֶשְׁלַח אֶת מֹשֶׁה וְאֶת אֶהֱרֹן וְאָגַף אֶת מִצְרַיִם כַּאֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתִי בְּקִרְבּוֹ וְאַחֲרַי הוֹצֵאתִי אֹתְכֶם. (ו) וְאוֹצִיא אֶת אֲבוֹתֵיכֶם מִמִּצְרַיִם וְתָבֹאוּ הַיָּמָה וְיִרְדְּפוּ מִצְרַיִם אַחֲרֵי אֲבוֹתֵיכֶם בְּרָכָב וּבַפָּרָשִׁים יָם סוּף. (ז) וַיִּצְעְקוּ אֵל ה' וַיִּשְׂם מֶאֱפֶל בַּיַּיִנִּים וּבֵין הַמִּצְרַיִם וַיָּבֵא עֲלֵיו אֶת הַיָּם וַיִּכְסְהוּ וַתִּרְאֶינָה עֵינֵיכֶם אֶת אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתִי בְּמִצְרַיִם וְתִשְׁבוּ בַּמִּדְבָּר יָמִים רַבִּים. (ח) [וְאָבִיא] (וּאֲבִיא) אֶתְכֶם אֶל אֶרֶץ הָאֱמֹרִי הַיּוֹשֵׁב בָּעֵבֶר הַיַּרְדֵּן וַיִּלְחַמוּ אִתְּכֶם וְאַתֶּם אוֹתָם בְּיָדְכֶם וַתִּירָשׁוּ אֶת אֶרֶץ וְאֲשֵׁמִידִם מִפְּנֵיכֶם.

5 הגדה של פסח: צא ולמד מה בקש לבן הארמי לעשות ליעקב אבינו: שפרעה לא יזר אלא על הזכרים, ולכן בקש לעקר את הכל. שצאמר: ארמי אבד אבי, וירד מצרימה ויגר שם במתי מעט, ויהי שם לגוי גדול, עצום ורב; וירעו אתנו המצרים ויענונו, ויתנו עלינו עבדה קשה; ונצעק אליה' אלקי אבותינו, וישמע ה' את-קולנו, וירא את-ענינו ואת עמלנו ואת לחצנו: ויוצאנו ה' ממצרים ביד חזקה, ויברע נטויה, ובמרא גדל, ובאותות ובמפתים:

6 דברים כו-ה: (ה) ועניית ואמרת לפני ה' אלקיך ארמי אבד אבי וירד מצרימה ויגר שם במתי מעט ויהי שם לגוי גדול עצום ורב. (ו) וירעו אתנו המצרים ויענונו ויתנו עלינו עבדה קשה. (ז) ונצעק אל ה' אלקי אבותינו וישמע ה' את קולנו וירא את ענינו ואת עמלנו ואת לחצנו. (ח) ויוצאנו ה' ממצרים ביד חזקה ויברע נטויה ובמרא גדל ובאותות ובמפתים.

7 Although there are mefarshim who translate the phrase "Arami oved avi" as referencing Avraham (Rashbam Deut. 26:5) or Yaakov (Ibn Ezra and Rabbeinu Bachya Deut. 26:5), the Hagaddah posits the interpretation of the verse based on Rashi (Deut. 26:5) that it is referring to Lavan seeking to destroy Yaakov.

8 דברים כו:ט: ויבאנו אל המקום הזה ויתן לנו את הארץ הזאת ארץ זבת חלב ודבש.

9 One may question why Shechem is referenced as standing before G-d, since during Yehoshua's time the Mishkan was established in Gilgal. Ralbag (Josh. 26:1) explains that Yehoshua's speech is a preamble to his renewing the covenant between G-d and the Jewish people, thus this location is granted the status of "lifnei Hashem." R. Moshe Yitzchak Ashkenazi in his *Sefer Hoil Moshe* (Josh 26:1) adds that Shechem is the place where two of our forefathers, Avraham and Yaakov built a *mizbeach*, an altar, to serve Hashem (Gen. 12:8; Gen. 33:20), earning the title of "lifnei Hashem."

being “*lifnei Hashem*” is repeated twice. The farmer is commanded to stand, “לפני מזבח ה' אלקיך,” “*in front of the altar before Hashem your G-d*” (Deut. 26:4) and make this declaration “לפני ה' אלקיך,” “*before Hashem your G-d*” (Deut. 26:5), emphasizing his location, standing by the Beit Hamikdash, the dwelling place of G-d. Thus, both stories quoted in our Hagaddah to recount yetziat Mitzrayim transpired in a location that epitomizes the special relationship between G-d and the Jewish people.

Second, as noted above, both Yehoshua and the farmer begin their speeches by referring to a story from Sefer Bereishit, reminiscing about evil influences of our past that our ancestors had to overcome (Terach and Lavan). Yehoshua references Terach, a known idol worshiper, describing how Avraham leaves behind his family to discover monotheism. Why begin the story here? Yehoshua knows that the biggest challenge awaiting the next generation of the Jewish people is the influence of their idolatrous Canaanite neighbors in the land of Israel, who may pressure them to return to the idolatrous ways of Terach. Thus, Yehoshua chooses to gather the Jewish people to Shechem, the exact location where Avraham spoke to G-d for the first time in Canaan and is promised the land of Israel (Gen. 12:6), and commences his speech with a reminder that the Jewish story really begins with Avraham. Avraham was chosen to begin the nation of G-d because he rejected his family’s belief in idols. Therefore, in that spot, in **Shechem**, Yehoshua commands the Jewish people “הסירו את אלהי הנכר אשר בקרבכם” (Josh. 26:23), borrowing Yaakov’s language in Genesis

35, where he commands his own sons “הסרו את אלהי הנכר אשר בתכם” (Gen. 35:2), “*remove the foreign gods that are amongst you*,” referring to the idols that they took from the spoils of **Shechem**. Yehoshua’s goal of starting the story of yetziat Mitzrayim from Avraham and Terach and not from the moment of enslavement is to prepare the people of his generation for the greatest challenge of the next stage of Jewish history. Following in the footsteps of Avraham, they must reject the temptations and invitations of their idolatrous neighbors and remain loyal to Hashem alone.

So too the farmer, speaking on behalf of himself and his fellow farmers, is declaring a warning against succumbing to the greatest challenge facing them. A farmer can easily become overwhelmed by his wealth and successful produce and must protect himself from an attitude of “כחי ועצמי ידי עשה לי את החיל” — “*my own power and the strength of my hand has made me this wealth*” (Deut 8:17). To fight this instinct, he must publicly declare that G-d is the source of his precious produce and the collective success of Am Yisrael by repeating the story of yetziat Mitzrayim. To further emphasize this point, he begins the story by mentioning Yaakov escaping from the evil influences of Lavan. Lavan is a symbol of selfishness, always coveting more wealth and honor (see Rashi Gen. 24:29, 29:13) and, ultimately, to control Yaakov’s family. Rav Yosef Zvi Rimon in his Pesach Hagaddah explains that “Lavan wanted to control everything—to destroy the very essence of Am Yisrael’s identity. That is the greatest danger to Am Yisrael.” Thus, the farmer must commence his story of yetziat

Mitzrayim by describing how Yaakov’s family extricated themselves from the evil proclivities of Lavan, setting precedence that Am Yisrael attributes full credit and control to Hashem, not to any human being.¹⁰

With all of this in mind, we can now answer our opening questions: Why do we read these alternative versions of the yetziat Mitzrayim story instead of the narrative presented in Sefer Shemot? Perhaps it is to demonstrate that the purpose of the Seder night is *ve-higadeta le-vincha*, specifically to tell the story in way that we can make it relevant to our children, not just tell them stories of the past. Thus, we read two versions of **people** recounting the story of yetziat Mitzrayim, each giving over an appropriate message that was germane to that moment in time, specific to that generation.

Conceivably, this also explains why, in both recounts, the Ba’al Ha-Hagaddah leaves out the endings of their respective narratives. If the goal was to show how the story of yetziat Mitzrayim can be told in a manner that would provide distinct messages applicable for that generation and particular for that audience, then perhaps the endings are purposely removed. At our own seder, we need to personalize the retelling of yetziat Mitzrayim, teaching our children the messages that are relevant for our time. Thus, perhaps, the Ba’al Ha-Hagaddah left the endings of story open for us to fill in the blanks.

10 These two principles, reminding ourselves that everything is from Hashem (the farmer), and rejection of idol worship (Yehoshua) are joint together in the same warnings of Moshe towards all of Am Yisrael and how they lead to us forgetting Hashem in our lives. In Devarim chapter 8, he begins by warning us against the attitude of “כחי ועצמי ידי עשה לי את החיל” (v. 17), leads to forgetting Hashem’s involvement in our lives, “והיה אם שכח תשכח את ה' אלקיך” (v. 19), and that leads to directly to a life of idol worship “והלכת אחרי אלהים אחרים ועבדתם והשתחית להם” (v. 19).



Bedikas Chametz Insights from The Rav: Excerpts from Batei Yosef

The Exemption of *Makom She'ain Machnisin Bo Chametz*

The Mishna, *Pesachim* 2a, states that there is no requirement to perform *bedikas chametz* on a *makom she'ain machnisin bo chametz*, a place where people don't bring chametz. Rav Soloveitchik queried: What is the nature of this rule? Do we treat a place where people don't bring chametz as chametz free or do we simply assume that such a place doesn't meet the threshold to require *bedikas chametz*? Rav Soloveitchik noted that the practical difference is whether we are required to perform *bitul chametz* (nullification of chametz) for potential chametz in those places. If we assume that such a place is chametz free, then there is no obligation at all to perform *bitul chametz*. However, if such a place only receives an exemption from *bedikas chametz*, perhaps that is only because *bedikas chametz* is a rabbinic

institution to actively search for unknown chametz and not rely on *bitul chametz*. Nevertheless, we must still perform *bitul chametz* because there is a possibility that this place does contain chametz, and failure to perform *bitul* would lead to ownership of chametz on Pesach.

This issue seems to be the subject of a dispute among the Rishonim. The Ran (*Pesachim* 1a in Rif pages s.v. *Ela Kach*) writes that a place where people don't bring chametz doesn't require *bedikah* or *bitul*. We may rely on the *chazakah* (status quo) that this place doesn't contain chametz. [The Ran does admit that on a rabbinic level, there is a requirement to perform *bitul* out of concern that we might actually find chametz there and decide to keep it until after Pesach.] The Rambam (*Hilchos Chametz UMatzah* 2:5) seems to disagree. The Rambam writes:

חור שבאמצע הבית שבין אדם לחבירו זה
בודק עד מקום שידו מגעת וזה בודק עד מקום

שידו מגעת והשאר מבטלו בלבו. אבל חור
שבין ישראל לעכו"ם אינו בודק כלל שמא



Batei Yosef (Hebrew) is a collection of insights into the laws and customs of the holidays through the rulings of The Rav as well as those of current Roshei Yeshiva at RIETS.

Batei Yosef is available at
RIETSPress.org.

יאמר העכו"ם כשפים הוא עושה לי אלא
מבטלו בלבן ודיו. וכל מקום שאין מכניסין בו
חמץ אינו צריך בדיקה.

If there is a hole in the middle of the building between two neighbors each one checks as far as he could and regarding the rest (the area that can't be reached), they should each nullify the chametz. However, if there is a hole between a Jew and non-Jewish neighbor, he should not check the hole at all out of concern that the non-Jew will say that his neighbor is engaged in sorcery. Rather, he should nullify the chametz and that is sufficient. Any place that one does not bring chametz does not require bedikah.

The implication is that a place where people don't bring chametz is the same as an unreachable hole, and since the unreachable hole requires *bitul*, so too, the place where people don't bring chametz requires *bitul*.

Rav Soloveitchik then asked another question: what are the parameters of a *makom she'ain machnisin bo chametz*? Is it defined as a place where people don't ordinarily bring chametz or is defined as a place where people never bring chametz? The Rambam (*Hilchos Chametz UMatzah* 3:6) writes that obligation to check for chametz includes "*kol hamekomos shemachnisin lahen chametz*," any place where people bring chametz. This formulation implies that we are discussing places where people normally bring chametz. By contrast, the *Shulchan Aruch* (*Orach Chaim* 433:3) writes "*kol hamekomos sheyesh lachush shema hichnisu bahem chametz*," any place where we must be concerned that someone brought chametz. This implies that even if there is a possibility that someone brought chametz into that place, even if it unusual to bring chametz there, we must perform *bedikas chametz*.

Rav Soloveitchik suggested that the

question about the parameters of a *makom she'ain machnisin bo chametz* relates directly to the question of whether *bitul* is required for a *makom she'ain machnisin bo chametz*. The Rambam is consistent in his opinion. Because Rambam defines a *makom she'ain machnisin bo chametz* as a place where it not normal to bring chametz, we can't rule out the possibility that there is chametz there. Therefore, we must still perform *bitul*. However, if we define a *makom she'ain machnisin bo chametz* as a place where chametz is never brought, then there is no need for *bitul* because the place is presumed to be chametz free.

Bedikas Chametz for the Traveler

The Gemara, *Pesachim* 6a, states that one who leaves his home within 30 days of Pesach is required to check his home for chametz before he leaves. The Ritva (s.v. *Lo Amaran*) quotes from the Ra'ah that anyone who has an obligation to check recites a beracha when performing the *bedikah*. The Ritva concurs when the *bedikah* takes place within 30 days of Pesach. The Meiri (s.v. *V'Chol Elu Shebodkin*) writes that the issue of whether to recite a beracha for a *bedikah* that is performed before the night of the 14th (but within 30 days) is the subject of a debate among the Rishonim. The Rama, *Orach Chaim* 436:1, rules that one should not recite a beracha when performing an early *bedikah*.

Rav Soloveitchik suggested that it is possible that this dispute revolves around the nature of *bedikas chametz*. Is the rabbinic mitzvah of *bedikas chametz* an extension of the biblical mitzvah of *tashbisu*, the mitzvah to destroy chametz? Or perhaps, *bedikas chametz* is an independent rabbinic mitzvah. If

it is part of the mitzvah of *tashbisu*, the mitzvah of *tashbisu* only applies during the day of the 14th of Nisan. When the rabbis instituted *bedikas chametz*, they merely extended the time to the night of the 14th. As such, a *bedikah* prior to the 14th is not a fulfillment of the mitzvah and no *beracha* is recited. However, if *bedikas chametz* is an independent mitzvah, it is possible that the requirement for the traveler to perform *bedikah* the night before he leaves is part of the same institution to perform *bedikah* on the night of the 14th. As such, performing *bedikah* on an earlier night provides the same fulfillment as a *bedikah* on the night of the 14th, and a *beracha* may be recited.

If we assume that there is no fulfillment of a mitzvah prior to the 14th, how do we understand the obligation to check? Furthermore, how do we understand the distinction between someone who leaves before 30 days and someone who leaves within 30 days? If there is a fulfillment of a mitzvah, we could say that before 30 days, the mitzvah has not yet set in, and within 30 days, there is a fulfillment of the mitzvah. However, if there is no fulfillment of a mitzvah, what happens within 30 days that changes the obligation?

Rav Soloveitchik suggested that by leaving home before Pesach, a person is neglecting the obligation to perform *bedikas chametz*. If someone leaves more than 30 days out, this is not a problem because there is no responsibility to worry about the mitzvos of Pesach until 30 days prior. However, if he leaves within 30 days, and he doesn't perform *bedikas chametz*, then when the 14th of Nisan arrives, he will be considered neglectful of the mitzvah of *bedikas chametz*. What solution did our rabbis provide? If he checks the home for chametz before he leaves, then the home is considered a "*makom she'ain*

machnisin bo chametz,” a place where no chametz is to be found, which is exempt from *bedikah*. When the night of the 14th comes, he is exempt from the mitzvah because he doesn't have a home where there is a concern that someone might find chametz.

Leaving Over Chametz After the Bedikah

The Mishna, *Pesachim* 10b, states that after *bedikas chametz*, whatever chametz is left should be placed in a secure location to avoid the need for an additional *bedikah*. The Ran (*Pesachim* 4b in Rif pages s.v. *UMa SheMeshayer*) writes that the Mishna is discussing the chametz that we plan to eat. If it is left in an unsecure location, an animal may find it and spread it throughout the house, requiring another *bedikah*. Rashi (9b s.v. *Ma SheMeshayer*) also says that we are discussing chametz that we plan to eat.

The Rambam (*Hilchos Chametz UMatzah* 3:1) writes that the chametz that we find during the *bedikah* should be placed aside and destroyed in the morning. In the next halacha (3:2), the Rambam writes that if we plan on eating chametz in the morning, it should be placed in a secure location.

Rav Soloveitchik understood that according to the Rambam, the purpose of *bedikas chametz* is to identify and destroy *all* chametz in our possession. There is a special dispensation to leave over chametz to eat after the *bedikah* and in the morning. As such, the chametz that is in our possession after the *bedikah* fits into one of two categories: chametz that was found during the *bedikah* and chametz that we plan to eat in the morning. There are two practical applications to this. First, if chametz doesn't fit into either of these categories, we may not leave it over. It is prohibited to leave over chametz past the *bedikah* for some other purpose. Second, if we do find chametz during the *bedikah*, and it was not something that we planned to leave over, we may not eat it and it must be destroyed.



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All the Days of Your Life: What is the Obligation?

The Torah commands, “So that you will remember the day of your departure from Mitzrayim all (“kol”) the days of your life” (Devarim 16:3).

The Haggadah describes a dispute between Ben Zoma and the Chachamim. Ben Zoma derives from the word “kol; all,” that the daily mitzva to remember Yetzias Mitzrayim applies every night as well. The Chachamim counter that *kol* teaches that the mitzva applies even after Mashiach comes (see *Berachos* 12b).

The Gemara (*Berachos* 21a) calls the mitzva to remember Yetzias Mitzrayim “*De’oraisa*,” based on

the aforementioned pasuk (Rashi, *Berachos* 21a). Yet the Rambam does not count this mitzva as one of the 613 mitzvos. Rav Soloveitchik (*Shiurim Lezecher Abba Mari* vol. 1, p. 1) cites a remarkable explanation given by his grandfather R. Chaim Brisker. The Rambam rules that a temporary mitzva is not counted in the list of 613 (*Sefer Hamitzvos, shoresh* 3). Only mitzvos which apply as long as heaven is over the earth (Devarim 11:21) are included.

While all of the temporary mitzvos that the Rambam excludes are mitzvos that applied only during the lifetime of Moshe Rabbeinu, R. Chaim extends this exclusion to mitzvos which will not apply when Mashiach comes. Thus,



according to Ben Zoma, for whom the word *kol* refers to the night and not to the days of Mashiach, the mitzva is temporary, and therefore, is not counted by the Rambam.¹

¹ This answer is questionable. Perhaps the mitzva will apply even after Mashiach comes, even according to Ben Zoma, albeit in a different form. The mitzva is to remember the most recent deliverance every day and night. Currently, the mitzva is to remember the Exodus from Mitzrayim, and later it will be to remember the final *geula*. The *Sefer Ha'ikkarim* (III:18) questions the Rambam's principle that the Torah is immutable and can never end. His proof is the change in the names of the months, which were originally named for their number, beginning with Nisan, as the Torah commands (*Shemos* 12:2), “This month is the first month.” Yet as the Ramban, based on Yirmiyahu 23:7-8, explains, the mitzva did not end, but rather the months took on new names which came with us from Bavel (Yerushalmi *Rosh Hashanah* 1:2). The names we now call the months are to remember the second redemption from Bavel, just as until then we remembered the first redemption by counting numerically from the month of Nisan. A similar argument can be made about the mitzva to remember the Exodus daily. It will not

R. Yitzchak Hutner (*Pachad Yitzchak, Pesach ma'amar* 24) asks: The Rambam does count the mitzva of *sippur Yetzias Mitzrayim* on Pesach night as one of the 613 (*Hilchos Chametz Umatza* 7:1). To paraphrase the Haggadah, why is the mitzva of this night different from the mitzva of all other nights, and days, of the year? He answers based on the Gemara (*Berachos* 13a): This is comparable to a person who encountered a wolf and was saved from it, and would recount the incident of the wolf. Later, he encountered a lion and was saved from it, and would recount the incident of the lion. Finally, he encountered a snake and was saved from it. He forgot the first two incidents, and would recount the incident of the snake. So, too, for *Klal Yisrael*, the later dangers (*tzaros*) cause us to forget the earlier ones.

So, too, the deliverance from the greater, final dangers before Mashiach comes will cause us to forget the earlier danger in, and deliverance from, Mitzrayim. According to the Chachamim, the daily mitzva of remembering the day we left Mitzrayim will remain, but will be secondary to remembrance of the final *geula* (*Berachos* 12b, based on Yirmiyahu 23:7-8). According to Ben Zoma, the mitzva of remembering the day we left Mitzrayim will no longer apply.

Rav Hutner writes that the Haggadah states: On Pesach night, we are obligated in every generation to see

ourselves as having just left Mitzrayim (*Pesachim* 116b). As such, there is no *tzara* later than that of Mitzrayim from which we see ourselves being delivered that very night. Therefore, this mitzva will apply on Pesach night, even according to Ben Zoma, and is counted as one of the 613 mitzvos.

The aforementioned citation from the Haggadah, however, does not actually state that we must see ourselves as having just left Mitzrayim now. Perhaps Rav Hutner meant to refer to the Rambam (*Hilchos Chametz Umatza* 7:6): "In every generation a person is obligated to show (*"lehar'os,"* not *"lir'os"*) himself as if he himself left now (*"ata"*) from the servitude of Mitzrayim.²

The Rambam (*Hilchos Avoda Zara* 12:3) lists five time-dependent positive mitzvos that apply to women, despite women's general exemption from time-dependent positive mitzvos. The time dependent mitzvos that do apply to women are: *kiddush, matza, korban pesach, simchas yom tov* and *hakhel*. This implies that women are not obligated in *sippur Yetzias Mitzrayim*, as the *Minchas Chinuch* (21:10) notes. However, the *Mincha Chadasha* (cited in the *Minchas Chinuch*, footnote 11), notes that the Rambam lists fourteen time-dependent positive mitzvos from which women are exempt. *Sippur Yetzias Mitzrayim* is not one of them, implying that women are indeed obligated. Why, then is *sippur Yetzias Mitzrayim* not listed in *Hilchos*

Avoda Zara 12:3 as one of the five time-dependent *mitzvos* in which women are obligated?

We can answer based on the Rambam's word "*ata; now.*" If a mitzva is triggered by an event, it may not be considered time-dependent. The *Turei Even* (*Megilla* 20b) discusses *bikkurim*, which are brought only from Shavuot to Chanukah (Mishna *Bikkurim* 1:6). The Gemara (*Pesachim* 36b, as explained by Rashi) limits *bikkurim* to a time when fruits are found in the field, which is only until Chanukah. Since it is not the days themselves, but only an outside factor, which defines the time of the mitzva, it is not considered time-dependent.

The *Mikraei Kodesh* (*Pesach* II, 67) suggests a similar idea regarding the mitzva of *sefiras ha'omer*. Since it is triggered by an event, the *korban ha'omer*, it may not be considered time-dependent. On Pesach night, too, the mitzva is triggered by an event: one should view himself as if he left Mitzrayim that very night. The obligation to show oneself as if he "left Mitzrayim now" applies to women, as is evident from the *Sefer Hamitzvos*. But it is event-dependent, and not considered time-dependent, and thus is not listed with the five time-dependent mitzvos incumbent upon women.

The *Or Sameach* (*Hilchos Kerias Shema* 1:3) has another, entirely novel approach (in his own words: "*chadash*

end when Mashiach comes, but merely change to remembering the more recent *geula*. As such, it is a permanent mitzva and should count in the 613 mitzvos.

Rav Soloveitchik (*ibid.*, p. 2) quotes, in the name of his grandfather R. Chaim, a different explanation for why the Rambam does not count the mitzva to remember the Exodus. The daily mitzva to remember the Exodus is part of the mitzva of *kabbalas ol malchus Shamayim*, as the Ten Commandments begin, "I am Hashem who took you out of Mitzrayim." Therefore, remembering the Exodus is part of the mitzva of *kerias Shema*, which according to the Rambam (*Hilchos Kerias Shema* 1:2) includes the third *parasha* which mentions Yetzias Mitzrayim (see *Am Mordechai, Berachos* 8:4).

A simpler explanation for why Rambam does not count the mitzva is offered by the *Tzelach* (*Berachos* 12b). The requirement to mention *Yetzias Mitzrayim* daily is derived from the phrase "so that you will remember the day of your departure from Mitzrayim all the days of your life." This is not an explicit command, and therefore is not one of the 613 mitzvos.

² Remarkably, the Rambam's text of the Haggadah states "*lehar'os; to show,*" but does not include "*ata; now.*" Perhaps "showing" can, and therefore must, be done in a manner that indicates that the Exodus took place just now. Our text, "*lir'os; to see oneself,*" requires imagination. This is possible only if one conjures up a past event. It cannot, and therefore, need not, be a vision of an Exodus that took place just now.

me'od") to explain the Rambam's omission of Devarim 16:3, "So that you will remember the day of your departure from Mitzrayim all the days of your life" from the 613 mitzvos, even though the Gemara (*Berachos* 21a) calls it a *mitzva De'oraisa*. According to the *Or Sameach*, Devarim 16:3 refers only to recounting the story of Yetzias Mitzrayim on Pesach itself (and not to remembering the Exodus from Egypt every day, as the Haggadah interprets it), as the pasuk begins by prohibiting chametz and requiring matza (Rashi ad loc.).

The term "*De'oraisa*," which usually means a Torah obligation, thus must be reinterpreted. Rabbinic laws sometimes protect Torah laws, as in the law of *netilas yadayim*, washing hands to avoid ritual impurity. Other rabbinic laws respond to events which transpired after Matan Torah, such as Megillas Esther.

Yet other rabbinic laws reflect the will of Hashem, even as He did not burden us by making it obligatory. The Sages made certain laws obligatory so that we achieve the goal of fulfilling Hashem's will when He took us out of Egypt. This type of rabbinic obligation is called "*De'oraisa*," because it is the will of Hashem recorded in the Torah itself. Thus, explains the *Or Sameach*, the Gemara calls the remembrance of the Exodus every day "*De'oraisa*" because it is a fulfillment of the Divine will, yet the Rambam does not count it in the 613 mitzvos because of its rabbinic status.

While very novel in this context, precedent for the *Or Sameach's* approach can be found in the Ritva (*Rosh Hashanah* 16a). The Gemara

quotes Hashem, "Say before Me on Rosh Hashanah, *Malchuyos, Zichronos* and *Shofaros* in order to make Me your king, to be remembered before Me for good, with the shofar." While the obligation of these prayers is rabbinic (*Rosh Hashanah* 34b), it is a fulfillment of what Hashem considers proper (*ra'ui*), says the Ritva. Hashem did not make it obligatory, but gave it to the Sages, who made it an obligation. This is called *asmachta*, based on pesukim in the Torah expressing Hashem's will, and not merely a mnemonic device, as others explain. So too, Hashem did not make the mitzva to remember Yetzias Mitzrayim every day obligatory, but gave it to the Sages, who made it an obligation considered "*De'oraisa*."



This essay appears in Rabbi Willig's newly published Haggadah Shel Pesach Am Mordechai, available for purchase at rietspress.org



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