

LIVING WITH THE HAGADAH

PARSHAS TZAV

By Rabbi Yaakov Feitman

INTO THE HAGADAH

- 1. Ha Lachma Anya – Matza represents both avdus – slavery – and cheirus – freedom. Now, at the beginning of the seder, we focus on the poverty and the pain because the structure of the seder is maschil b’genus Umesayeim beshevach we begin with the degradation and then tell of the praise and upliftment. Therefore we begin with lechem oni – the “down” side of our history. Later, the same Matza will become the bread of geulah, eaten as we left Egypt.**
2. For this reason, the words lachma anya add up in Gematriya to 210. We were supposed to be in Mitzrayim for 400 years but, as the Hagadah soon says “Hakadosh Boruch Chishev es Haketz,” which means that Hashem actually altered the ketz, the time of redemption. Ketz adds up to 190, which means that Hashem deducted 190 from 400 and redeemed us after 210 years. But the question remains. Hashem always keeps His word and therefore 400 means 400. Now we know that K’lal Yisrael was at the 49th level of tumah-defilement and could wait no longer so Hashem increased the severity of the bondage so that in effect 210 equaled 400. Only Hashem can make that quantity-quality calibration but for us, even at the very beginning of the seder it is important for us to acknowledge that it was lachma anya, the increase in suffering which saved us (Perashas Derachim, Divrei Shaul, Tzelach Pesachim 116b)
3. Perhaps this also explains why we eat matza before maror although logic would seem to dictate that since maror is pure slavery and matzah is both, as mentioned earlier, maror should come first. However, now that we understand that the enhanced bitterness in fact got us out early, it need not go before matzah since both represent both.

4. In fact, since the pain caused us to finally cry out to Hashem, which (tefilah) saved us, the maror is part of the geulah because it stimulated our davening to Hashem.
5. In Ha lachma anya we mention that that our forefathers ate matza “in the land of Egypt.” The Avudraham extraordinarily says that the Egyptians made us eat matzah because it is a “slave food,” eaten fast, lasts long and (at least in the olden days) didn’t cost much. The Maharal, however, disagrees, pointing out that nowhere in Chumash or Chazal is there any hint that the Egyptians wanted us to eat matzah.

We can perhaps explain the Avudraham’s opinion this way:

The geulah in and from Mitzrayim was all about our triumph over every aspect of Egyptian culture. The Navie Michah says “kimei tzeischa me’eret Mitzrayim arenu niflaos,” which means that every aspect of all future redemptions were present in the prototype geulah, which was the one from Egypt. Therefore, it makes sense that the transformation of matzah from an Egyptian food of degradation to a holy food of triumph represents Am Yisrael’s eternal ability to transform gashmios into ruchniyos etc. This is symbolized, according to the Avudraham, by the matzah itself going from lechem oni in the beginning of the seder and becoming the sublime afikomen by the end of the seder.

6. Leshanah Haba’ah B’arah D’Yisrael – Why do even those in Eretz Yisrael recite a prayer to be in Eretz Yisrael next year? Aren’t they already there? The answer is that even in Eretz Yisrael we are davening that next year we should truly be in our own Jewish land, where we don’t have to worry about foreign influence, politics etc.(Hagadas Lev Haivri, Rav Yerchezkel Levenstein, Haseder Ha’aruch, 3:114).
7. Hashata hacha, Hashata avdei – This to refers to the double geulah of the physical and he spiritual (Rashbah). This duality is one of the most important elements in the Hagadah, since Yetzias Mitzrayim represents the physical and spiritual geulos. For this reason, the two “hashatas” are mentioned early in the Hagadah so that we can follow this theme throughout the evening.

8. Chazal teach us that the Hagadah must be recited derech shelah uteshuvah, in question and answer form. Why is this necessary? My Rebbe, Rav Yitzchok Hutner offered a simple but penetrating answer. We will say later in the Hagadah that at the exodus we all went from darkness into the night. When one has a question he is in the darkness. When he knows the answer he has “seen the light.” Our Mah Nishtana and Avadim Hayinu neatly mirror this process.

9. There is a famous question which bothers everyone at one time or another. We recite the same questions and answers every year, outside Eretz Yisrael twice a year. Why do we keep repeating the same ones? Why not attempt to innovate and come with new issues and problems every year? Actually we do that when we recite new chidushim and explanations which we have never heard before, but what about the basic questions? The Taam Vadaas Hagadah page 39 quotes an answer from the Baal Shem Tov. An interesting aside about this source is that Rav Sternbuch, the author, is a direct descendent of the Vilna Gaon, quoting here from the founder of Chassidus. My Rebbe used to mention that the Gra’s Yohrzeit is Succos, zman Simchaseinu and the Baal She’em’s Yohr Zeit is Shavuos, zman mattan Toraseinu. Chassidus was known for its emphasis on Simcha, the Gra for his emphasis on Torah study. Yet, the message of their Yohr Zeits is that both represented both. Only the surface manifestation seemed to be in conflict.

However, back to the interpretation itself. He teaches that the purpose of the seder is to instill in us emunah peshutah – simple basic belief. This is reflected by the concentration on children on this night. In a sense, we are all still children and need to be reminded to have basic faith, with no philosophical and theological additives. Rav Sternbuch adds that the Chosid Yaavetz, who left Spain in 1492. wrote in his memoirs that during the Expulsion many of the scholarly Jews lost their faith and trust in Hashem. But the “poshete Yidden, those with a pure simple faith, maintained their emunah through all the hardships. I have heard this from a number of Holocaust survivors as well.

10. The answer to all the questions is Avadim Hayinu. How does this answer all the “Four Questions”? The Hagadas Chamei Yerushalayim answers that since Hashem made changes in OUR status, we make CHANGES to remember that our own situation was altered. The concepts of good change versus bad change is also one of the inner themes of the Hagadah.
11. Vayotzianu Hashem Elokeinu Me’sham – And Hashem took us out of THERE. The Bais Aharon points out what seems to be a useless Gematria (G-d forbid). He says that misham is the Gematriya of Mitzrayim. Now the one thing we all know for certain is that we left Mitzrayim, so what is the purpose of this Gematriya? Perhaps the answer is that we will say a bit later in the Hagadah “Vayehi Sham L’goy” we became a nation THERE. Again, the stress is on THERE. It was specifically in the depravity of Egypt that we became a nation because it fortified and inoculated us against all the later spiritual dangers which we would encounter in every exile we entered (see above #5). The Bais Aharon’s Gematriah teaches us that there are no coincidences in Jewish history. The fact that we were “created” in Mitzrayim and survived the 49 levels of depravity to become the Am Kadosh we are today allowed us to overcome the spiritual dangers of every culture we “visited” in later exiles.
12. Maaseh B’Rebbe Eliezer etc. – A number of questions have been raised over the centuries and millennia about this story: a). why were all these great Tannaim together for the Seder? b). Even if they had to be together, why B’nai Brak? That was Rebbe Akiva’s city but he was the student of a number of these great rabbis. He should have gone to them instead of them coming to him! Rabbi Reuvein Margolios (Hagadas Be’er Miriam) gives a simple answer. The Gemara tells in Me’ilah of the trip these same Tannaim made to Rome to intercede with the government concerning a decree against the Jews. They returned on Erev Pesach, landing in Yaffo. The closest of their homes was Rebbe Akiva’s in B’nai Brak and so he hosted this distinguished group for that fateful Pesach. The Aruch Hashulchan (Hagadas Lelil

Shemurim) gives a more conceptual answer: We know that at the time, the Roman government was issuing horrific gzeiros against K'klal Yisrael and it was a difficult time to celebrate and be grateful.

However, Rebbe Akiva was the one who was able to do this even under the most dire of circumstances. We knew this because of a number of classic sources. First of all, the famous Gemara at the end of Makos tells us that the other Tannaim (these same great Rabbonim) cried when they saw the tragic circumstances of the Churban, the destruction of the Bais Hamikdash. Rebbe Akiva, however, laughed and was able to see in these dismal scenes the future rebuilding of the Bais Hamikdash and the coming of Moshiach. Secondly, everyone knows the story of Rebbe Akiva and the rock. He saw a stone which had been penetrated by years of dripping water and extrapolated that his head, too, could be penetrated by Torah. The Aruch Hashulchan points out that without examining every aspect of this story it is clear that Rebbe Akiva had the ability to look beyond a scene in front of him and recognize its long-range meaning and significance. Therefore, since Rebbe Akiva was, so to speak, the mara d'asra of this methodology, the other Tannaim, even his own Rebbeim, went to him for his unique brand of chuizuk and solace.

13. THE FOUR SONS – A perennial question asked is “why isn’t the good son called a tzadik, which would seem to correspond to the Rasha, wicked son”? One answer (Hagadas Halekach v’Halibuv, page 13) is that the Hagadah is teaching us that the only way to lead a Torah life and overcome the Yetzer Hara is through active Torah study leading to someone becoming a talmid chochom. We might add from the Brisker Hagadah that although the mitzvah of the night is sippur yetzias Mitzrayim, which would seem to be the actual narrative-the story of the exodus, the answer to the wise son is Halacha (when to eat the afikomen etc.) The reason for this is that clearly the Torah is not about stories alone. It is about what to DO with those stories. For that reason, the chochom is given something practical to do since he knows that he must APPLY what he has learned. The others are either uninterested or incapable of applying their knowledge to the pragmatics of practicing ones religion. One might add that in the

beginning of the Kuzari the king, who is searching for the right religion and way of life, asks all his clerical interlocutors what their religions tell them TO DO, not just their philosophies.

14. A further explanation of the Afikomen answer to the Chochom is that we may not eat anything after the Afikomen so that its taste will remain in our mouth until morning. This is a basic message about Judaism for anyone who wishes to be a Chocom,. You must live with the Posuk, with the Mitzvah, with whatever spiritual thing you do. The goal is that the joy, spiritual elevation and excitement should remain with us for a very long time (Rav Mordechai Gifter zt”). As my Rebbe, Rav Hutner zt”l always said at the end of a Yom Tov (Ne’ilas Hachag), one should not say “es is avekgegangen a Yom Tov,” the Yom Tov went away, but “es is tzugekumen a Yom Tov.” A Yom Tov was added to our personality, character and essence. This is the meaning of Chasal Sidur Peasasch. We reflect upon what we already accomplished at the seder but immediately consider how we will carry it over into the future. The Belzer Rebbe uses this same concept to explain why at Koreich we quote the posuk from Parshas Behaaloscha about Pesach Sheni instead of the one in Parshas Bo about the regular korban Pesach. He explains that at the seder it is already too late to offer the korban Pesach so we look ahead longingly to the Korban Pesach Sheni, hoping and praying that this year we will at least be able to bring the korban Pesach Sheni. This is a general spiritual lesson as well. We should celebrate each spiritual attainment and immediately think about what we can do next so that we are always growing.

A GUTTEN SHABBOS AND A CHAG KASHER V’SOMEACH