



CHICAGO RABBINICAL COUNCIL

מועצת הרבנים דשיקגו



Divrei Torah for Pesach 5782



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Where is Moshe Rabbeinu in the Haggadah?

Rabbi Yona Reiss
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ועל הים מה הוא אומר וירא ישראל את הים הגדולה אשר עשה ה' במצרים ויראו העם את ה' ויאמינו בה' ובמשה עבדו.

Incredibly, throughout virtually the entire Haggadah, which is the story of the exodus from Egypt that took place under the noble leadership of Moshe Rabbeinu, Moshe's name is not mentioned. The commentators quote the explanation of the Vilna Gaon that one of the major themes of the Haggadah is that Hashem took us out of Egypt by Himself, as we express in the words *אני ה' – אני ולא מלאך...אני ולא השליח...* – so that we should not delude ourselves into thinking that salvation will come from the hands of mortals. Rather, we are reminded that we have nobody to turn to other than Hashem Himself (see Sotah 49a). Accordingly, it is important that Moshe's name not become the focus of the Haggadah, or even a distraction from the divine source of our deliverance.

And yet, at the same time, there is one parenthetical allusion to Moshe's name in the concluding section of the Maggid section of the Haggadah, dealing with the reckoning of the

plagues that afflicted the Egyptians. As Rabbi Yosi Hagelili tabulates the total number of adversities suffered by the Egyptians, he notes that each plague is referred to as an *אצבע*, as a *finger*, while during the splitting of the sea of reeds, the Torah describes the *יד*, *the hand of Hashem*, thus indicating that for each plague in Egypt there were five corresponding plagues (like the number of fingers in a hand) during the splitting of the sea. The full verse that speaks of the “*hand of G-d*” ends with the words, “*the people trusted in Hashem, and in Moshe His servant.*”

I have heard an explanation that this is the exception that proves the rule. Since Moshe's name is only mentioned once, and even during this occasion in a supporting role as the “servant” of Hashem, we are thus sensitized to the realization that Moshe's name indeed does not appear elsewhere in the Haggadah, and are forced to understand that this is because his role in the redemption was not as our true savior, but as the servant of Hashem who is the true source of the redemption of our people.

However, if this is the purpose of the parenthetical mention of his name, the point of Moshe's subordinate role would seem to be best expressed by eliminating his name altogether. Indeed, in the Rambam's version of the Haggadah, the entire section describing the multitude of plagues during the splitting of the sea is omitted entirely, resulting in no mention at all of Moshe's name.

Others explain that the name of Moshe would have been eliminated altogether, except that Moshe's name needed to be mentioned in this specific verse, since it is forbidden to quote only half of a verse (see Ta'anis 27b). However, in the context of the Haggadah, this is a difficult argument to accept, because there are many verses that are only quoted in part, including the immediately preceding verse cited in the Haggadah which refers to the "finger" of Hashem. Indeed, Rav Yitzchak Yosef shlit"א, quoting his father Rav Ovadia Yosef zt"ל, writes in the *Yalkut Yosef* (Tefillah 2:131, n.17) that the incomplete verses in the Haggadah prove that one is permitted to quote a fragment from a verse for the purpose of amplifying a homiletic message. Thus, we still need to understand why Moshe's name is mentioned even in passing.

Perhaps we can explain that it was in fact necessary to include Moshe's name in the Haggadah as

an expression of *Hakaras Hatov* (gratitude) to Moshe for his supporting role, even if Moshe was not the ultimate force for our salvation. The Gemora in Bava Kamma (92b) notes that as a matter of proper etiquette, one should thank the royal waiter who brings the wine to the table, even though the king of the palace was truly responsible for providing the wine (see Rashi's explanation ad locum). Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik (as elucidated by Rav Hershel Schachter in *Nefesh HaRav*, p. 112) understood that this Gemora is teaching an important principle in serving Hashem properly. If we do not show proper appreciation to human beings, then we will never succeed at achieving the requisite amount of recognition and gratitude to Hashem. Thus, it could be that the Haggadah similarly included at least a minimal acknowledgment of Moshe Rabbeinu, to inspire us towards the appropriate level of gratitude that we should have towards Hashem for all the goodness that He has bestowed upon us.

In fact, even the Rambam who omits any mention of Moshe Rabbeinu altogether in his version of the Haggadah, writes (*Chametz u'Matzah* 7:2) that a parent is obliged to tell a wise son during the course of the recitation of the Haggadah about "what transpired to us in Egypt, including the

miracles that were brought about by Moshe Rabbeinu.” Thus, even though the Rambam does not include a mention of Moshe in his official text of the Haggadah, he also indicates that there needs to be an acknowledgment of his role in helping to bring about the miracles bestowed upon us by Hashem.

It may be for this reason that the Talmud (Pesachim 116a) recounts that when Rav Nachman asked his servant Daru one Seder night what a slave should say if his master would free him from slavery and present him with precious jewels, and Daru answered, I would say “thank you,” Rav Nachman responded that “we have fulfilled our obligation of reciting the Mah Nishtanah.” Rav Asher Weiss shlit”a (commentary to Haggadah, p. 108) notes that this helps us understand the requirement recorded in the Haggadah, אפילו כלנו חכמים כולנו נבונים...כולנו יודעים את התורה מצוה עלינו לספר ביציאת מצרים – that even great Torah scholars are obligated in the mitzvah of reciting the Haggadah, because everybody is obligated to utter “thank you” to Hashem. Gratitude to Hashem is really the main purpose of the Haggadah. The oblique reference to Moshe Rabbeinu in the Haggadah is a reminder to us that we can’t demonstrate a proper sense of gratitude to Hashem without also saying “thank you” to His servants.

Although this explanation is premised upon an interpretation of Rav Soloveitchik based on the Talmudic passage in Bava Kamma, Rav Soloveitchik himself cited a different explanation from his father, Rav Moshe Soloveitchik (*Shiurim L’zecher Avi Mori*, volume 2, pp. 158-160). He noted that the Rambam only records the requirement to share the role of Moshe Rabbeinu with a wise son, but states that if the son is unintelligent or too young to understand, there is no such requirement. Why does the Rambam distinguish in this fashion?

There is a midrash (Shir Hashirim Rabbah 3:1) that expounds upon the verses in Shir Hashirim (3:1), “*upon my couch on night*” – this is the night of Egypt, ‘*I sought the one I love*’ – this is Moshe, ‘*until I brought him to my mother’s house*’ – this is Sinai.” Rav Moshe Soloveitchik explained that the Midrash is a reference to Pesach night. The Jewish people “sought” to include their beloved leader, Moshe Rabbeinu, in the Haggadah, but, as the verse continues, “*I sought but found him not*,” because Pesach night belongs solely to Hashem, who redeemed us without an intermediary. However, when Moshe is brought “*to my mother’s house*,” representing the giving of the Torah at Sinai, he played a prominent role as the Torah teacher to the Jewish people and therefore merits

having the Torah called in his name, as recorded in the verse, “*the Torah of Moshe my servant*” (Malachi 3:22).

Accordingly, Rav Soloveitchik explained, based on his father’s interpretation of the Midrash, that the obligation recorded by the Rambam to mention Moshe Rabbeinu’s name in the retelling of the Exodus from Egypt, relates exclusively to the Sinaitic experience of receiving the Torah, the climactic moment of the redemptive experience that only the wise son can truly comprehend. However, when telling the story of the Exodus to a child of lesser intelligence, the focus is solely upon our emancipation from slavery in Egypt, regarding which any mention of Moshe Rabbeinu’s name would be inappropriate since the redemption came from Hashem alone.

Thus, there are at least three different lessons that we can derive from these explanations of the absence or near-absence of Moshe’s name in the Haggadah: (1) the importance of recognizing that notwithstanding the significant role that human beings seem to play in this world, we have nobody to rely upon other than Hashem for our redemption; (2) the fact that a primary purpose of the Haggadah is to express gratitude to Hashem for redeeming us, but that one way to achieve this goal is to show

gratitude to those who bring us closer to Hashem; (3) the reminder that the major contribution of Moshe in our story of redemption was to bring us to Sinai, to receive and to be taught the Torah, which is what elevates and ennobles us as a people.

Following this past two-year period of pandemic, we have a greater appreciation than ever of our complete dependence upon the Almighty, just like at the time of the Exodus from Egypt, and the importance of connecting to Him through Torah, prayer, and mitzvot. However, the road toward achieving a greater bond with Hashem also includes an aspect of ויאמינו בה – acknowledging the contributions of those who help to bring us closer to Hashem and to Torah, especially our rebbeim, our teachers, our parents, and all those who serve as a healthy and positive influence in our lives to enable us to live in accordance with Torah principles. We must also remember to thank all the “waiters,” including our family members and friends, as well as our health care providers, who help us pull through every single day, to understand more fully what it means to show gratitude to Hashem and to be worthy of experiencing complete redemption speedily in our days. Chag Kasher v’Sameach.

Into the Great Unknown

Rabbi Shaanan Gelman

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It was the final plague, the culmination of a year's worth of miracles and wonders – at last G-d would send a plague so devastating that the world would be utterly convinced of the Ribono Shel Olam's supremacy. And yet, despite the fact that this final מכה would serve as incontrovertible evidence, there is an element of imprecision found within the warning:

וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה כֹּה אָמַר ה' פְּחַצְתָּ הַלַּיְלָה אֲנִי יוֹצֵא בְּתוֹךְ מִצְרַיִם: וּמַת כָּל־בְּכוֹר בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם מִבְּכוֹר פְּרֹעָה הַיֵּשֵׁב עַל־פְּסָאוֹ עַד בְּכוֹר הַשֹּׁפֵחָה אֲשֶׁר אַחַר הָרְחִים וְכֹל בְּכוֹר בְּהֵמָה: וְהִיְתָה צְעָקָה גְדֹלָה בְּכָל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם אֲשֶׁר כָּמְהוּ לֹא נִהְיְתָה וְכְמְהוּ לֹא תִסָּף: (שמות פרק יא פסוקים ד-ו)

The expression which jumps out of the Chumash is כחצות הלילה, *at about midnight...*¹

Why the imprecise language? Why can't Moshe, speaking on behalf of G-d, pinpoint the exact hour of calamity? What's the problem with giving us a definitive time for the מכות בכורות?

Chazal were first to weigh in on the subject, claiming that it serves as protection against human error, lest the Egyptians err in their calculation and accuse Moshe of being a false prophet:

וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה גו' כחצת וגו'. ומפני מה אמר משה כחצות וכי היה ספיקא ביד משה? אלא כך אמר משה אם אומר בחצות, החרטומים אינם יכולם לכיון את השעה, ויאמרו אצטגניני פרעה משה בדאי הוא, לפיכך אמר כחצות: (מדרש אגדה (בובר) שמות פרשת בא פרק יא סימן ד)

Building off the above midrash, medieval Spanish commentator, Rabbeinu Bachya ben Asher,²

1 Contrast with when the plague is executed in which we find the precise language:

וַיְהִי בַחֲצֵי הַלַּיְלָה וְה' הִכָּה כָּל־בְּכוֹר בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם מִבְּכוֹר פְּרֹעָה הַיֵּשֵׁב עַל־פְּסָאוֹ עַד בְּכוֹר הַשֹּׁבֵי אֲשֶׁר בְּבֵית הַבּוֹר וְכֹל בְּכוֹר בְּהֵמָה: (שמות פרק יב פסוק כט)

2 ויש לשאול על המאמר הזה כי בודאי אצטגניני פרעה וחרטומיו מן המכה השלישית שהודו על כרחם ואמרו: "אצבע אלקים היא" לא נתראו לפני משה ולא באו בהיכל המלך כלל, כי ראו במשה שהשיב כל חכמתם אחר דעתם יסכל, וא"כ איך יתלו הטעות במשה ויאמרו משה בדאי הוא, והם היודעים כי נאמנים כל דבריו בתשע מכות הקדמות ולא נפל מכל דבריו ארצה, והנה המה חכמים מחוכמים המכירים כי מעשיו של משה היו מאת השם כי כבר הודו בכך? ... (רבינו בחיי שמות פרשת בא פרק יא פסוק ד)

wonders why such a precaution was necessary? As early as the third plague, they had openly admitted that the wondrous miracles were undoubtedly the work of the “אצבעת אלוקים” – (*the Finger of G-d*) – surely, they would not have blamed a miscalculation on Moshe, for even they trusted Moshe at this point!

Nonetheless, Rabbeinu Bachya suggests that the stakes were somehow higher at this late stage in the plagues, such that, the mere appearance of an error would not only call into question the final מכה but would retroactively invalidate each of the nine preceding מכות as the handiwork of Hashem. For this reason, Moshe Rabbeinu was especially sensitive to these sorts of matters.

I would like to suggest a third explanation. Perhaps Moshe wasn't worried about the perception of the Egyptians, or anyone else's perception for that matter. Instead the Torah is teaching us that when dealing with matters of importance and gravity, such as Emunah B'Hashem or שכר ועונש, reward and punishment, it's wise to take a posture of humility.

The imprecise language is not a sign

of ignorance or uncertainty; **rather it is a calculated projection of hesitation and doubt.**³ In other words, Moshe is suggesting that at this critical juncture, despite the clarity and ironclad dependability of G-d's mandate, we mortals remain on unsteady ground. We are unsure of our footing and, as such, we must tiptoe forward cautiously and with an air of mystery.

It is fascinating that this embrace of ambiguity and vagueness emerges at this point in the emancipation process; it's as if Moshe Rabbeinu is reminding us that one who is too certain and overly confident will have a difficult time seeking redemption.

It is therefore not surprising that the Haggadah's main pedagogic tool is the שקלא וטריא, a night centered around a question and answer format.

If we wanted to shorten the seder we could skip right to the answers, but Chazal structured it so that we would ask questions, and express our doubts.

Moreover, a parent who can give over this idea has equipped his children with the ability to be wrong on occasion; to fall and pick themselves up again. Children

3 Moshe Rabbeinu is known for calculated actions which often appear as if they stem from ignorance or even a loss of control – such as throwing down the *luchos* (according to the חזקוניי which was more of a didactic tool than a moment of rage).

need to know that they will not always have the answers. On Pesach we learn that having questions is the key to freeing yourself from life's greatest burdens!

The Shulchan Aruch (OC 473:7) states that even a תלמיד חכם dining on his own must ask himself four questions.

Why should that be the case?

Perhaps the explanation is that we don't need solutions as much as we need wise men who are willing to ask questions.

There is a *machlokes* in the *rishonim* as to whether or not the *nusach* of Mah Nishtana is מעכב, required, or if the questions could be posed using alternative language?

And though we *paskin* like the majority of the *rishonim* (Tosafos, Rambam) that the *mah nishtana* must be recited using the traditional words, there exists a view of the רוקח and the מהרי"ל that any question which is asked, in any language, discharges the mitzvah in the Torah of:

כִּי־יִשְׁאַלְךָ בְּנֶךְ. (דברים פרק ו פסוק כ)
When your son shall ask of you.

The underlying requirement is to create an environment in which people are asking questions. And even if it isn't the *מה נשתנה* per se, and even if the one asking the questions already knows all the answers – there remains a need to ask.

Asking questions is more important than actually finding answers because it's not about solutions but rather introducing humility.

Today's political discourse is particularly harsh – replete with know-it-alls, who are incapable of learning from others.

Throughout these past few years, we have each met our share of self-proclaimed experts in epidemiology, infectious diseases, efficacy of masking and the safety of vaccines. And now most recently, as we watch, in horror, the events in war-torn Ukraine, those very same “experts” have suddenly pivoted to become authorities on international law, opining unreservedly on the efficacy of economic sanctions, NATO and the West's moral imperative. When did we all become חכמים of such diverse proficiency?

Part of the problem stems from the world we live in and the incredible resources available to us at our fingertips.

We have been granted access to endless information, and hence there are no longer any mysteries. The price we pay for having an infinite entrée to answers is that we don't know how to ask, and we've forgotten how to be wrong.

Consequently, our children are growing up with a fear of asking

uncomfortable questions and with an anxiety associated with the unknown.

And perhaps the greatest casualty is to the notion of authority and expertise. There is a remarkable loss of trust in those who are older, wiser, and more experienced. It's no surprise therefore, that the notion of *emunat Chachamim* and *Zekeinim*, trust in sages and elders, has been largely undermined. Most devastatingly, it also has diluted trust in Hashem.

Rav Wolfson, in his work *Emunat Itecha*, shares that on one occasion the son of the Chasam Sofer had a burning question which could not be answered, and after an agonizing few

days of ignoring his son, the Chasam Sofer finally provided him with an answer. When asked why he didn't give the answer right away, the father responded to his son – “a Jew needs to know how to have questions and how to live with the unknown, that's what it means to be a ‘מאמין ברה.’”

How do you regale and entertain and stimulate a generation so overwhelmed by answers and solutions and quick fixes? The solution is simple: you give them a question, reintroduce mystery into their world, ignite their sense of wonderment, and pique their curiosity. If we can do so effectively, then humility and simple faith in Hashem will soon follow.

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The Meaning of Pesach

Rabbi Levi Mostofsky
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What is the meaning of Pesach?

The Torah uses the word “pesach” to describe the act of divine salvation for the Jews on the evening of the 15th of Nisan, as the Egyptian first-born are plagued, “וראיתי את הדם” (ופסחתי עליכם) (יב, יג) *“I will see the blood [on the doorposts] ufasachti.”* That fateful event is forever commemorated in the Korban Pesach, and in our celebration of the holiday we call Pesach.

Rashi quotes an explanation of the Mechilta defining the word פסח as “skipping over.” This explanation is the source of early non-Jewish English translations that used the word that we are familiar with, Passover. Rashi explains that the usage of pesach here is similar to how it is used in describing the events of *הכרמל* בהר אליהו, as Eliyahu says to the *Nevi’ei HaBaal*:

עַד־מָתַי אַתֶּם פֹּסְחִים עַל־שְׂתֵי הַסְּעָפִים?
(מלכים א יח:כא)

How long can you skip, so to speak, between the opposing sides of Hashem and of Avodah Zarah?

As we quote in the Haggadah:

ואמרתם זבח פסח הוא לד’, אשר פסח על בתי בני ישראל במצרים, בנגפו את מצרים ואת בתינו הציל. (שמות יב:כז)

And you shall declare that this is the Pesach offering to Hashem, that He ‘pasach’ on the Jewish homes in Egypt as he struck Egypt, and saved our homes.

Four Questions to Consider

1. Why does the pasuk focus on how we were saved, and not on the salvation itself? Similarly, why first say that He was *poseiach* and then “*saved our homes*,” when the salvation is the main point, and should be mentioned first?
2. Why celebrate being skipped, what did not happen to us in *Makas Bechoros*, rather than the miracles we experienced first-hand?
3. Why are we celebrating not being stricken as collateral damage when we were seemingly not the target, and divinely-perfect aim was being used?
4. Why refer to “*the Jewish homes in Egypt*?” We already know where they were.

Rav Avraham Yitzchak Kook suggested an alternate understanding of the word *pesach* that answers these questions, and presents perspective

on our broader relationship with Hashem.

Returning to the story of Eliyahu and the *nevi'ei ha'baal*, Rav Kook points out that it says *Poseiach al Shtei HaSeipim*, technically translated as “upon” either side of the line, rather than “over.” Pesach would then be more accurately translated as “rest-upon,” rather than “passover.”

He explains that Hashem was *poseiach*, the Shechina rested upon the Jewish homes on that fateful night. In Egypt, despite the extent of assimilation, despite whatever troublesome ideas we might have picked up from the culture around us, Hashem was there, in Egypt, in our homes. In שמות ט:כט we read that Moshe Rabbeinu feared that he could not even daven in the midst of that culture, כִּצְאֹתַי אֶת הָעִיר אֶפְרַשׁ אֶת כָּפִי אֶל ד', but on the night we left Egypt Hashem הקדוש ברוך הוא בכבודו ובעצמו came to meet us where we were.

The resting of the Shechina upon the Jewish homes was an active demonstration of commitment, and protection, from the *mashchit* that was wreaking havoc that night all around them.

On Pesach we are not celebrating merely avoiding punishment, but rather Hashem's demonstration of His love and dedication to the Jewish people. We don't hide from

divine vengeance and merely hope to escape calamity. Our salvation is not focused on avoiding damnation. Our safety is a function of our closeness to Hashem. Spiritual strength from within protects us from the profane threats and even physical dangers outside.

Do we see our *Avodas HaShem* as a burden that we bear to escape punishment or as an opportunity? Do we think all year about avoiding chametz, and how we can survive a week without waffles, pancakes and pasta, or do we embrace the opportunity to experience שבעת ימים מצות תאכלו? Pesach is a time to cherish and celebrate our relationship with Hashem, and recommit to our duty to develop that relationship.

Hashem is committed to the sanctity of the Jewish home, and so should we. When we sit around our table on ליל הסדר, it may just be our dining room here in Chicago, but it's so much more than four walls, a table, and chairs. We can cultivate the holiness of our home environment regardless of what swirls in the world around us, and be ready at all times to welcome the Shechina that beckons to be invited. Perhaps that is why we celebrate primarily with a meal, surrounded by family at our table, in our home.

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Will Miracles Fix This Crazy World?

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What is going on in the world? It seems to be getting crazier and crazier. Things that were once unthinkable have become normal, and then, just a few short years later, the line between unthinkable and normal moves yet again. This is true in almost every area. Societal expectations have changed, and continue to change. The geopolitical landscape is shifting in ways nobody saw coming. Local and national politics are all over the place. The monetary system, the housing market, the supply chain, the education system: nothing seems to be working the way it is supposed to. Who could have imagined the destruction in Ukraine happening in this day and age? Israeli politics are, of course, unpredictable, and Israel's enemies are lurking on all sides.

There doesn't seem to be an obvious way for all of this to be corrected. Where are the wise and sage world leaders? Where are the smart people who know what to do? It seems that the world needs a miracle, one of those big, giant, earth-shattering

miracles of biblical proportion that will put everything in its place.

Why doesn't Hashem show miracles, the way that he did for the Jewish people in Egypt? As I approach the holiday of Pesach, anticipate celebrating the Seder, and review the miraculous story of the Exodus, this question is foremost in my mind. Why are there no overt miracles today? I know about the hidden everyday miracles; I have experienced them in my life many times. Right now, however, it seems that the only solution is for Hashem to grant us a big and obvious miracle. Why did Hashem perform such feats for our ancestors but not for us?

An answer to this question was given by the *Noda Biyehudah*, Rabbi Yechezkel Landau, in a sermon in Prague in 1789, when the Austro-Hungarian Empire defeated the Ottoman Empire at Belgrade.

Jericho was the first city conquered by the Jewish people in the Land of Canaan. Sefer Yehoshua describes the openly miraculous way that it occurred. The Jewish people did not fire a shot; they simply marched

around the city walls once a day for six days and seven times on the seventh day, blew shofar, and the fortified walls around the city fell to the ground.

Why was this one city overcome by miraculous means and not the rest of the cities in the land of Canaan?

The Noda Biyehudah explained that the purpose of this miracle was not simply to take control of the territory, as that could have been done by normal means, like the rest of Canaan. Rather its purpose was to address another problem entirely.

The people of Canaan did not believe that it was destined that the Jewish people take over the land. Even though they had heard of Hashem's promise to Avraham, which was reiterated many times to our ancestors, including Yehoshua, they suspected that it was untrue. The open and obvious miraculous conquest demonstrated to everyone that Hashem did indeed promise the land to the Jewish people, and that the promise was finally being fulfilled under Yehoshua's leadership.

Thus, the purpose of this miracle was not just to give the Jewish people the city. Rather, the purpose of the miracle was for Hashem to communicate with the non-Jewish people who were present that it is Hashem's intention to give the land to the Jewish people.

Once this message was communicated, there was no need for any more miracles, and that is why the rest of the cities were conquered militarily, and not miraculously.

In other words, miracles are not there to solve problems. Hashem didn't need to send ten plagues and split the sea in order to remove the Jews from slavery in Egypt. They could have gotten out by more natural means. Hashem did not need to drop manna from heaven because the people were hungry in the desert. They could have gotten food by more natural means.

The message of the miracles of the Exodus is that there is One G-d, Who controls everything in the world. There are not disparate forces competing for primacy, as was commonly believed in polytheistic Egypt. The message of the manna was that Hashem is the ultimate Provider for our needs.

The purpose of miracles, says the Noda Biyehudah, is for Hashem to communicate, and once the message has been conveyed, He expects humanity to remember it.

In the early days when our nation was being formed, Hashem performed many miracles, because Hashem was communicating fundamental ideas to the Jewish people and to all of humanity. From that point on, it is our job to pass the message along

to upcoming generations. That is why there is so much emphasis in Judaism on teaching children, and it is especially so during the Seder when we tell our children about these very miracles which convey Hashem's important messages.

So how will the world's problems be solved? It won't happen by us sitting back and waiting for supernatural intervention.

It will happen by each and every one of us doing our best to do everything we can to bring Hashem's message to the forefront of the world's consciousness. We do that by living our lives by the ideals and ideas of the Torah. More specifically it

is by applying Hashem's message, broadcasted by those historic miracles from so long ago, to today's situation.

When the world seems to be getting crazier and crazier, and the various forces seem out of control, let's remember the message of the miracles of the Exodus. There is the only one all-powerful, all-knowing, good G-d Who controls everything in the world. Our role is to spread the knowledge of Hashem throughout the world, and prepare the world for the one big event which everyone is waiting for, the coming of Moshiach speedily in our days. Amen!

The Meaning of Pesach Continued from page 10

Sefer Shemot encapsulates the story of slavery in Egypt, the redemption from Egypt, receiving the Torah, and the construction of the Mishkan. The Ramban in his introduction describes the sefer as the story of exile and redemption. He explains that ultimate redemption was not achieved by leaving Egypt, but rather by the Shechina's return, first at Har Sinai and then in the Mishkan. Perhaps Rav Kook's understanding of Pesach reframes the holiday as the beginning of the spiritual redemption, not just the physical.

Before the glorious revelation at Har Sinai, the Shechina was first in our humble homes, in Egypt.

Pesach is an opportunity to thank Hashem for His commitment to each of us, the sanctity of our homes and the protection of the Jewish people. It is a time to embrace and develop our relationship with Hashem, and recommit to holiness and spirituality. Peril may swirl around us, but Pesach reminds us that our homes are protected by Hashem's closeness.

Learning and Living the Lessons of the Seder

Rabbi Shmuel L. Schuman
Chief Executive Officer, Hebrew Theological College



The Seder is not an isolated event on the Jewish calendar; it is a time to recharge our batteries, rejuvenate our spirit and reenergize our commitment. It is one thing to go through the Seder, but what we need most is for its lessons to go through us, transforming them into practical lessons to live by long after Pesach.

The Haggadah culminates with a paragraph that begins, “חסל סידור פסח – כהלכתו – *We are now ending the Seder according to its laws.*” The paragraph continues, “כאשר זכינו לסדר אותו כן, – *just as we merited to arrange it, may we also merit to do it.*” This sounds strange. At this point in the Seder, we not only arranged the Seder, but we have certainly done it, so what is there left to do?

The simple explanation of this statement is that, just as we merited to arrange the Pesach Seder this year, may we also merit to do the real Pesach, the ancient Pesach sacrifice, in the future. However, since the Haggadah is open to interpretation, perhaps it means

that just as we merited to observe the Seder by reenacting *יציאת מצרים*, learning its lessons and discussing the fundamental principles of our faith, so may we merit “to do” those lessons by living them and making them a part of our lives.

I would like to offer a lesson that is relevant and instructive for the challenging situation that presently faces world Jewry.

In the section of the Haggadah dealing with the four sons, there is a curious introduction. “ברוך המקום – ברוך הוא ברוך שנתן תורה לעמו ישראל – *Blessed is The Place (Hashem), blessed be He, blessed is the One Who gave the Torah to His nation, Israel*” How is that introduction related to the four sons and why is Hashem referred to with the name “המקום,” “*The Place*”?

Rav Shimon Schwab notes that when we experience troubling times and accept the painful situation as being His will, we refer to Hashem as “המקום.” For example, when we comfort a mourner we say, “המקום ינחם אתכם – *May The Makom comfort you.*” Why at such times is Hashem

referred to as “*The Place*”?

Says Rav Schwab, because on sad occasions it may appear to those suffering that Hashem is absent. So, we express to them our prayer that “*The Place*” (Hashem) should assist them. We give them encouragement and hope by conveying our faith that the whole world is filled with His glory. He is *The Place* of the world because there is no place void of His presence and involvement.

On Seder night, when telling the story of the Exodus to our children, there are people who find themselves unable to carry out this mitzvah because they weren’t זוכה to offspring or are unable to do the mitzvah as they anticipated since their child may be in the classification of a בן רשע. Yet, we accept the situation, by pronouncing, ברוך המקום, may Hashem (HaMakom) be blessed. Even if a child is considered a בן רשע, he has a place at the Seder and the Torah addresses his questions. To that end we say, ברוך שנתן תורה לעמו, “*Blessed is the One Who gave the Torah to His nation Israel, may He be blessed,*” for the Torah gives us perspective on how to deal with challenges and provides an answer even for a rasha and a method that can bring him back on the proper path.

As we approach Pesach we worry

about the plight or our fellow brothers and sisters in the Ukraine and what Pesach this year will be like for them. Will they be able to fulfill the mitzvah of להגדת לבנך, eat מצה and perform the other mitzvos of the Seder as בני חורין, free people, or will it be כולו מרור, entirely bitter for them? Some of us may remember similar emotions when we davened for the freedom of Russian Jews at the seders of our youth.

It may appear at times that Hashem is absent. We counter that notion and say ברוך המקום, “blessed is *The Place*.” We beseech Him daily, “אחינו כל בית ישראל הנתונים בצרה... המקום ירחם עליהם—*our brothers the entire house of Israel who are found in distress... may The Place, the Omnipresent One, have mercy on them.*” We express our belief that the entire universe is filled with His glory. He is *The Place* of the universe and is ubiquitous.

We are reminded of the story of Moshe Rabbeinu himself, who after traveling to Egypt to bring בני ישראל out of bondage unsuccessfully, turns to Hashem and says, “why have You harmed this people, why have You sent me. From the time I came to Pharaoh ... he harmed this people, but You did not rescue Your people.” Yet, Hashem responded to Moshe, “now you will see what I will do to

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And if Hashem Had Not Taken Us Out...

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עֲבָדִים הָיִינוּ לְפָרְעָה בְּמִצְרַיִם, וַיּוֹצֵיאֵנוּ ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מִשָּׁם בְּיַד חֲזָקָה וּבְזֵרַע נְטוּיָה. וְאֵלֹהֵינוּ לֹא הוֹצִיא הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא אֶת אֲבוֹתֵינוּ מִמִּצְרַיִם, הֲרֵי אָנוּ וּבְנֵינוּ וּבְנֵי בְנֵינוּ מִשְׁעָבָדִים הָיִינוּ לְפָרְעָה בְּמִצְרַיִם.

The Haggadah immediately following the four questions, makes this astounding statement.

We were slaves to Pharaoh in Mitzraim, and Hashem our L-rd took us out of there with a strong hand and an outstretched arm. Had the Holy One, blessed is He, not taken our forefathers out of Mitzraim then we, our children and grandchildren would remain enslaved to Pharaoh in Mitzraim.

This statement, made in our times, seems to make no sense. There is no Pharaoh in Egypt today and there hasn't been one for many centuries. There is no legal slavery in Egypt today, nor anywhere else in the civilized world. Though in the past there have been many countries that have enslaved other countries, often, in time, the oppressed rose against their oppressor and were successful to gain their freedom. How could we

say in certitude that we, our children and children's children would remain in slavery after so many centuries had we not been freed by Hashem?

Perhaps one might answer that indeed the statement made so many centuries ago was at least true in that time, and we are merely repeating the text handed down to us from the times of the Tanaim. But, no, it wasn't true then either. Long before the Haggadah was compiled there was already no Egyptian monarch. Egypt, which had by Alexander's time (320 BCE) been reduced to an unimportant kingdom, was conquered by the Greeks and remained a Greek vassal state until it was conquered by the Romans in 27 BC under Octavius during the last century of Bayis Sheini. At the time of the writing of the Haggadah, it was ruled by the Roman emperor and by the governors installed by him. In no way would we be slaves to Pharaoh in Mitzraim then either.

The Torah states “אל תתעב מצרי כי גר—Do not detest the Mitzri for you were once guests in his land.”

Some hosts! They enslaved us and murdered our infant sons. We were forced, under the whip, to do hard labor. Why should we not detest the Mitzrim?

The answer lies in that there was more than one generation of Mitzrim in our history. The Pharaoh that gave the governance of his kingdom to Yosef was indeed generous, allowing the family of Yaakov to settle, in times of famine, in Goshen, which was an ideal land to raise and graze sheep and cattle, which was the mainstay of our people at the time. It was a later generation that treated us as enemies and enslaved us. We cannot forget the good that was done by one generation of Mitzrim because of a later generation's evil.

The word *משעבד* does not necessarily mean "enslaved." It can also mean "indebted." Had the Pharaoh of Moshe's time accepted the original request and immediately granted us freedom, there would have been a requirement to be grateful to him for our freedom. As it was, he refused time and again, and relented only when he saw that his life and the life of his country was in danger, since an eleventh plague would likely be more devastating than the tenth. Avraham taught us, by not accepting even a shoelace from the king of Sodom, that it is not good to be beholden to a wicked person.

The Haggadah therefore states that we would have been beholden to Pharaoh throughout our history had he been the one to release us from our bondage. But since it was Hakadosh Baruch Hu Who took us out against Pharaoh's will, we are not beholden to him and for that we are thankful.

A second interpretation can be based on a question dealt with by many. Avrohom Avinu was told that his descendants would be in a land not of their own, in servitude, for four hundred years. Yet, as Rashi proves by adding the years of Kehos, (who came with Yaakov to Mitzraim), of Amram, and Moshe's eighty years, we do not have four hundred years, and, in addition, their lives overlapped. Chazal have told us that B'nei Yisroel were in Mitzraim for only 210 years. But, then, how can Hashem's prophetic declaration not be true?

There are two answers our sages have given. One is to count from the birth of Yitzchok, or from the *ברית בין הבתרים* and that would amount to four hundred or four hundred thirty years. Another answer is that the servitude was so harsh that 210 years was equivalent to four hundred years of standard slavery.

In any case, there needs to be a reason for allowing for either of these answers to govern the meaning

of Hashem's prophetic declaration. Hashem could have said to Avrohom, "Your descendants will be in a land not of their own for four hundred years and will be enslaved for two hundred and ten years" (first answer). Or He could have said, "Your descendants will be slaves for four hundred years in a land not of their own, **or its equivalent**" (second answer). Instead, Hashem gave the sad news in a way that was ambiguous enough to be explained either literally or interpretively.

Meforshim state that the spiritual level of Yisroel in Mitzraim was very low. It was described as sinking to the 49th level of tumah (defilement) out of a total of 50. The reason we had sunk so low was due to the exposure to the prevailing culture of Mitzraim. Because we were so low in social status, being mere

slaves, we looked up to the Mitzrim and their culture and it affected us greatly. Had Hashem not hastened the redemption, say the *meforshim*, we could never have arisen to a level in which we would be capable to receive the Torah. It is in this sense that we would have been, even today, subservient to Pharaoh in Mitzraim had Hashem not taken us out when He did. The spiritual stain of Mitzraim would have remained with us for all time. Not only did Hashem take us out of physical slavery, but more importantly, from spiritual slavery as well. This is another reason why the Haggadah says that we would have remained in slavery after so many centuries had we not been freed by Hashem. It is this spiritual freedom that we acknowledge and celebrate on the night of Pesach.

Learning and Living the Lessons of the Seder

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Pharaoh, for with a strong hand he will send them out..." We know the rest of that story; it is the glorious story of *יציאת מצרים* and us becoming the chosen nation. Indeed, there was much pain in that story, but there was a master plan that was eventually revealed.

Just as we merited to observe the

Seder, learning its lessons, including that Hashem is Omnipresent and always has a master plan, so may we merit "to do" those lessons by living them and infusing them into our lives.

כאשר זכינו לסדר אותו כן נזכה לעשותו.
לשנה הבאה בירושלים!

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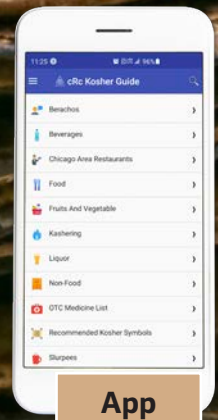
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