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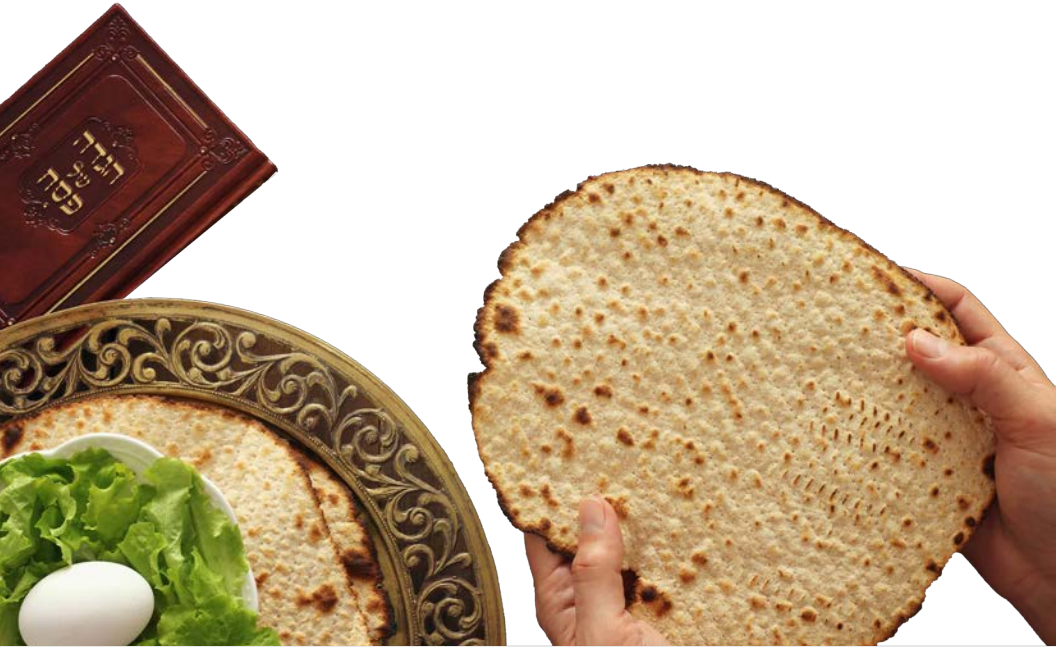
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“Dayenu”: Exclamation or Exhortation?

Rabbi Yona Reiss
Av Beth Din



One of the highlights of the Haggadah is the *Dayenu* song, in which we proclaim how each individual kindness of Hashem “would have sufficed for us” (*Dayenu*). One of the stanzas states *אלו קרבנו לפני הרי סיני ולא נתן לנו דיינו – את התורה –* “had He brought us before Har Sinai, but not given us the Torah, this would have sufficed for us.” Many commentaries ask what type of benefit would have been derived from simply coming to the mountain of Sinai but not receiving the Torah? If anything, that would seem like a profound disappointment, a tantalizing letdown worthy of lamentation rather than celebration.

The commentators provide different explanations for this stanza. One approach (see *Alshich, Vayikra* 23:9) is based on the *midrash* that at the time the serpent in Gan Eden enticed Chava to eat from the Tree of Knowledge and cavorted with her, all of mankind received a spiritual contamination (referred to as “*zuhama*”) which was removed from the Jewish people at the time that

we stood at Har Sinai (see *Shabbos* 146a). Thus, even if the Torah had not been given, our readiness to receive the Torah at Har Sinai would have been sufficient to remove this contamination. According to this explanation, we are celebrating the fact that Hashem gave us the ability to prepare ourselves for holiness, so that we were in an elevated spiritual state at Har Sinai to be capable of receiving the Torah. As Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik *zt”l* was fond of saying, *אין קדושה בלי הכנה* – there is no holiness without preparation. We thus are thankful that our preparation alone for receiving the Torah led to our receiving holiness at Mount Sinai to remove the spiritual contamination that had afflicted humankind.

Rabbi Levi Yitzchok of Berdichev (cited by R. Yaakov Wehl, *Ki Yishalcha Vincha*, p. 267) provides a second explanation. Just as Avrohom Avinu was able to reach a purity of spirit so great that he was able to decipher all the laws of the Torah on his own (see *Yoma* 28b; *Bereishis Rabbah* 95:3), so too our experience

of being in Hashem's presence at Mount Sinai would have furnished us with the self-same ability to derive the laws of the Torah from the purity of spirit and clarity of mind that we received at that time.

A third approach is that the stanza refers to how it would have been sufficient had we heard the Ten Commandments alone (or even the first two of the Commandments) without receiving the full Torah (see R. Wehl, *supra*, p. 266). Either the explanation is that we would have been able to derive all of Torah from the Ten Commandments (based on R. Saadiah Gaon's comment that all of the 613 commandments are contained in the Ten Commandments, see Rashi, *Shemos* 24:12), or that it would have been sufficient to have heard the first two commandments from Hashem (see *Imrei Baruch on the Haggadah*, p. 229, citing the *Birchas Hashir*) and then derived all of the Torah from those two commandments (in this sense, Torah, which has a numerical value of 611, is a reference to the remaining 611 commandments, in addition to the two commandments heard directly by the entire nation from Hashem; see *Makos* 23b-24a).

According to a fourth explanation (see *Imrei Baruch*, p. 238, citing R. Aryeh Tzvi Fromer, the Kozoglover

Gaon), we are celebrating that when we came close to Har Sinai, we were *כאיש אחד בלב אחד* – we were a completely united people with one unified purpose and destiny (see Rashi, *Shemos* 19:2). This sense of togetherness served as an indispensable aspect of our ability to receive the Torah (see *Vayikra Rabbah* 9:9). We thus express our appreciation for the unity of our nation, indivisible in the service of Hashem, that took place at Har Sinai.

There are additional answers given as well, but perhaps the most thought-provoking approach is an explanation based on the commentary of the work *Ma'asei Hashem on the Haggadah* (R. Eliezer Ashkenazi). According to the *Ma'asei Hashem*, the word "*Dayenu*" does not connote an exclamation, but rather an exhortation in the form of a rhetorical question. "*Dayenu*" in this sense means, "are you kidding? Obviously, that would not have been enough!" Our desire to come as close as possible to Hashem and to serve Him as fully as possible serves as an exhortation for us to achieve higher spiritual elevation.

Accordingly, we can understand the stanza about being brought to Har Sinai as a key towards understanding the rest of the *Dayenu* refrain. In the

same way that it would not make sense to have come all the way to Har Sinai without receiving the Torah (as the *Alshich* comments, it would be akin to eating tasteless food without salt), so too it would not have been enough to only leave Egypt without receiving the *mitzvah* of *Shabbos*, or to have received the *mitzvah* of *Shabbos* without being brought to Har Sinai, or to have received the Torah without being able to observe all the *mitzvot* in *Eretz Yisroel*.

This final explanation gives us a fresh perspective with respect to the final stanza of *Dayenu*, which states, "Had He brought us into the Land of Israel, but not built the *Beis HaBechira* for us, *Dayenu!*" When we change the exclamation point to a question mark and an exhortation, we convert this statement into a plea for future redemption. We turn to Hashem on the *Seder* night with fervent appreciation for all the miracles of redemption that we have witnessed, including in our times, but nonetheless exclaim that we recognize that there is more to be attained, that we have not yet rebuilt the *Beis Hamikdash*, and that we are not satisfied with the status quo

until we can worship Hashem in the fully rebuilt Jerusalem.

This final idea has special resonance for us this year in the aftermath of the terrible October 7 terror attack on Israel as we recognize the delicate nature of our existence. We have come to realize how much we still need to strive further, and to plead to Hashem for complete deliverance and redemption. In this sense, *Dayenu* both signifies our deep appreciation for the many miracles that relate to the flourishing of our people and our faith, but also our continuous yearning for deeper salvation and the restoration of the *Beis Hamikdash* in Jerusalem during a time of peace and tranquility to be ushered in by the coming of the *Mashiach*. It is thus through our song of *Dayenu* that we enthusiastically express towards the conclusion of our *Seder* our perennial wish of לשנה הבאה בירושלים הבנויה.

The Winning Strategy

Rabbi Joel Gutstein

Rabbi, Congregation Yehuda Moshe



There are no coincidences in Jewish life. Since Pesach seems to mark the beginning of the baseball season, perhaps we can derive a lesson from baseball to the holiday of Pesach.

The Oakland Athletics is not one of the glamorous teams in baseball. They are not in one of the major population or television markets. They also do not have one of the higher payrolls in baseball. Yet, in past years, the Athletics consistently fielded one of the better teams in baseball. Year after year they were in the playoffs. How did they do it?

Billy Beane, the formal general manager of the Athletics, explained his strategy. What is the goal of an inning? Most people would say to score. Beane explained that the goal is not to make three outs. As long as a team does not have three outs, they keep on batting and can keep scoring. Therefore, a walk, hit-by-pitch or on base by an error is just as good as a single. The team can keep batting. On the other hand, a sacrifice bunt or a sacrifice fly is not

a good strategy because a team loses an out in that at bat, leaving them with one less chance at the plate.

Based upon his ideology, Beane looked for players with good on-base percentages. He usually did not seek very young players because they had not proven their value at getting on base. He often went for players that had been rejected elsewhere. They might not have been able to hit homeruns, but if they knew how to get on base, they were able to be a part of his team. Owning players who knew how to reach base was his secret to having success annually in a sport that does not always allow for continued success.

So, what does baseball-on-base percentage have to do with Pesach and the Jewish people? For there to be a Jewish people - a strong Jewish people, and a consistently strong Jewish people - we need to have a good on-base percentage. We need to have Jewish people who participate with the Jewish people on a regular basis - people who show they want to be a part of G-d's chosen nation. The

holiday of Pesach is a good start in that direction. Pesach and Chanuka are the two most observed Jewish holidays in the Diaspora. They are better when observed in accordance with Jewish law and Jewish tradition. However, the fact that many Jews have at least some semblance of a *Seder* or Pesach observance means that they still have some connection to the Jewish people.

There is a story about Rabbi Yisroel Salanter. One time, late at night, he came up to a group of students and told them, “I have just learned something very important from a poor shoemaker. I was passing by his shop and saw him bent over his bench working by the light of a tiny flame sputtering at the end of an almost burnt out candle. I asked him, ‘Why do you work so late? Isn’t it time to go home and rest?’ He replied, ‘As long as the candle burns, one must mend.’”

Rabbi Yisroel told his students, “There gentlemen, is something for you to think about. As long as the candle burns, one must mend. As long as one is alive, one must learn, work and improve.”

As long as a person has a connection to the Jewish people, no matter how tenuous it might be, there is still hope for that person.

We have such an example in the *Seder*

– the Four Sons. We can understand that the wise son is at the *Seder*. We can also understand why the simple son attends the *Seder*. But what is the wicked son doing at the *Seder*? What is the son who does not know how to ask – the uneducated son – doing at the *Seder*?

The fact that they – the wicked son and the uneducated son - also attend the *Seder* means they still have a connection to the Jewish people. They still want to take part in G-d’s eternal people. They might not have the correct approach to matters, but at least they are there and can learn the correct manner to be Jewish. “As long as the light burns” – players with a good on-base percentage – they can keep the inning going. Since they have a good on-base percentage, with the right combination of factors, they can score for the Jewish people. That will make us a strong playoff team on a consistent basis.

G-d says, “כימי צאתך – As in the days that you left Egypt I will show you wonders.” (*Micha* 7:14) With a consistently strong playoff team we will eventually reach the “World Series” and become the champions, just as G-d has promised us through His prophets.

Concealing the Afikoman

Rabbi Aron Wolf

President, Director and Founder of the
Chicago Mitzvah Campaign



Following *yachatz*, there are a number of customs regarding the manner in which the *afikoman* should be set aside/concealed until the end of the meal.

כך החיים describes the *minhag* to wrap the *afikoman* in a cloth that was tied to a child's shoulder. After the recitation of *הא לחמא עניא*, this child would knock on the door, and then respond to the questions of the other participants in the following manner: "Who are you?" "I am a Jew." "Where are you coming from?" "From Egypt." "Where are you going?" "To Jerusalem." "What are you carrying?" "Matzah." The *Seder* would then continue with the *afikoman* tied to the child's shoulder until the end of the meal.

The *טור* and others write that the *afikoman* should be given to one who is designated to safeguard it from being inadvertently eaten during the meal.

Conversely, the *מהרי"ל* and others write that one should keep his

afikoman in front of himself on the table (but under a cloth), to ensure that he will remember to eat it at the end of the meal.

The *מהרש"ל* and others write that the *afikoman matzah* should be wrapped in a cloth and either placed under a pillow or between pillows, as a reminder of the *pasuk* that describes the Jews leaving Egypt with "משארותם צרורות בשמלותם" – "their kneading bowls wrapped in their cloaks." (The *מקראי קודש* and others explain that concealing the *afikoman* under a pillow also has the added advantage of "safeguarding" the *matzah*, in accordance with the *pasuk*, *ושמרתם את המצות*.)

The *כל בו* writes that the purpose of concealing the *afikoman* is so that the children will notice this unusual behavior and will ask why we are concealing the *matzah* when we haven't yet eaten?

The *מקראי קודש* writes in the name of Reb Chaim Soloveitchik that we conceal the *afikoman* because it is a memorial to the *korban Pesach*.

Just as the *korban Pesach* required safeguarding to avoid any “היסח” (distraction) from it during the meal, so too we conceal the *afikoman* in a designated place to safeguard it and thereby avoid being distracted from it during the meal.¹

“Stealing” or “Grabbing” the *Afikoman*

Some have a practice that children “steal” and hide the *afikoman* after *yachatz*, returning it to the adults at the end of the meal in exchange for a reward.

Some base this practice on the *Gemara* (*Pesachim* 109:1): “חוטפין מצות בליל פסחים בשביל תינוקות שלא יישנו” – “We grab *matzos* on the night of Pesach so that the children will not fall asleep.”² However, it is surprising that interpreting the word חוטפין to mean that children steal the *afikoman* became such a widespread explanation of this *Gemara*, despite the fact that the classic commentaries offer many other interpretations, including the following:

- We lift the plate with the *matzos* so that the children will ask about it. (רש"י)
- We eat quickly so that the children

will not fall asleep. (“רש"י and others)

- We hasten the *Haggadah* prior to eating so that the children will stay awake. (כל בו and others)
- We remove the *matzah* from the children so that over-eating won't cause them to fall asleep. (רשב"ם)
- We grab the *matzah* from the children and play games with them so that they won't fall asleep. (ר' יהונתן מלוניל)
- The adults “grab” *matzah* from one another to cause the children to ask why they're doing so. (רמב"ם)

A Controversial Practice

In fact, the practice of children “stealing” the *afikoman* and hiding it from the adults is controversial, as it crowds out or directly prevents the fulfilment of [some or all] of the customs and explanations mentioned at the beginning of this article. For example, Reb Chaim Soloveitchik's approach explicitly negates this practice, since the *afikoman* needs to be watched in order to avoid any distraction (היסח) (הדעת) from it during the meal, as explained above.

Furthermore, Chabad custom also negates this practice for another

1 ראה הגדה ש"פ חב"ד הוצאת קה"ת דף י"א

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reason, which is that stealing is forbidden even when done in a light-hearted or insincere manner. (See, for example, the statement of the Gemara (Berachos 5:2): “בתר גנבא גניב וטעמא טעים”)

Similarly, the ארחות חיים writes that the practice of stealing the *afikoman* is a “bogus and foolish” custom, and that anyone who eliminates it is praiseworthy. Indeed, many Sefardic communities never had this custom at all, and the משנה ברורה noticeably omits any mention of it.

On a Spiritual Level

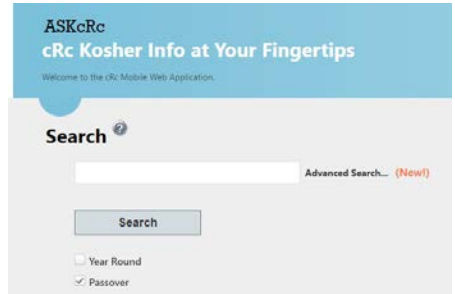
Chabad Chassidus teaches that the

custom of concealing the *afikoman* gives us the strength to eliminate even the **hidden** evil of the *yetzer hara* that lies concealed (צפון) in a person’s heart, as the *pasuk* (יואל ב:כ) states, “הצפוני ארחיק”, and as רש”י explains, זה יצר הרע.

The שפת אמת writes that *afikoman* represents יציאת מצרים. **That geula**, however, was not complete, as we are still awaiting the final *geula*, with *Moshiach*. Setting aside or concealing the larger part of the *afikoman* reminds us that the best, the true and complete redemption, is yet to come, still hidden in the future. May we speedily merit ביאת אמן משיח צדקנו במהרה בימינו, אמן.



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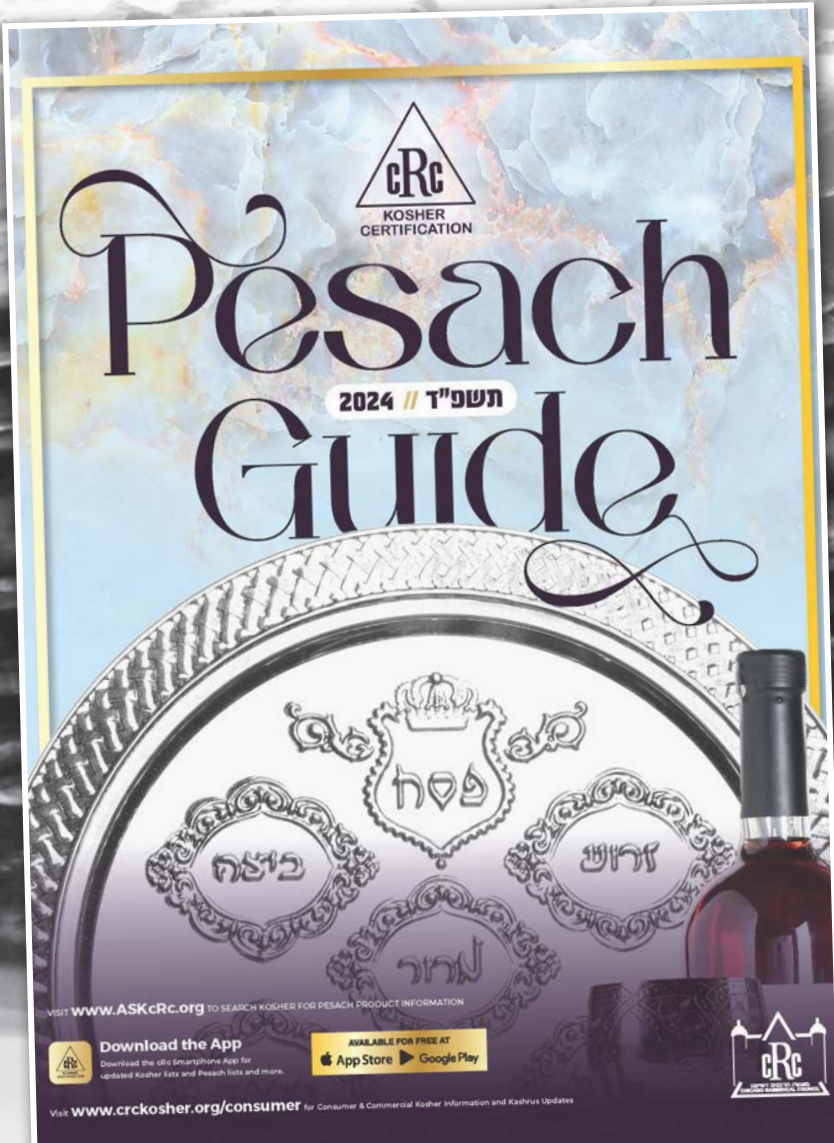
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