

PHILOTORAH

יְהִי רְצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ שֶׁתְּשַׁלַּח מְהֵרָה רְפוּאָה שְׁלֵמָה מִן הַשָּׁמַיִם, רְפוּאָת הַנַּפְשׁ וְרְפוּאָת הַגּוּף לְפְצוּעֵי הַמִּלְחָמָה, וְלַנִּפְגְּעֵי מַעֲשֵׂי טְרוּר וְאַנְטִישִׁמְיוֹת בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל – וּבְכֹל מְקוֹם שֶׁהֵם, עִם שְׂאֵר חוֹלֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל. אָמֵן.

May HaShem protect our soldiers and the hostages; may He send Refu'ah Sh'leima to the many injured; may He console the bereaved families and all of Israel, and may He end this war with success and peace for Klal Yisrael.

שַׁבַּת פְּרֻשַׁת מִצְרָע
אֵת אֱלֹהֵי הַנְּבִיא לִפְנֵי בּוֹא יוֹם הַתְּגָדוּל וְהַנִּקְרָא

זְכְרוּ תּוֹרַת מוֹשֶׁה עַבְדִּי
אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתִי אוֹתוֹ בְּזֶרֶב
עַל-כָּל-יִשְׂרָאֵל
וְזָקִים וּבְשׂוֹפְטִים:

שַׁבַּת הַגְּדוּל

וְהַשִּׁיב לְבֵי-אֲבוֹת עַל-בָּנִים וְלֵב בָּנִים עַל-אֲבוֹתָם...

YERUSHALAYIM in/out times for **M'TZORA**

SHABBAT HAGADOL

י"ב ניסן ה'תשפ"ד • April 19-20,

6:36PM PLAG 5:50PM • 7:50PM R' Tam 8:29PM

For other locales, click on the Z'MANIM link

PhiloTorah (195mtz) - 1 - all@once file



Kiddush L'vana

Minhag Yerushalayim - three full days after the molad - This past Motza"Sh was clear in Jerusalem. DONE.

First op for 7-days-after-the-molad opinion is Monday (April 15th) after 11:38pm - more practical is Tuesday evening, April 16th.

Last op = Leil HaSeder, all night. Usually, we don't say KL on Leil Shabbat or Chag. But if it is the last op, then we do.

BIRKAT HA-ILANOT

If you haven't said it yet, you've got all of Nisan to say it. See PT link.

The M'TZORA Story

In all SHANA P'SHUTA (12-month - one Adar - years, M'tzora is read combined with Tazri'a. 27% of the time in Israel and 45% of the time in Chu"L, the reading is 'just' Tazri'a-M'tzora, and the haftara is V'ARBAA ANASHIM.

18% of the time, TM is Rosh Chodesh Iyar, and the haftara is that of Shabbat-R"Ch (V'ARBAA ANASHIM being preempted).

In Israel, an additional 18% of the time, TM is on Erev Rosh Chodesh, and the

Haftara of Machar Chodesh preempts the regular haftara.

The discrepancy between Israel and Chu"L in that one year-type (the most common of the calendar at 18% frequency) is due to Pesach being Shabbat to Friday here and Shabbat to Shabbat in Chu"L. We resume Parshat HaShavua on their ACHARON SHEL PESACH. In Israel, TM is Machar Chodesh in that year, and in Chu"L, Sh'mini is read on that same Shabbat.

All the above accounts for 63.16% of years, which is the frequency of Shana P'shuta.

As to SHANA M'UBERET (13-month - two Adars - years), M'tzora is read separately. M'tzora is Shabbat HaGadol - 26.3% of the time - as it is this year. Special HaGadol haftara preempts M'tzora's regular haftara.

The other 10.53% of years, Acharei is HaGadol, and M'tzora is regular, getting its own haftara.

The HaGadol Story

No special maftir for Shabbat HaGadol - just one Torah. The haftara is special.

In all Shana P'shuta, Tzav is Shabbat HaGadol. That's 63.16% of the time.

And, as already mentioned, M'tzora is HaGadol 26.30% of years and Acharei is HaGadol 10.53% of years.

M'TZORA HaGADOL



28th of 54 sedras; 5th of 10 in Vayikra

Written on 159 lines • ranks: 40th

6 Parshiyot, 3 open and 3 closed

90 p'sukim, rank 42 (5th in Vayikra)

1274 words, rank 39 (4th in Vayikra)

4697 letters, rank 39 (4th in Vayikra)

M'tzora's p'sukim are longer than average, hence its rise in ranking for words & letters

MITZVOT

11 mitzvot - all positive

FYI - just 5 other sedras have only positive mitzvot: B'reishit (1), Lech L'cha (1), Chukat (3), Pinchas (6), Vayeilech (2) - M'tzora has the most by far, among the sedras with only Mitzvot Asei

FYFI: Vayishlach, B'shalach, Vayakhel are the only sedras with only mitzvot Lo Taasei - one each.

Aliya-by-Aliya Sedra Summary

[P> X:Y (Z)] and [S> X:Y (Z)] indicate start of a parsha p'tucha or s'tuma. X:Y is Perek:Pasuk of the beginning of the parsha; (Z) is the number of p'sukim in the parsha.

Numbers in [square brackets] are the Mitzva-count of Sefer HaChinuch AND Rambam's Sefer HaMitzvot. A=ASEI; L=LAV (prohibition). X:Y is the perek & pasuk from which the mitzva comes.

Metzora is read alone in all SHANA M'UBERET (7 years of the 19-year cycle) and combined with Tazri'a in all SHANA P'SHUTA (12 years of the 19-year cycle).

Kohen - First Aliya 12 p'sukim - 14:1-12

[P> 14:1 (20)] The afflictions presented in Tazri'a are dealt with by the procedures described in M'tzora.

The main theme of M'tzora is the "ritual purification" of the one afflicted with Tzara'at. These procedures constitute a positive mitzva [173, A110 14:2]. Two birds are to be taken, a ceremony is performed with them, one bird is slaughtered, and the other is set free. The person immerses in a mikve, he cleans his garments, and he shaves all the hair on his body [174, A111 14:9]. The rules of ritual immersion in general, come from this context [175, A109 14:9].

a long SDT: The 12th and final chapter of Mishna Chulin deals with the mitzva of Shilu'ach HaKen (the sending away of the mother bird who is on her nest of eggs or fledglings). The final mishna in that

chapter deals with the situation when that mitzva might clash with the purification of the M'tzora. What if the only bird available to the M'tzora for his atoning offerings is a mother sparrow hovering over her nest? Do we say the positive mitzva of Taharat HaM'tzora overrides the prohibition of taking the mother bird? This would seem to fit a general rule: a positive commandment overrides a prohibition (ASEI DOCHEH LO TAASEI). Yet this is not the case. Even for a mitzva, and even when the bird will be released alive(!), as is the case of the second of the M'tzora's two birds, one may not violate the Shilu'ach HaKen prohibitions. There are technical reasons based on the wording in the text of the Torah for this. And, Shilu'ach HaKen is not a "simple" prohibition, but involves an attached positive command.

But there might be another concept here. Shilu'ach HaKen is a "show-case" mitzva. It is one of the rare mitzvot for which a reward is specified - ARICHAT YAMIM (lengthening of life, the exact meaning of this is not clear - does it apply to this world or the next or both? - but the reward is expressed). The mitzva defies common logic and reasoning. It contains enigmatic qualities of a CHOK - a Divine imperative, not readily explainable. And its reward is implied for many other mitzvot by reasoning of a KAL VACHOMER - if this mitzva is

rewarded thusly, then certainly the more difficult mitzvot must carry with them great reward. (Although we are cautioned not to act in order to receive reward, and although we cannot compare one mitzva with another since we "don't know how G-d keeps score", we do have a sense of the truth of the logic expressed by the mishna.) Be that as it may, we can possibly learn that the pursuit of personal improvement may not be at the expense of others, be they human or animal. [Note: this is only food for thought, might not even be "correct" for this issue. One should not generalize to other areas of mitzva.]

BTW, the "rule" mentioned earlier whereby a positive commandment (sometimes) pushes aside a prohibition, does not operate when it is possible to satisfy the command without violating the prohibition. Since there is no requirement to take specifically a mother bird that is hovering over her nest, then the positive commandment of TAHARAT HAM'TZORA cannot override the LO TIKACH HA'EIM AL HABANIM prohibition of Shilu'ach HaKen. Additionally, Shilu'ach HaKen is not a pure prohibition because of the positive command to verily chase away the mother bird - SHALEI'ACH T'SHALACH... But the original point is still something to ponder.

Levi - Second Aliya 8 p'sukim - 14:13-20

The purification process is completed after bringing various korbanot, following a seven day period and the other procedures, as mentioned above [176, A77 14:10].

SDT: Notice how the M'tzora is isolated from others during the time he is ritually unclean. That gives him time to examine himself, his deeds, his thoughts. But as part of the process of purification, as part of the process of having a second chance in the world, he is ministered to by a kohen who becomes the first contact in his renewal procedure. There is a significant psychological factor at work in the area of NEGA'IM.

On another note... Notice the use of the blood of the korbanot as well as the oil that the purifying M'tzora brings. Many of the same things are done to both - sprinkling, dabbing the right earlobe, right thumb and right big toe.

Shlishi - Third Aliya - 12 p'sukim - 14:21-32

[S> 14:21 (12)] A person who cannot afford the animals for the sacrifices, is to bring one sheep and two birds as his offering. The Torah describes the rituals involved in these

offerings. Notice the 'repetition' of the details of the korbanot, rather than simply saying, "and the poor person's offerings are done the same way... It is not important how much the sacrifice is worth on a dollars and cents basis (shekels and agorot), but what is relative to the means of the atoner.

Thus ends the section of the Torah dealing with afflictions to the individual. ZOT TORAT... this is the body of law of one afflicted who cannot afford the full set of korbanot.

R'vi'i - Fourth Aliya - 21 p'sukim - 14:33-53

[P> 14:33 (25)] The Torah next discusses Tzara'at that can afflict a person's house. This can only be in the Land of Israel, in a house made of specific materials, and under specific conditions [177, A103 14:35]. Once again, it is the kohen who makes the determination as to whether Tzara'at does exist, or a professional house painter should be consulted. In the case of a "house plague", there are procedures to be followed and purification processes, including korbanot to be brought.

SDT: Not only does a person's body contain elements of spirituality, but even his home - specifically in Eretz Yisrael. Although we do not "practice" this whole topic today, the

lessons of the bridge and connection between the physical world and the spiritual one cannot be over-looked. A person whose home is a meeting place for Torah scholars, a launching pad for acts of charity and kindness, a training ground for a new generation of sensitive, feeling, enthusiastic Jews, such a home cannot be infected by spiritual plague. A home devoid of spirituality is a prime target for NIG'EI HABAYIT. In this case, it is not the anti-rust and anti-mold paint that makes the difference. It is the values that a Jew lives by and their effect on the next generation.

It is worthwhile to point out that the manifestation of a NEGA and some kind of rot, mold, fungus, or whatever can be EXACTLY the same. If a kohen sees it and declares ritual impurity, then it is a NEGA HABAYIT. And if he doesn't see it (and doesn't say it!), then it isn't. Even if a non-kohen expert in the field, identifies it as a NEGA. And it is possible that a kohen was about to declare a house TAMEI and he finds out that the homeowner is a CHATAN in his first week of marriage, then he won't make the declaration and there is no TUM'A. It is all "the way a kohen sees it".

Let's contrast this kind of TUM'A to that of TUM'AT MEIT. If a person dies in a tent, let's say, then anyone in the tent becomes TAMEI. Same for objects

that are subject to contracting that TUM'A. No one declares them TAMEI. They are automatically TAMEI by virtue of the fact that they were under the same roof as a dead body. But with NEGA HABAYIT, we find different rules. People and personal possessions are removed from the house before the kohein comes in to inspect. When he declares the house TAMEI, then it is and so are certain objects in it. An object that was in the same house minutes before - and nothing physically changed with the house in the meantime - but was removed before the declaration by the kohein, is TAHOR. Maybe we can say that TUM'AT MEIT is objective while the TUM'A of these N'GA'IM is subjective. There's a lot to ponder here.

GIMATRIYA

based on L'ORA SHEL TORAH

by R. Yaakov Auerbach ל"ר

Our sources clearly state that the (main) cause of Tzara'at is Lashon HaRa. This idea is beautifully reflected in the following Gimatriya.

The numeric value of NEGA TZARA'AT is 883. The prohibition of gossip and "evil tongue" is LO TEILEICH RACHIL B'AMECHA, "do not be a talebearer". Its numeric value is 883. Punishment for violating the 883-prohibition of Lashon HaRa is the 883-affliction of Tzara'at.

More... The proper way to avoid both the violation and its punishment is with MIDOT TOVOT (good personality traits) = 883.

And if we all can avoid Lashon HaRa and its punishment by developing those good traits, then TIZKU L'GEULA SHLEIMA (you shall merit the Complete Redemption) = 883.

Chamishi 5th Aliya 19 p'sukim - 14:54-15:15

This portion begins with a summary of different types of N'GA'IM.

The shortest p'sukim in the Torah have 3 words each. There are only 13 in the whole Torah. Here in M'tzora are two consecutive 3-word p'sukim - unique. Vayikra 14:55,56 -

*ULTZARAATHABEGEDV'LABAYIT.
V'LAS'EITV'LASAPACHATV'LABEHARET.*

Is there anything special about the 3-word p'sukim? Perhaps. Perhaps, not. In some Sidurim there is the list of the 3-word p'sukim (plus some other "special" p'sukim from Tanach) in the Motza'ei Shabbat readings (after Z'mirot). It is probably Kabbalistic.

[P> 15:1 (15)] Next the Torah speaks of the status of a man with an "unnatural discharge" (probably a form of venereal disease). In such cases, the Torah view matters as a combination of physical symptoms with spiritual causes - in the case of

ZAV and ZAVA, most probably attributable to sexual misconduct. (As such, there is a close relationship between the different themes of the sedra. Interesting, is it not, that there are doctors and clinics today that specialize in dermatology and venereal diseases. Interesting combination of specialties in light of this week's sedra.)

The one afflicted is himself TAMEI, as well as causing other people and objects to become "ritually impure" through contact, both direct and indirect [178, A104 15:2]. The one afflicted, must bring special korbanot after a purification process [179, A74 15:13].

Shishi - Sixth Aliya - 13 p'sukim - 15:16-28

[S> 15:16 (3)] There is also a "ritual impurity" (of a lesser degree - one-day type) in cases of normal seminal emissions [180, A105 15:17]. A woman who has relations with a man also contracts this one-day Tum'a.

A menstruating woman is "ritually unclean". This is counted as a positive mitzva [181, A99 15:19]; its negative counterpart is in the next sedra.

[P> 15:19 (6)] A woman with an unnatural discharge has a specific set

of rules. In the case of a ZAVA, there are differences in her status depending upon how many sightings of blood there are, and how frequent. These rules and procedures constitute a mitzva [182, A106 15:19].

[S> 15:25 (9)] The longer-term ZAVA is presented in its own parsha, a S'TUMA that can be seen as a sub-parsha of the previous P'TUCHA that introduced the topic of ZAVA. These rules and procedures constitute a mitzva [182, A106 15:19].

Sh'VII - Seventh Aliya - 5 p'sukim - 15:29-33

The requirement of the korbanot at the conclusion of the period of impurity constitutes a positive commandment [183, A75 15:29]. The people of Israel have a great potential for attaining spiritual heights. They have an equally great potential for descending to low levels of spiritual impurity.

Generally, when there is a rich man's korban and a poor man's korban for the same situation, if a rich man brings the less expensive version of the korban, he fulfills his obligation, after the fact. Tzora'at is an exception. If a rich man brought a poor man's offering, he has not fulfilled his obligation. The son of the Nodeh B'Yehuda beautifully explained why this is so. One of the causes of Tzora'at is stinginess. Even

the term in our Vidui can be seen as a play on words - TZAROT AYIN. If a rich man brings a poor person's korban, in this case it is an indication that he hasn't healed. The korban cannot bring atonement.

The last 3 p'sukim of the sedra (which are reread for Maftir - even on Shabbat HaGadol) serve as a summary to the topics of ritual purity and impurity and present the challenge to the Jewish People to rise above mundane physical existence by scrupulously avoiding "impurity".

SdT: Commentaries note that the laws pertaining to human beings (the sedras of Tazria and M'tzora) follow the laws pertaining to animals (Vayikra, Tzav, Shmini). This corresponds to the sequence of creation - animals were created before humans. If a person behaves in an improper manner, he is lower than an animal. And is reminded that "the mosquito preceded him". If however, he behaves properly, keeps the Torah and mitzvot, rises to the challenge of being holy, then he is worthy of having been created in the image of G-d.

Haftara 21+1 p'sukim - Mal'achi 3:4-24

The haftara speaks of faithfulness to Torah and the promise of the coming

of Eliyahu HaNavi as the harbinger of the Complete Redemption. That the second, to some extent, depends on the first can be seen in the closeness of the following two phrases: ZICHRU TORAT MOSHE... (remember the Torah, and keep it), and HINEI ANOCHI SHOLEI'ACH LACHEM and if you do, then I will send Eliyahu...

Note: The penultimate (next to the last) pasuk is repeated as the concluding pasuk of the haftara. This is done to end Malachi and Trei-Asar and the Nevi'im portion of Tanach on a positive note. (This is done three other times - end of Yeshayahu, Eicha, and Kohelet.)

Bringing the Prophets to Life

Weekly insights into the Haftara by Rabbi Nachman (Neil) Winkler

Author of Bringing the Prophets to Life (Gefen Publ.)

Shabbat HaGadol - 21+1 p'sukim

- Mal'achi 3:4-24

Celebrating the Future

Over these many years, I have always understood this week's haftara selection from the final chapter in the book of the final Navi, Malachi, to be based upon the vision of a future redemption. We should be aware of the fact that the holiday of Pesach is meant to be more than just a reminder

of past events and even more than a reenactment of those events. The Yom Tov is, after all, Chag HaGeula, a celebration of our redemption and, therefore, is also meant to celebrate our not-yet-realized future redemption.

In fact, the order of the Seder reflects this very idea. The practices we follow and the text we recite before the Seder meal are all based upon our past redemption from Egypt. The bitter maror that brings to mind the bitter slavery in Egypt, the salt water representing the tears of suffering and the charoset symbolizing the mortar used for the brick, all relate back to our slave experience. Likewise, the recitation of AVADIM HAYINU and MIT'CHILA OVDEI AVODA ZARA fulfill Talmud's insistence of beginning the Magid section with G'NUT, the shame we suffered during our Egyptian enslavement. Even the Hallel that we begin reciting before the meal is known as HALLEL HAMITZRI, the Egyptian Hallel, and we end that pre-meal section with the verses that refer to Egypt and our release from slavery.

In contrast, the post-meal Seder practices and recitations rely heavily upon our vision of the future redemption. It is during this time, therefore, that we drink the fourth cup of wine, a cup introducing our prayers

for the geula to come. It is at this point that we ask Hashem to punish those who deny His existence and oppress His people, as we open the door for Eliyahu HaNavi, the future harbinger of the messianic era, as related to us by the navi Malachi in the haftara we read on this Shabbat HaGadol. We continue the recitation of Hallel HaMitzri by completing its final part, the part that makes no mention of Egypt or our enslavement. We then praise Hashem with the Hallel HaGadol, the great Hallel as praise for G-d for our future geula. It is no wonder then that, as we conclude this final section we pray that Hashem will bring us, redeemed, to Tziyon in song, and we declare: L'SHANA HABA'A BIRUSHALYIM.

Our haftara does not, at first glance, reflect the joy of redemption. In fact, much of the selection is filled with Malachi's criticism of the nation, including a litany of their sins and misdeeds over the years. It would appear that only the final psukim, with their mention of the arrival of Eliya(hu) HaNavi, make a direct connection to the future for which we yearn.

I believe, however, that one verse in the middle of our haftara reflects a crucial pre-Pesach message that reverberated over the years to our oppressed nation and speaks to us today as well. KI ANI HASHEM - LO SHANITI - "For I, Hashem, have not

changed", I am as I was; I am still the Righteous Judge Who demands obedience and One who will punish the evildoers. And yet, V'ATEM B'NEI YA'AKOV LO CHILITEM, - "You, descendants of Yaakov, have not perished", despite the sins the navi detailed, despite your failure to live up to standards set by the Torah and despite that you have been punished by G-d for those misdeeds... you are still here. The eternity of G-d and the eternity of Israel remain.

Years ago, when Jews sat down to their Seder reeling from edicts, attacks and murders, they had little to celebrate and little reason to believe in a future redemption. And so, on Shabbat HaGadol they read these words of Malachi. You have sinned, Hashem does punish and yet... you're still here. Your GEULA is guaranteed as is your national survival. So we remember our suffering in Egypt and beyond but we can still cry out: L'SHANA HABA'A BIRUSHALYIM. Not as a prayer nor as a dream, but as a confident proclamation.

Next year we WILL be in Yerushalayim, a rebuilt and renewed Yerushalayim. ✨

NO NEW PARSHAPIX

THIS WEEK

לע"נ
הרב יעקב צבי ב"ר דוד אריה
ז"ל
Rabbi Jonathan Sacks z"l

Is there such a thing as Lashon HaTov?

M'tzora

The Sages understood tsara'at, the theme of this week's parsha, not as an illness but as a miraculous public exposure of the sin of lashon hara, speaking badly about people. Judaism is a sustained meditation on the power of words to heal or harm, mend or destroy. Just as God created the world with words, He empowered us to create, and destroy, relationships with words.

The rabbis said much about LASHON HARA, but virtually nothing about the corollary, LASHON HATOV, "good speech". The phrase does not appear in either the Babylonian Talmud or the Talmud Yerushalmi. It figures only in two midrashic passages (where it refers to praising God). But LASHON HARA does not mean speaking badly about God. It means speaking badly about human beings. If it is a sin to speak badly about people, is it a mitzva to speak well about them? My argument will be that it is, and to show this, let us take a journey through the sources.

In Mishna Avot we read the following:

Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai had five (pre-eminent) disciples, namely Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus, Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananya, Rabbi Yosi HaKohen, Rabbi Shimon ben Netanel, and Rabbi Elazar ben Arach.

He used to recount their praise: Eliezer ben Hyrcanus: a plastered well that never loses a drop. Yehoshua ben Chananya: happy the one who gave him birth. Yosi HaKohen: a pious man. Shimon ben Netanel: a man who fears sin. Elazar ben Arach: an ever-flowing spring (Pirkei Avot 2:10-11).

However, the practice of Rabban Yochanan in praising his disciples seems to stand in contradiction to a Talmudic principle:

Rav Dimi, brother of Rav Safra said: Let no one ever talk in praise of his neighbour, for praise will lead to criticism (Arachin 16a).

Rashi gives two explanations of this statement. Having delivered excessive praise [YOTER MIDAI], the speaker himself will come to qualify his remarks, admitting for the sake of balance that the person of whom he speaks also has faults. Alternatively, others will point out his faults in response to the praise. For Rashi, the crucial consideration is, is the praise judicious, accurate, true, or it is overstated? If the former, it is permitted; if

the latter, it is forbidden. Evidently Rabban Yochanan was careful not to exaggerate.

Rambam, however, sees matters differently. He writes: "Whoever speaks well about his neighbour in the presence of his enemies is guilty of a secondary form of evil speech [AVAK LASHON HARA], since he will provoke them to speak badly about him" (Hilchot De'ot 7:4). According to the Rambam the issue is not whether the praise is moderate or excessive, but the context in which it is delivered. If it is done in the presence of friends of the person about whom you are speaking, it is permitted. It is forbidden only when you are among his enemies and detractors. Praise then becomes a provocation, with bad consequences.

Are these merely two opinions, or is there something deeper at stake? There is a famous passage in the Talmud which discusses how one should sing the praises of a bride at her wedding:

Our Rabbis taught: How should you dance before the bride [i.e. what should one sing]?

The disciples of Hillel hold that at a wedding you should sing that the bride is beautiful, whether she is or not. Shammai's disciples disagree. Whatever the occasion, don't tell a lie. "Do you call that a lie?" Hillel's disciples

respond. "In the eyes of the groom at least, the bride is beautiful."

What's really at stake here is not just temperament - puritanical Shammai-ites versus good-natured Hillel-ites - but two views about the nature of language. The Shammai-ites think of language as a way of making statements, which are either true or false. The Hillel-ites understand that language is about more than making statements. We can use language to encourage, empathise, motivate, and inspire. Or we can use it to discourage, disparage, criticise, and depress. Language does more than convey information. It conveys emotion. It creates or disrupts a mood. The sensitive use of speech involves social and emotional intelligence. Language, in J. L. Austin's famous account, can be performative as well as informative.

The discourse between the disciples of Hillel and Shammai is similar to the argument between Rambam and Rashi. For Rashi, as for Shammai, the key question about praise is: is it true, or is it excessive? For Rambam as for Hillel, the question is: what is the context? Is it being said among enemies or friends? Will it create warmth and esteem or envy and resentment?

We can go one further, for the disagreement between Rashi and Rambam about praise may be related to a more fundamental disagreement

about the nature of the command, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself" (Vayikra 19:18). Rashi interprets the command to mean: do not do to your neighbour what you would not wish him to do to you (Rashi to Sanhedrin 84b). Rambam, however, says that the command includes the duty "to speak in his praise" (Hilchot De'ot 6:3). Rashi evidently sees praise of one's neighbour as optional, while Rambam sees it as falling within the command of love.

We can now answer a question we should have asked at the outset about the Mishna in Avot that speaks of Yochanan ben Zakkai's disciples. Avot is about ethics, not about history or biography. Why then does it tell us that Rabban Yochanan had disciples? That, surely, is a fact not a value, a piece of information not a guide to how to live.

However, we can now see that the Mishna is telling us something profound indeed. The very first statement in Avot includes the principle: "Raise up many disciples." But how do you create disciples? How do you inspire people to become what they could become, to reach the full measure of their potential? Answer: By acting as did Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai when he praised his students, showing them their specific strengths.

He did not flatter them. He guided

them to see their distinctive talents. Eliezer ben Hyrcanus, the "well that never loses a drop", was not creative but he had a remarkable memory - not unimportant in the days before the Oral Torah was written in books. Elazar ben Arach, the "ever-flowing spring", was creative, but needed to be fed by mountain waters (years later he separated from his colleagues and it is said that he forgot all he had learned).

Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai took a Hillel-Rambam view of praise. He used it not so much to describe as to motivate. And that is LASHON HATOV. Evil speech diminishes us, good speech helps us grow. Evil speech puts people down, good speech lifts them up. Focused, targeted praise, informed by considered judgment of individual strengths, and sustained by faith in people and their potentiality, is what makes teachers great and their disciples greater than they would otherwise have been. That is what we learn from Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai.

So there is such a thing as LASHON HATOV. According to Rambam it falls within the command of "Love your neighbour as yourself." According to Avot it is one way of "raising up many disciples". It is as creative as LASHON HARA is destructive.

Seeing the good in people and telling them so, is a way of helping it become

real, becoming a midwife to their personal growth. If so, then not only must we praise God. We must praise people too.

Around the Shabbat Table:

- (1) Where else in the Tanach do we see biblical figures using LASHON HATOV to lift each other up?
- (2) How impactful are the words that people have said to you? Have they shaped your choices in a positive way?
- (3) What is something genuine you can say to someone close to you, to help lift them up?

Y'HI ZICHRO BARUCH

Message from the Parsha

Rabbi Katriel (Kenneth) Brander

The Paradox of the Pesach Symbols: The Jewish Dance for Eternity

In honor of my father Rabbi Aaron Brander - haRav Aharon ben Basia & Tuvia - Who has been my role model and exemplified the ideals in this Dvar Torah. May he have a refu'ah sh'leimah.

In just a matter of days, we will all sit at the festive Seder table, in

commemoration and celebration of the foundational story of our people. We will read the Haggada, our guidebook through the evening, as we tell our story with the help of the various symbolic foods that grace the Seder table.

And yet, this year the joy of the holiday is colored with grief, sorrow and anxiety. There are so many empty chairs at so many Seders - some for reservists back on the frontlines, some for the remaining hostages, some for those who remain in hospital for their injuries or in hotels as their displacement continues, and yet more for all whose lives have been taken from us on and since October 7th. The weight grew even heavier on Saturday night, as Iranian cruise missiles and drones rained down on our cities, striking fear into the hearts of Israelis across the country. This latest escalation in Iran's campaign to destroy our nation threatens our very existence and instills even greater anguish in the minds of our already overburdened children. How are we meant to focus on the festival's messages of freedom, peoplehood and redemption in the face of the overwhelmingly tragic and terrifying events of the last seven months?

Perhaps the answer lies in the duality of the Seder's narrative and of its symbols themselves.

The Mishna in Masechet Pesachim (10:4) presents the framing through which we are commanded to read the Exodus narrative: MATCHIL BIGNUT, UMISAYEIM B'SHEVACH, 'opening with shame and servitude, and ending with praise.' In order to fulfill the mitzva of SIPUR Y'TZI'AT MITZRAYIM, of telling the story of our release from bondage in Egypt, we must begin our retelling by recounting the servitude itself, and only then make our way towards redemption.

This framing, making space for both the servitude and the redemption, plays out in the symbolic items on the Seder table as well. The Matza we eat is presented twice in Maggid - first in HA LACHMA ANYA, seeing in the Matza the bread of affliction eaten while our ancestors were enslaved in Egypt, and then again at the closing of the Maggid section, where the Matza celebrates redemption, reminding us of the hurried departure from Egypt, which left the Jews with no time to allow their dough to rise.

The same goes for the Maror, the bitter herbs. The Mishna (Pesachim 10:5), cited in the Haggada, attributes the Maror to the bitterness of slavery (Sh'mot 1:14). Yet Rav Chaim ibn Attar, in his masterful commentary Or HaChayim (Sh'mot 12:8), sees Maror as a way to accentuate the taste of the Korban Pesach eaten with it. Even the

Maror has a dual purpose, focusing on both dimensions of Pesach: the enslavement and the redemption.

So, too, for the four cups of wine. On the one hand, they are traditionally associated with the four redemptions from Egypt (Sh'mot 6:6-7; Yerushalmi Pesachim 10:1). On the other hand, the Shulchan Arukh (Orach Chayim 472:11) notes a preference for red wine for it recalls the blood of the Jewish children spilled by Pharaoh as he had them cast into the Nile.

Even the sweet Charoset, according to Gemara Pesachim (116a) holds within it a duality of meaning, directing our memory both to the fragrant apple orchards in which Jewish women would secretly birth their children, as well as to the thick mortar the Jewish slaves would prepare and use during their backbreaking labor.

Each one of these symbols has two layers of meaning, one of G'NUT/AVDUT (denigration and slavery) and one of SHEVACH/GEULA (praise and redemption). Yet unlike the telling of the story, which follows a clear chronological trajectory, the symbols on our Seder table are denied the luxury of beginning with sadness and journeying into joy. On the contrary, our Matza, Maror, wine, and Charoset are left to hold the whole story together - simultaneously the tragedy and the relief, all the pain and all the

healing, all the grief and all the hope - in a single instant.

This intermixing of suffering and redemption speaks to us so clearly this year. We will celebrate our People, our State, and our bright future, without losing sight of all that remains broken, the empty chairs, the unbearable sacrifices, and the ongoing challenges facing our people. We will bring all this grief with us into Pesach this year, as we reminisce about marching out of Egypt and dream ahead to our ultimate redemption.

These feelings are not in opposition to one another, but complementary - the story of our people, throughout history and in this moment, holds within it both of these poles. We are both a redeemed people and a people in a state of challenge, with both Eliyahu HaNavi and the angel of destruction simultaneously knocking on our door on Seder night. For this is the Jewish dance towards eternity.

Our challenge for this Pesach is not to lose sight of either, making space for both our heartbreak and our hope, praying that it won't be long before we 'sing a new song upon our salvation, and upon the redemption of our souls.' (Haggada)

Walk through the Parsha

with **Rabbi David Walk**



MY STORY

Pesach

OMG hosting a Seder is a big job! The cleaning, and the cooking, and the set up are just an enormous amount of work. And then there are the more subtle arrangements: Making sure Uncle Irv never has to confront Aunt Sadie. It's just a massive undertaking. Thank God as an aging Baby Boomer (quickly approaching Bust!), I'm now just a guest. But there's one job which one can never avoid: Portraying this ancient account as my personal narrative.

In the Haggada, as we are ending the main section, called MAGID (the retelling of the tale), the ancient authors of the Haggada wrote: In each and every generation, every individual is obligated to see himself as if he personally left Egypt, as it is stated (Sh'mot 13:8); "And you shall explain to your child on that day: For the sake of this, did HaShem 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.

So, that's Job #1: Relate the story as a first person narrative! Because as we

already said in AVADIM HAYINU (We were slaves): 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] still be enslaved to Pharaoh in Egypt.

In other words, we are the direct beneficiaries of the Exodus miracles. As a result, please, have the decency to thank God for this benefit.

I believe strongly that this Haggada process is a direct extension of the Mitzva of V'SHINANTAM L'VANECHA ('you shall diligently teach your child'). This pedagogic requirement extends to spiritual experiences as well as formal education. For example, Rav Soloveitchik emphasizes that our ability to pray to God is a result of the efforts of our forebears: From generation to generation one praises Your deeds (T'hilim 145:5). The Rav maintained that we only know how to daven because we witnessed the efforts of the previous generation.

So, too, the Seder requires the older generation to inform and inspire the younger generations. I feel this responsibility very keenly because, please, God, I will have almost 30 direct descendants at this year's Seder.

How do we fulfill this awesome responsibility? Get personal. My advice: Relate an incident in your life

when you felt the relief of escape from peril. It could be a personal event; an accident or an operation. But I also try to think of moments when we as a people felt this sense of 'Wow, it's over!' I think of June 6, 1967, when we breathed a collective sigh of relief that the Israel Air Force had basically won the Six Day War in the first few minutes the previous day, but we only found out the next morning.

I also think of March 1, 1991; Purim, when the first Gulf War ended and we ran through the streets with the plastic sheets which had encased our secure rooms for the previous month and a half.

Push those buttons hard! Try to find just a few minutes to get personal and emotional about events in your own life when you felt HASHGACHA, Divine supervision. The goal is for your progeny to be able to declare with sincerity and feeling the famous line from the Song of the Sea: This my God and I will glorify (perhaps 'enshrine' or 'emulate') Him; the God of my PARENT, and I will exalt Him (Sh'mot 15:2). It's no coincidence that this poem is recited at the end of Pesach. During the holiday, we must get our kids to buy into our religious commitment.

Begin Pesach by teaching your child; so that Pesach can end with your child acknowledging your spiritual guidance.

That's the syllabus, the lesson plan.

Now we can use this idea to understand a minor problem in the text of the Haggada. Just before we declare the obligation of everyone to feel that we are actually experiencing the GEULAH (redemption) through the agency of the parents personalizing the account, we have the famous statement of Rabban Gamliel: Anyone who has not said these three things on Pesach has not fulfilled his obligation, and these are them: the Pesach sacrifice, Matza and Maror.

The fly in the ointment is that the recitation of the three symbols is out of order. Throughout the Seder we've been following the advice of Chazal: Begin with the G'NUT (negative) and finish with the SHEVACH (positive, perhaps 'praiseworthy', Mishna Pesachim 10:4). But Rabban Gamliel reverses the order and ends with the negative or 'the downer'. What's going on?

Here's my take: During the recitation of the story, we follow the rule of 'begin low; end high'. We've finished the story relating section of the Seder. We've entered a new phase of the Seder experience: It's time to internalize the story.

When we look at the redemption from Egypt story, we begin with the horrible bondage (G'NUT) and end with the glorious redemption (SHEVACH), but

now we're telling our story which is a pre-redemption tale. We're still waiting for the GEULA SHLEIMA, complete and final redemption. The MAROR must come last; we still have bitterness in our lives and, therefore, on our palate.

Until the advent of the Mashiach (speedily in our days, please), we continue to experience the pains of this world. We really feel it this year. We are living through, probably, the worst period since the Holocaust. We've got that Maror on our palate. But it will be sweet when that GEULA arrives. Please, please, soon! CHAG SAMEI'ACH! 🙏

Rav Kook Torah



by Rabbi

Chanan Morrison • www.ravkooktorah.com

The Power of Speech

Only in Israel

What is the root cause of the disease of tzara'at as described in the Torah? The Midrash explains that this skin disease is a punishment for gossip and slander. A person suffering from tzara'at is called a m'tzora because he is MOTZI SHEIM RA – he spreads derogatory reports (Vayikra Rabba 16:1. See Rambam, Laws of Tzara'at 16:15, that one fulfills the mitzva “Be careful

regarding tzara'at" [D'varim 24:8-9] by avoiding gossip).

Given that tzara'at is brought about by slander, one would expect that all peoples would be afflicted, since even non-Jews are culpable for personal damages. Yet, Rambam wrote that tzara'at is not a natural phenomenon, but a unique sign found only among the people of Israel. Why should only the Jewish people suffer from this ailment?

Divine Speech

There are two types of speech. There is everyday speech, based on - and limited to - that which occurs in the physical universe. And there is a higher form of speech, a holy speech that God bestowed upon Israel. This elevated speech does not originate from the physical world. On the contrary, the world originates from it. This is the speech through which God created the world. "Through the word of God, the heavens were made; and through the breath of His mouth, all of their hosts" (T'hilim 33:6).

God granted us the power of His speech, the speech that preceded the world, when He gave us the Torah, the blueprint of Creation. "He looked in the Torah and created the universe" (Zohar T'ruma 161b). The transmission of Divine speech to the Jewish people is alluded to in the verse: "I put my

speech in your mouth... to plant the heavens and lay the foundations of the earth" (Yeshayahu 51:16).

Redemption of Speech

The Kabbalists explained that the Hebrew name for Passover, Pesach, is a combination of the words PEH SACH – "the mouth speaks". The redemption from Egypt, which paved the way for the Torah's revelation at Sinai, also redeemed the faculty of speech. For this reason, Pesach is commemorated with a mitzva of speech, the mitzva to retell the story of the Exodus. And we find that Moshe, aware of this aspect of the redemption from Egypt, tried to disqualify himself by protesting, "I am not a man of speech" (Sh'mot 4:10).

In an essay entitled "The Redemption of Speech," Rav Kook wrote:

"Sometimes we can sense the connection between our speech and the universe. This is the initial step to redeem speech from its exile.

"As the soul is elevated, we become acutely aware of the tremendous power that lies in our faculty of speech. We recognize clearly the tremendous significance of each utterance; the value of our prayers and blessings, the value of our Torah study and of all of our discourse. We learn to perceive the overall impact of speech. We sense the change and great stirring of the world that comes about

through speech.” (Orot HaKodesh vol. III, p. 285)

Two Mouths

The most striking expression of the difference between these two levels of speech is the remarkable statement of Rabbi Shimon Bar-Yochai:

“Had I been present at Mount Sinai, I would have requested that God create us with two mouths: one mouth to speak in words of Torah, and one mouth for all of our worldly needs” (Yerushalmi, B'rachot 1:2).

We may lack a mouth dedicated exclusively to Torah and prayer, but we can still deepen our awareness of the extraordinary nature of holy speech. At the start of the morning prayers, we recite a wonderful formula as we prepare our KAVANA (mental state): “I hereby ready my mouth to thank and praise my Creator.” With this short declaration, we ready ourselves to employ our mouths for a totally different form of speech. We prepare ourselves to employ the sublime speech that is rooted in the source of Divine wisdom. Since this discourse comes from the elevated speech which was used to create the universe, our prayers have the ability to influence the world and change its course (Olat Re'iyah vol. I, p. 192).

With this appreciation for the power of holy speech, we may understand why

tzara'at only afflicts the Jewish people. Our faculty of elevated speech, based on the Divine speech which transcends the universe, can influence the world for good and for bad. When we misuse this great power, we damage the world and are held responsible. The affliction of tzara'at, and the process of purifying oneself from it, comes to repair this wrong. The verbal communication of other nations, however, comes from the realm of the physical universe. Since it lacks the power of elevated speech, they are not punished for its misuse.

Sapphire from the Land of Israel.

Adapted from Mo'adei HaRe'iyah, pp. 295-296.

Parsha Story

Stories and Parables from
the famed Maggid of Dubno
by Rabbi Chanan Morrison

The Sick Forester

M'tzora

Jack was a simple forester, living alone in a primitive hut in a large forest.

One day Jack woke up with a raging fever. He was in a desperate situation. He was too weak and dizzy to move out of his bed, and there was no one in the area who could hear his cries for help.

Fortunately, a hunter happened to

pass near the hut and heard Jack's cries. The hunter entered the hut and realized that Jack was in a bad way.

"I am not a doctor and cannot treat you", the hunter told him. "But I can take you to the nearest village. There people will see you and do the best they can to treat you."

Bringing out the Evil

Tzara'at is a wake-up call. It is meant to uncover spiritual illness within a person. The word M'TZORA comes from the words MOTZI RA -- this disease "brings out the evil". When an unusual discoloration appears on a one's skin, the person is made aware of his illness and will seek out a kohen to be treated. The process of purification is a lesson in t'shuva and spiritual repair.

Tzara'at works like the hunter in the parable, who brought the sick man out of the forest (where he was hidden) to the town, where others will notice him and treat him. Were it not for tzara'at, people would not be aware of their moral and spiritual failings.

The Midrash notes that it is the kohen who sees the metzora and diagnoses his condition. But in the future, God Himself will purify us, as it says, "I will sprinkle clean water over you and you will be purified" (Yechezkel 36:25). God will purify us, giving us a new heart and a new spirit, and elevate us to a totally

new spiritual level.

Adapted from Mishlei Yaakov, pp. 225-226

Rabbi Ephraim Sprecher

Eliyahu HaNavi - A Peace Activist?

In the special Haftara for Shabbat HaGadol, we are told, that Eliyahu's task is to "turn the hearts of the parents to their children, and the hearts of the children to their parents" (Malachi 3:24). Rashi explains that the "parents" in this verse refers to G-D, and the "children" to the Jewish People. Eliyahu is appointed to restore our relationship with G-D. He will be the ultimate outreach worker, bringing all Jews back to their Father in Heaven.

Eliyahu repeatedly complained to G-D that he was the only faithful Jew left, because everyone else had "forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets" (Melachim Alef 19). The midrash states that these verses are a reply to a specific question from G-D. "Why are you protesting my honor?" G-D asked Eliyahu. "Whose altars are they breaking, yours or Mine? And whose prophets are they killing, yours or Mine?" (Shir HaShirim Raba). G-D was not pleased about Eliyahu's complaints against the Jewish People.

In the final words of the last of the prophets (Malachi), we are taught that Eliyahu, who doubted our faithfulness, will restore our relationship with G-D. Rashi tells us that this time, instead of rebuking us, Eliyahu will fortify our relationship with G-D based on love. This matches Rashi's comment on the Sh'ma, where he explains that while fear and coercion may force people to act faithfully for a short time, only love can inspire an enduring relation with G-D.

This idea was powerfully expressed in a story about the Baal Shem Tov. A man once came to the Baal Shem Tov and complained, "My son is not observant and he rejects our faith", the man cried. The Baal Shem Tov replied, "Then you must love him more." The man returned a few months later, complaining that he had seen no improvement in his son's behavior. The Baal Shem Tov's response was decisive, "Then you must love him even more", he said.

This need for loving relationships is found in the Mishna, which takes the words of our verse literally. The Mishna explains that when the Prophet says that Eliyahu will settle disputes between parents and children, this means that he will settle disputes among all Jews and make peace in the world (Eduyot 8). In fact, these interpretations are closely related, for

we can't have a close relationship with G-D if we are fighting among ourselves. Eliyahu's mission is to be a Peace Activist. Only love and peace can restore our relationship to G-D, our family and all Jews. On the Seder night, Eliyahu HaNavi visits every Jewish home. The symbolism is very powerful. G-D's prophet does not just visit the rich, the famous, the scholars and the Tzadikim. Eliyahu comes to every Seder, caring about each and every Jew.

The Radak states that the children and parents will unite in rebuilding their relationship to G-D. As we sit around the Seder table, asking questions and sharing knowledge, we strengthen our families, friends, and reinforce our relationship with G-D. -**ESP**

CHIZUK & IDUD

*Divrei Torah from the weekly sedra
with a focus on living in Eretz Yisrael
Chizuk for Olim & Idud for not-yet-Olim*

by **Rabbi Yerachmiel Roness**
Ramat Shiloh, Beit Shemesh

M'tzora 2019 (edited)

In Vayikra 14:34 we read: "When you come to the Land of Canaan that I am giving you as an inheritance, and I will place a lesion of Tzara'at (affliction) on the house, in the Land of your inheritance."

Rashi, following the words of the Talmud (Horayot 11a) says that these are good tidings since the homeowner of a house afflicted with Tzara'at, could expect to find - while dismantling the walls of his home - gold which had been hidden in the walls by the original Canaanite owners. The Torah Temima explains that the source of this surprising contention is to be found in the Torah's usage of the phrase V'NATATI NEGA TZARA'AT, (literally I will grant or give), which regularly indicates a gift or a benefit received. This helps us understand how the rabbis derived their Peirush from the words of the verse, but it doesn't answer the additional question of why the plague of Tzara'at meted out as a punishment for slanderous speech should result in such a rewarding outcome. After all, if the affliction is seen as a form of Divine punishment, then why should it have such should have a silver, (or rather, a gold lining) attached to it?

I should like to concentrate on the explanation of the Kli Yakar who suggested that Tzara'at should be seen not so much a punishment as much as a wake-up call directed towards the unrepentant slanderer. If the call is promptly heeded one can even expect to be rewarded.

[The Kli Yakar, Rabbi Efrayim Ben Aharon (b. 1550), served as the Rabbi

of the city of Lvov, and later as the Chief Rabbi of Prague . When he was in his early fifties he fell deathly ill (as a result, the name Shlomo was added to his given name and he became Shlomo Efrayim) and vowed to compose a commentary to the Torah were he to regain his health. Approximately a year later he completed his commentary which became an instant classic.]

The Kli Yakar states that, in essence, the Tzara'at served as an early warning system. Thinking in relation to modern-day concepts, the Tzara'at could be viewed, in a certain sense, as a spiritual version, or parallel, to the NORAD (the North American Air Defense Command) early-warning system created in the fifties to warn of incoming missiles launched from Russia, or more recently the Israeli manufactured Iron-Dome system deployed near the Azza border. Before the devastating missile could land wreaking havoc, the early warning provided one with the ability to make last minute adjustments to lessen any harm. Here too, when a house was hit by Tzara'at, this served as a warning to its owner, that evil was to be found within it's confines. M'TZORA - MOTZI-RA. The Tzara'at revealed the problematic situation which could not be allowed to go on any longer: Rather than inviting and welcoming guests into the home, Bnei Habayit, the household had behaved in a stingy

manner (TZARUT AYIN), regarding their home as a private castle into which any "outsiders" were not granted entry. As a result of such conduct, the Almighty has decided to take them to task. The home was struck by a plague, as a first warning signal. If the initial warning did not lead to a change in the way things were being done, then the affliction would be intensified and would progress to the next level. If at first it was the walls of the home that had been affected, the next stage would bring the affliction closer to heart as a person's clothes would now show signs of Tzara'at HaBegeg. If this additional warning turned out to be insufficient, the next stage of the process would be to proceed to an even more intimately experienced signal, as the Tzara'at lesions took hold upon one's body. This is one of the reasons the Rambam tells us (Peirush HaMishnayot N'ga'im 12:5) that these various forms of Tzara'at were not natural physical illnesses but rather miraculous events.

This notion of a Divine signalling system which utilizes affliction with the intention that the events wake us from our spiritual slumber and galvanize us to take action is highly instructive in attempting to make sense of our national history over the past generation.

The CHIBAT TZION MOVEMENT - an important forerunner of the Zionist Organization - which was aimed at promoting the return of the Jewish people to Eretz Yisrael, was established in Russia following the pogroms of 1881-1882. The great suffering and affliction experienced during those years served as the impetus for this movement, which began the process of shifting our national consciousness back towards our ancestral homeland. [This idea in no way exonerates our enemies for their malicious behavior, and yet, nonetheless, a basic Jewish belief is that we view every event as a vehicle for our own self-improvement.]

Seeking to encourage Jews to settle in Eretz Yisrael, Rabbi Shmuel Mohiliver, and others, influenced Baron Edmond de Rothschild to purchase land for Jewish colonization, and encouraged courageous families to take the plunge and give it a try .

Rabbi Mohilever's message for the Jews of his time was: "Why do you remain aloof while our Land is being built? Come redeem the soil and build structures to reach up to the Heavens." Although a significant number of people heeded the initial call, the multitudes stayed away. The mass emigrations only occurred when many others were awoken as the signalling hit more strident and horrific

notes...

More than 125 years later, Rabbi Mohilever's words continue to resound in our ears - let us not stay away any longer... 🏠🔥

Shabbat HaGadol 2016

On Pesach night do we do so many different things in order to attract the children's attention and involve them in the Seder activities. We expectantly turn to the youngest of all participants, eagerly awaiting their shy and hesitant rendition of the four questions, of the MA NISHTANA. As regards to the older children, no Seder would be the same without the Afikoman "treasure hunt" (which for many will become ingrained as the peak memory of the Seder night for years to come...). How are we to understand this unusual focus on the younger generation? Surely, many reasons have been put forth, and yet I find the answer suggested by Rav Soloveitchik zt"l to carry unparalleled force. R. Soloveitchik highlights a unique capability which all children possess, one which we, the adults, have long forgotten. Children have a natural capability to relive a story, injecting themselves into the tale they hear and directly experiencing the events.

Whereas the adult perceives himself

as removed from historical experiences, at best commemorating past events as anniversaries of days gone by, children have the ability to immerse themselves into the ancient stories, and via their imagination breathe life into the dry words.

The Rambam writes that on the Seder night CHAYAV ADAM L'HAR'OT ET ATZMO, one is obligated to show, or present himself as one exiting Egypt. Amongst Yemenite Jewry many follow this directive by having the leader of the Seder put on a knapsack and take a walking stick in hand to show that he is literally prepared to leave Egypt. While the adult may view such behavior as frivolous play acting, for the children this is a way of stepping back into history, viewing the Exodus through the present tense. Perhaps the great emphasis we place on the children, stems from the fact that through the wondrous look we see in their eyes, we too, the adults can share in their magical journey through time.

Many Chasidic thinkers have discussed how the Jewish calendar assumes that there is a circular, repetitive, aspect to time. As Rabbi Moshe Bamberger writes in his work on "Hallel", we regard time: "Not in a linear fashion but in a circular one. Events around the Jewish calendar are analogous to train stations on a circular time track." On the Seder night our goal is not to "turn

the clock back" and return to an earlier era, but rather to tap into Geulat Mitzrayim taking place in the present.

This perspective can radically change the way we look at this night: If the entire process is reenacted on a yearly basis, then we realize that the stakes are exceedingly high. After all, although we tend to overlook it, we know that during the original Exodus millions of Jews were not included amongst the fortunate. As the Seder night arrives we must pause and candidly ask ourselves: Are we deserving to be counted amongst the CHAMUSHIM (one-fifth, or one in five-hundred) who leave, or will we be amongst those left behind?

Indeed, what was it that led so many of our brethren to choose to stay in Egypt? - In order to break away from past mistakes, we have to understand their causes.

Midrash T'hilim (107,114), as quoted by the Rosh Yeshiva of Kerem B'Yavneh teaches us that: "When Israel went out of Egypt, Hashem "took one nation from the midst of another nation", (D'varim 4:34) - Like a shepherd extracting the fetus from its mother's womb."

The Maharal (Gevurot Hashem, 3) writes that the point of the Midrash is to explain that at the time of the Exodus we were enslaved not only

physically but spiritually as well. We had become so intertwined with the Egyptian values and mores, so intermingled with the Egyptian way of life, that we were like a fetus residing within its mother's womb, woefully incapable of independent existence.

As we near the end of the Seder we will all proclaim: L'SHANA HABA'A BIRUSHALAYIM! - and yet we know that only a small proportion of Jews will actually board the "Jerusalem Express" and be here next year. Why is that? What inhibits Jews from leaving galut and being amongst the Chamushim who get up and come here?

Continuing the Maharal's line of thought, it seems that today too, many have become enslaved by the corporate mentality and by suburban values and culture - they too have been swallowed up by the West, viewing themselves like the embryo which cannot survive outside its mother's womb.

Shabbat HaGadol is a reminder that one can tear oneself away. It can be done. On Shabbat HaGadol we commemorate the heroic actions of our ancestors who daringly captured and slayed the Egyptian deity, reclaiming thereby our own cultural independence.

Once every year as we chant L'SHANA

HABA'A BIRUSHALAYIM, the Jerusalem Express prepares to leave the station. As the conductor begins to chant: "All aboard, all aboard last call for Jerusalem!" - take one long look into your childrens' wide open starry eyes, and I'm sure you will muster the courage to hop aboard! 🚂👉

These weekly words of Torah wisdom can be found in my recently published book "Eretz Yisrael and Aliyah in the weekly Parsha". It can be ordered by calling 052-336-0553 or by ordering it on Amazon



by Rabbi Dr Raymond Apple z"l

HAPPY OR SAD ON SEDER NIGHT?

Rabbi Irving (Yitz) Greenberg once pointed out that we face a dilemma on Seder night.

Seder is a moment of memory, but which memory are we talking about - happy or sad?

The Haggada tells us to imagine that we are the Hebrews of the Exodus, but what memory is uppermost in our minds - the bondage or the freedom?

There are two possibilities.

We can think back to the hard times

when we had no independence, no time to call our own, and had to jump to the command of our taskmasters.

Alternatively, we can think of the liberation, when the metaphorical chains were gone.

Greenberg says that every generation must decide for itself which memory to emphasise.

If we focus on the past we remind ourselves what it was like to be powerless.

If we think of the present and future we are no longer powerless but we have a new problem, that of learning responsibility.

Neither memory is easy. The thought of the past recalls our victimhood and suggests that we will always feel unsafe because of the resurgent masters of today: as the Haggada says, "In every generation they rise against us to eliminate us."

On the other hand. if we concentrate on the liberation we no longer need to be frightened ... but now we need to make sure that we can be responsible towards others and not make them afraid of us.

Why was the Slavery Necessary?

The Israelites in Egypt cried long and hard because of their pain.

God heard their cry and the people were eventually rescued, crossed the Red Sea, and settled in the Promised Land.

Had there been no bondage there would have been no redemption: had there been no redemption there wouldn't have been a Pesach. Without Pesach, we would have had no Seder, no matza, no four cups of wine.

We realise this, but we still ask: "Why was the bondage necessary? Did God really need us to suffer so much and to cry so long?"

It's the Holocaust question: Why did bad things happen to good people?

The superficial answer is that it tested our character, but shouldn't we say with "Fiddler on the Roof", "God, so we're the Chosen People - but can't You choose someone else for a change?!"

The answer is that we really don't know the answer, or at least not yet. Maybe that's one of the lingering questions that Eliyahu HaNavi will answer for us. In the meantime, as Rav Soloveitchik tells us, though we don't have an answer, we have to have a response.

We don't know why we suffer, but we have to have the courage to keep going, build a future and rise above the pain.

WHY HE IS WICKED

There are many explanations as to what makes the RASHA a "wicked" child.

Most focus on his words, "What does this service mean to you?"

People think he is mocking old-fashioned rituals that have long since lost their point.

What the interpreters often fail to recognise, however, is that the wicked child is not a hundred per cent wicked. When he mocks the traditional ritual, he is not necessarily saying that it never had a point. His view can be taken as saying, "I can see that it had meaning in the past, but surely we have outgrown such things".

He is also saying, "Some people can't manage without rituals, but aren't we more advanced intellectually these days, perfectly capable of handling ideas without tokens, totems and traditions?"

The Haggada's response is a verse that says the Pesach ritual was ordained by God, not just for the post-Exodus generation, but as a permanent feature of Judaism.

The implication? Not only is the ritual the word of God, but it answers a permanent need in human psychology, to have symbols of abstract concept

and not to imagine that man can live on ideas without analogies and active reminders. -OZ

Y'HI ZICHRO BARUCH

Sedra Highlight

- Dr Jacob Solomon

M'tzora

This is the law of tzaraat (loosely, but erroneously translated as leprosy) (14:57).

Remember what ... G-d did to Miriam, on your journey from Egypt (D'varim 24:9)

The Rabbis (Talmud Arachin 15b plus various Midrashic sources) imply that tzaraat, the main subject of both Tazri'a and M'tzora, is not just a physical disease, but the physical symptoms of something spiritually wrong with the offender. It is a condition that tells the afflicted that he must change his behavior. Tzaraat is not only a symptom of the sin of slander (as in case of Miriam, who spoke adversely against Moshe, Bamidbar 12:1), but also of haughtiness (as with Naaman, Melachim Bet 5), bloodshed, false oaths, sexual immorality, robbery, and selfishness. G-d rebukes this anti-social behavior by temporarily removing the offender from society, through imposing the laws of tzaraat.

It is clear that all the above concern bad conduct between people. They are not specific to the Israelite nation, but such behaviors are despised by right-thinking people in any civilized society. However, that common factor may be sharpened a little in the following way.

Few things are achieved by one person only. Education, medical treatment, transport systems, manufacturing, and balanced utilization of natural resources all require collaboration between individuals and organizations. People have to trust one another for that to work. They have to know that their confidences will be respected. For example, a young man with a personal problem needs the confidence in a spiritual mentor that his or her tongue will not wag, with sharp adverse effect on marriage and employment prospects (especially when justifying the breach of confidence with a twisted interpretation of the holy sources in the ego-expansive selfish gossip's favor, and adding insult to injury by saying that it is all for the victim's benefit). Otherwise, lacking a mentor he can trust, he will keep the issue to himself and often with disastrous consequences. And commercially, if a person produces something worthwhile: whether a book, or a method of hardening plastics to substitute for steel, he needs the

confidence that he can develop his product without the patent being stolen and shamelessly incorporated into someone else's manufacturing schedule. Or that (most commonly) she will not be targeted for sexual favors as currency to ensure advancement in the business. Or that society will not tolerate perjury in business for gain, whose spirit can include grossly misleading advertising. Indeed there are many situations on record where business rivals have been 'put out of the way' by rivals in a 'terminal' manner.

We add another dimension. People need the warm support of other's speech. This can be supported korban metzora, whereby on recovery, he brings two birds as an offering, one slaughtered and the other set free. Rashi observes that birds chatter, and (ironically) twitter. R. Shlomo Ganzfried (the author of the Kitzur Shulchan Aruch) suggests that the bird that was slaughtered represents gossip and evil speech, and the one that was set free represents good speech.* There is plenty of room for good speech in many situation including in promoting trust when working and doing things together: a please and a thank you, a genuinely friendly remark in the right place and the right moment...

That is a hidden, reverse side, proactive, message of tzaraat - namely that the Holy Nation is charged with setting the world standard in matters that promote the trust for people worldwide to maximize the social and economic benefits from trust in one another. It is that challenge that the Jews of today must face at a greater level...

I am indebted to R. Jeff Beinenfeld for bringing this explanation to my notice. 🌿📖

The Daily Portion - Sivan Rahav Meir

Righteous Women and Redemption: Then and Now

Translation by Yehoshua Siskin

Rachel Goldberg-Polin, the mother of Hershele, who was taken hostage, was chosen this week by Time Magazine as one of the 100 most influential people in the world. I have personally felt this to be true for a long time. She influences me enormously and I quote her regularly in my lectures.

In Israel she is less well-known, but outside of Israel - wow. Rachel spoke at the United Nations and with Biden and at a rally in Washington DC, where 300,000 gathered in support of Israel.

She is interviewed non-stop, appears on podcasts, and is invited to many different events abroad, for English speakers.

When we met, she showed me a video on her cell phone that she had received that morning. It showed girls in Chicago giving tzedaka for “Hersh ben Chana Pearl” (Rachel’s Hebrew name). “This gave me the strength to get out of bed this morning”, she said. Girls, coins for tzedaka, Chicago, Hersh. She got up and marked on her lapel the number of days of his captivity, as is her custom each morning, and went out to meet another day.

Rachel relates how as a young woman she chose to return to her heritage, became religious and made Aliyah. She appeals to the world’s sense of justice and morality and to our own Jewish values, awakening hidden sparks of our identity. When she shouts “Bring them home now”, she is not only speaking of the hostages but of all the distant members of our nation in the Diaspora who hear her and are reminded of who they are and are thus inspired to return home.

On the eve of Pesach, the Festival of Freedom, we recall our sages’ dictum that “In the merit of righteous women we were redeemed from Egypt.” The women in that generation knew how to keep their faith in the midst of hardship and to demand a better life. In the

merit of such righteous women, we too will be redeemed.

To receive Sivan Rahav-Meir's daily WhatsApp: tiny.cc/DailyPortion

Dvar Torah by **Rabbi Chanoch Yeres**

to his community at

Beit Knesset Beit Yisrael, Yemin Moshe
Graciously shared with PhiloTorah

The SEDER

This coming week, we will all be celebrating the Holiday of Pesach, with G-d's help. We will be sitting around the table beginning the Seder Pesach with family and friends.

The S'fat Emet (Rabbi Yehuda Aryeh Leib Alter - The Admor from Gur 1847-1905) asks why is the ceremony on the first night of Pesach called "The Seder"?

Is it simply, perhaps because the "order" of the evening is detailed before us, so it is called "Seder"?

The S'fat Emet suggests a deeper meaning to the title of the ritual "Seder". The Pesach Seder allows us to analyze the Divine events which took place then, at the Exodus from Egypt, in the correct outlook. Since the Exodus transpired so quickly and all at once, it did not allow ample time to fully appreciate the course of events. The Seder night gives us the opportunity to reconstruct the sequence of


events to understand them slowly and thoughtfully in an orderly fashion.

With this, we can discern the true nature of the miracles that took place and the overall Divine intervention. This is the true meaning behind the need for the "Seder".

There is a hint of "Order" further back in the Torah. In Parshat B'reishit, we read of the Creation. We are taught that not only G-d created the world, but we are given a detailed account of what was created on each of the six days of Creation.

Wouldn't it be enough just to transcribe that G-d created the world without the need for such details?

We are taught, therefore, to emulate G-d, our Creator, and His ways. By its detailed description, we are prescribed to work and create in a patient and methodical fashion and not all at once, just as the Torah described the Six Days of Creation, each day on its own. This is "The Seder", to know that everything has its appropriate order and sequence.

Therefore, on the night of Pesach, we recreate ourselves with our "Seder" as with the original Divine Plan of "Seder" allowing us to reach the level of Adam HaRishon, Original Man before he sinned. Thus, the special uniqueness of our Pesach Seder taking us back to beginning of Creation. 

The Weekly 'Hi All' by Rabbi Jeff Bienenfeld

[M'tzora - Shabbat HaGadol 5782](#)

Hi All,

M'tzora - Torah & Lashon Hara

The Talmud (Eirchin 15b) tells us that Talmud Torah is the corrective (the TIKUN) for the sin of LASHON HARA - negative speech. How are we to understand how the sin of lashon hara is neutralized by Torah?

At the conclusion of the Amida, we recite the well-known prayer composed by the Amora, Rav. It begins with our plea to Gd to help guard our tongue (i.e., our speech) from evil (talk). A few sentences later, we petition for something else. We pray, "Open our hearts to your Torah." The obvious question is: what does it mean to request that HaShem "open our hearts..." Wouldn't it make more sense to beseech Gd for Torah knowledge to help us to deal with this mitzva observance?

Perhaps the answer is that it is precisely the plea to open our hearts - not our minds - to Torah that enables us to fortify ourselves from speaking lashon hara. A person can be a brilliant Torah scholar and yet - tragically - be a vulgar, arrogant, insensitive person. How can that be? Simple. Their vast Torah knowledge remained on the

"surface" of their personalities. It never sunk into their hearts. It was never absorbed into their being; it never integrated into their persona. As such, their Torah was not at all transformative. Their characters remained coarse, foul and plainly nasty. A sad Chilul HaShem!

This is why we beg HaShem to open our hearts to His Torah. It's not at all easy to allow the Torah to sink into our core and transform us. Many would rather keep the wisdom of the Torah at arm's length and avoid implementing its practical imperatives into our lives. But once we allow the Torah to enter our hearts, it generates a religious awareness that expands out and becomes the permanent backdrop, inspiring proper religious and ethical behavior in all our affairs.

And so, before we finished our Amida and begin our day, we turned to HaShem to help us resist the lashon hara temptation. Hopefully, our hearts, now infused with His Torah, can provide the necessary firewall to succeed in that task.

M'tzora - Waiting for the Good

In the Warsaw Ghetto, there lived and died a great rabbi, the Piacezna Rav (R. Kalonimus Kalman Shapira, HY"D). While suffering through the horrors of that dark time, he composed brief insights into the Torah. After the war,

his books were discovered and later printed.

The year was 1940; the place, the Warsaw Ghetto, and this was R. Shapiro's d'var Torah on the Parsha of M'tzora. When Israel entered its Land, the Midrash tells us (Rashi 14:34) that the People were required to take note of any NEGA (blemish) that might appear upon the walls of their homes and if, rendered impure, would have to be demolished. Now, although this appeared to be unwelcome news, the Midrash relates that the Amorites would hide their valuables in the walls of their homes. As such, what initially seemed disheartening would prove to be a great good.

The Piacenza Rav asked: if so, why was it necessary to wait seven days before breaking down the walls (14:38)? Why even wait for the nega to be identified; let's get to the treasures immediately? His answer - especially from one who had every reason to despair - is both uplifting and remarkable (my summary).

"When G-d beats us, it's all for the good. But when we see that the suffering is not only physical but spiritual as well (religious life had all but shut down in the ghetto), a bit of doubt enters. Could this also be for the good? Therefore, we are told in the Torah that there can be great impurity upon entering Israel. There will be

much destruction, and, yes, the good will come, but often we have to wait, often we have to live through the impurity even in its ugliest and vilest forms. But the end, there will be a treasure."

These words were spoken by someone who never did see the "treasure", but yet - even in that hell - he believed it would come.

Clearly, the takeaway from this insight is this: that all too often, in order for the good to come, we have to wait! Not to remain idle, but to fervently believe that all our efforts will one day be vindicated and rewarded in precious treasures. Hopefully, we will all merit to see it happen!

M'tzora - Positive Speech

Even with Pesach so close, we ought not to ignore the central message of these past two Parshiyot. As the Talmud tells us (Eirchin 16b), the skin condition of tzara'at was a consequence of speaking lashon hara (technically, speaking ill of someone even if true).

R. Shlomo Ganzfried, author of the Kitzur Shulchan Aruch, offers a fascinating insight as to why the purification of the M'TZORA (the afflicted individual) consisted of two birds, one to be sacrificed and the other to be set free. The bird was chosen because, as Rashi tells us

(14:4), "...LASHON HARA is an act of chattering. It was therefore necessary [that he offer] two birds which constantly chirp." If so, asks R. Ganzfried, why were two birds needed, one would surely have sufficed? And additionally, why was one sacrificed and the other left alive?

He answers by elaborating on the symbolism of the birds. By sacrificing the one, the rebuke was clear. While there are exceptions to the proscription against lashon hara, for the most part, such language is forbidden. The second bird, however, was to promote the importance of good speech. It was set free to remind us that it is not simply sufficient to avoid speaking ill of another, but we are also enjoined to find positive ways to use our speech. The sincere compliment, the "pleases" and "thank yous", the simple courtesies - these expressions from the "good tongue", can often make a "turning point" difference in a person's life. And even if the "good word" doesn't achieve such life-changing results, what can be wrong with expressing a nice and kind remark every now-and-then to cheer up an otherwise gloomy day for a friend, a relative, or just for any stranger?

R. Lord Jonathan Sacks z"tl, offers this additional insight. "It was from another wise woman that I learned another important lesson about praise. Stanford psychologist Carol Dweck, in

her book **Mindset**, argues that it makes a decisive difference whether we believe that our abilities are innate and determined once and for all (the "fixed" mindset), or that talent is something we achieve through time by effort, practice and persistence (the "growth" mindset). The former tends to be risk-averse, afraid that if they fail this will show that they are not as good as they were thought to be. The latter embraces risk because they take failure as a learning experience from which we grow. It follows that there is good praise and bad praise. Parents and teachers should not praise children in absolute terms: 'You are gifted, brilliant, a star.' They should praise effort: 'You tried hard; you gave of your best.' They should encourage a growth mindset, not a fixed one."

Good speech can also take the form of sincere encouragement, especially when someone is down and out. Rav Soloveitchik points out that notwithstanding the isolation of the m'tzora, the kohein was required to remain in contact with him throughout his ordeal. Why? The sin of lashon hara can ruin the life of another. Noxious speech can wreak terrible damage upon a person's reputation. Often the injury is irreparable. How is it possible for the m'tzora to rehabilitate himself? His self-esteem is shot; he is shunned by his community. Enter the kohein - even the Kohen Gadol himself - should

the m'tzora request it. The kohein, sensitively, with words of genuine encouragement, helps to restore the m'tzora's sense of dignity and self-worth.

The Zohar (Va'eira 68) tells us that during Israel's servitude in Egypt, "speech" was in exile. With the Exodus, "speech" was redeemed; there was PEH SACH, the mouth began to speak once again. Speech was exiled as punishment for the sin of lashon hara. Once the People understood the cause of their misery, they repented and, in that merit, they were delivered from their bondage.

Shabbat HaGadol - Pesach and T'shuva

This Shabbat is not called "great" because of Shabbat. Otherwise, it would have been called Shabbat HaGedola (in the feminine gender, modifying Shabbat). It is Shabbat HaGadol (masculine gender) because on this Shabbat, we read about a great and awesome day, a day that some will dread and others will rejoice in, but a day that, in any case, will surely come. To elaborate:

In Malachi - the source of our Haftara - we read in 3:19 that on that day, HaShem will remove, "the Sun from its sheath". In one instant - so that no one will attribute these events to happenstance - the Sun's intense heat will

devour the perpetrators of wickedness - the malicious sinners, while its inviting warmth will heal and grant salvation to the righteous and the just. In a word, the good will finally be vindicated, and evil - crushed and destroyed.

The Navi unmistakably lays out the choice before each of us. As we close in on redemption, we will each be challenged to identify with one of the above two groups? The great Eliyahu HaNavi will come (3:23) and urge everyone to repent and choose the right one. Incredibly, there will be many who will simply refuse to listen-up. In one of prophecy's most poignant and plaintive calls, G-d pleads, "Remember the Torah of Moshe, My Servant, the laws and statutes I commanded him at Chorev for all of Israel..." (3:22).

Most people do not associate Pesach with repentance. That's for Yom Kippur. Not so; for without the spiritual turnabout in Egypt, the Exodus would not have occurred. And had the Jews in the Purim story not repented - a t'shuva that took place in Nissan, on Pesach - Haman may have (chas v'shalom) succeeded in his nefarious plan. Indeed, redemption is serious business. And lest we forget it, the Haftara of Shabbat HaGadol comes to sober us up to its critical importance.

And so, at our Seder, when we pour that fifth cup and invite Eliyahu to join us, we need think deeply about whether we are truly deserving of the ultimate redemption we pray for at the Seder's conclusion. T'shuva, indeed, is very much a part of the Pesach experience. 🙌

Afterthoughts

- Yocheved Bienenfeld

PO'EIL G'VUROT #3

When it happens that people close to me, whether relatives or friends, are dealing with severe illness, it takes over my thoughts, especially when I'm davening.

And so, in this frame of mind, I find different meaning to words I've prayed many times before. This is what happened recently when I reached L'KEIL BARUCH N'IMOT YITEINU - To the blessed Gd they offer melodies. I understood it in a way that was different from the two other ways I had always understood it. I would usually see the phrase PO'EL G'VUROT as referring to Gd's overcoming either His MIDAT HADIN to show RACHAMIM or overcoming His MIDAT HARACHAMIM to show DIN, when that became necessary. But now, thinking of those who are sick, I realized that one of the G'VUROT of HaShem is healing the sick. This is clearly spelled out in the

second b'racha of the Amida, the one we refer to as G'VUROT. It lists there a number of His G'VUROT: granting parnasa, freeing captives, reviving the dead, as well as healing the sick - ROFEI CHOLIM.

Given this understanding of G'VUROT, the b'racha before the Sh'ma took on a different meaning for me. We praise and exalt Gd because He is PO'EL G'VUROT - He uses the G'VURA of healing the sick and, in that way, is OSEH CHADASHOT - He gives the sick a new lease on life. As BA'AL MILCHAMOT - He fights the disease; is ZOREI'A TZ'DAKOT - The Lord executes righteousness and justice for all who are oppressed (T'hilim 103:6) - actually uses His righteousness to be MATZMI'ACH Y'SHU'OT - to bring forth His salvation by BOREI R'FU'OT - having created the healing necessary, thus leading to NORA T'HILOT, One Whose praises are more than we can give because He is ADON HANIFLA'OT, Master of all wondrous things, even though they may be hidden from us.

It amazes me how many possible meanings Chazal put into the words of our davening. It only waits for us to discover them.

May we all be able to. ❀

Insights into Halacha

- Rabbi Yehuda Spitz

Ohr Somayach (yspitz@ohr.edu)

(PhiloTorah editor's notes in green)

Understanding Urchatz Comprehending Karpas

Have you ever wondered why, during the Pesach Seder, when we dip the Karpas in saltwater to symbolize our ancestor's tears while enslaved at the hands of the cruel Egyptians *(there are other reasons given for this)*, we precede it by washing our hands (URCHATZ)? Isn't handwashing exclusively reserved for prior to 'breaking bread'? And furthermore, why is this only performed at the Seder? Is there a specific message this action is meant to portray?

All About the Children

The answer to these questions might depend on a difference of understanding. The Gemara in Pesachim (114b) asks why at the Pesach Seder we perform two dippings, i.e. Karpas into saltwater and later the Maror into Charoset. The Gemara succinctly answers KI HEICHI D'LEHAVEI HEKEIRA L'TINOKOT, in order that there should a distinction for children'. Both Rashi and his grandson, the Rashbam, as well as the Rokeach, explain the Gemara's intent, that this

act is performed in order so that the children should ask why we are performing this unusual and uncommon action on Leil HaSeder, as this action serves as a HEKEIRA TOVA, an excellent distinction. This is one of the ways we ensure that the Seder Night's Mitzva of V'HIGADTA L'VINCHA, retelling the story of our ancestors' exile, enslavement, and ultimate redemption and Exodus from Egypt, is properly performed.

But a question remains. Which exact action is the one that is meant to evoke the children's questions? The answer may surprise you. The Bartenura and Tur specify that it is not the seemingly odd act of handwashing for vegetables that is peculiar, but rather the timing of the dipping. They assert that it is unusual to dip food items at the beginning of a seuda. Most other days we also dip, but in the middle of the meal. In other words, the only change we do to evoke children's questions is to perform the dipping right then.

What then of the seemingly atypical handwashing just for vegetables? Isn't that an uncharacteristic change from the ordinary? 'No', they would respond, 'one certainly would have to wash his hands before dipping his vegetables.'

Drip and Dip

But in order to properly understand this, we must first digress to a different Gemara in Pesachim (115a). Rabbi Elazer teaches in the name of Rav Oshiya "any food item that is dipped in a liquid requires handwashing before eating." On this statement, Rashi and Tosafos (among others) differ as to the correct understanding of his intent.

Rashi and the Rashbam maintain that this ruling is still applicable nowadays, as it is similar to the requirement to wash before eating bread, while Tosafos is of the opinion that this law is only relevant during the times of the Beit HaMikdash, as it is conditional to Taharot, Ritual Purity, which in this day and age, is unfortunately non-applicable. Although the Maharam MiRottenberg, and several later poskim are of the opinion that one may indeed rely on the lenient view, it should be noted that the majority of halachic authorities including the Rambam, Tur, Shulchan Aruch, Rema, Vilna Gaon, Chayei Adam, Shulchan Aruch HaRav, Ben Ish Chai, Kitzur Shulchan Aruch, Mishna Berura, Kaf HaChayim and Chazon Ish, hold that even nowadays one should do his utmost to be vigilant with this and wash hands before eating a food item dipped in liquid.

The lenient opinion is taken into account, however, and that is the reason why according to the majority of poskim, this washing is performed without the prerequisite blessing, as opposed to the washing before eating bread. This is due to the halachic dictum of SAFEK B'RACHOT L'HAKEL, meaning that in a case of doubt regarding the topic of b'rachot, we follow the lenient approach and do not make the blessing, to avoid the possibility of making a blessing in vain.

This all ties in to our Seder. In fact this, explains the Tur and Avudraham, and echoed by later authorities, is the reason why we wash URCHATZ prior to dipping the Karpas into saltwater. As this action is classified as a DAVAR HATIBULO B'MASHKEH, it requires handwashing before eating. Although Rambam, Tur and Avudraham, as well as the Levush and Vilna Gaon, aver that URCHATZ actually necessitates a b'racha of NETILAT YADAYIM, conversely, the vast majority of poskim conclude that we do not make the a b'racha for URCHATZ, but rather exclusively at RACHTZA immediately prior to Motzi-Matza. This is indeed the common custom.

[Based on footnote 12 - Another interesting question is whether reclining is required for Karpas. Some require it; others do not. Some phrase their opinions that it is not necessary but if one does so, no problem.]

The Chida's Chiddush

The Chida, in his Simchas HaRegel commentary on the Haggada, explains that this is the background, as well as the reason for the added VAV by URCHATZ at the Pesach Seder, as it is the only one of the Seder Simanim that starts with that conjunction. We find a parallel by the b'racha that our patriarch Yitzchak Avinu bestowed on his son Yaakov (B'reishit, Parshat Toldot, 27: 28), V'YITEIN L'CHA - 'And Hashem should give you...' According to Chazal and cited by Rashi, the extra conjunctive VAV means YITEIN YACHZOR V'YITEIN - that Hashem should continually and constantly give.

Likewise, the Chida explains the extra VAV in Urchatz. The Baal Haggada is transmitting a message to us. Just as during the Seder we all wash before dipping a vegetable in salt water, that extra VAV is telling us - RACHEITZ YACHZOR V'RACHEITZ - that we should continue to wash our hands, anytime we want to eat a food dipped in liquid, year round.

The Chasam Sofer and his son-in-law, the Chasan Sofer, write in a similar vein in their Haggada, that Urchatz is meant to serve as a tochacha (rebuke) and yearly reminder to those who are lackadaisical with the observance of this halacha, in order to remind everyone that this applies year round

as well. Indeed, the Taz actually writes similarly, and concludes that at least during the Aseret Y'mei T'shuva one should be stringent. The Ben Ish Chai remarks comparably when discussing Urchatz, that praiseworthy is one who is careful with this handwashing year round.

Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach zt"l adds that the VAV is connecting URCHATZ to KADEISH - meaning KADEISH URCHATZ - (as a command) that we should be M'KADEISH ourselves and continue to wash for food items dipped in liquid - even if we were previously not usually stringent with this all year round.

The Medium is the Message

Yet, it is important to note that other poskim take an alternate view. Rav Yaakov Reisher in his Chok Yaakov argues that since the great Maharam MiRottenberg, as well as the Lechem Chamudot and Magen Avraham among other poskim, ruled leniently with washing before eating a food item dipped in liquid following Tosafot's precedent, and most people do not follow the opinion mandating it nowadays, this simply cannot be the reason why we perform Urchatz at the Seder.

Rather, he explains that the Gemara's intent with stating that URCHATZ is performed in order that there should a

distinction for children to ask, is that the handwashing itself for eating dipped vegetables is what is out of the ordinary, not the timing of the washing. According to this understanding, it is the Urchatz itself that is essentially the HEKEIR, highlighting that something different than the norm is occurring, to enable children to ask what is different on Seder night. Meaning, although most do not wash before eating a dipped item year round, at the Seder we do; and that is the atypical action we do to arouse the interest of the children.

Not a DAAT YACHID (lone dissenting opinion), this understanding of Urchatz is also given by the Abarbanel, both the Chayei Adam and Aruch HaShulchan seem to favor this explanation, and it is cited by the Mishna Berura in his Shaar HaTziyun as well.

Alternate Views

On the other hand, the Levush understands Urchatz somewhat differently. He explains that the dipping of Karpas at the Pesach Seder is due to CHO VAT (or in some editions CHIBAT) HaRegel, extra obligation or devotion for the Yom Tov. Ergo, the handwashing is specifically performed at the Seder, as due to its inherent holiness, we do more than usual, to strive for an increase in purity, as opposed to year round, when in his opinion, it would not be mandated.

VAYAGED MOSHE, the renowned classic sefer on the Haggada, after citing several authorities who discuss the extra intrinsic Kedusha of Leil HaSeder, writes that perhaps this can be seen by the VAV in URCHATZ. He explains (in the exact opposite approach of the Chida's) that the VAV is connecting URCHATZ to KADEISH - meaning KADEISH URCHATZ - (as a command) that specifically at the Seder, due to the added inherent Kedusha of Leil HaSeder, we should be M'KADEISH ourselves by washing before dipping our vegetables - even though we would not need to the rest of the year.

An alternate, yet somewhat similar, interpretation is offered by the Netziv, Rav Naftali Tzvi Yehuda Berlin zt"l, venerated Rosh Yeshiva of Volozhin. The Seder reminds us of the eating of the Korban Pesach that took place when the Beit HaMikdash stood. Therefore, we follow the same halachic requirements at the Seder that were in place during the Temple era. Everyone agrees that at the time of the Beit HaMikdash there was an obligation to wash hands for dipped food items, and therefore, at the Pesach Seder we do so as well, regardless of whether or not we actually fulfill this year round.

Rav Yishmael Hakohen maintains an analogous distinction. He explains that earlier generations were indeed stringent with Ritual Purity and hence

certainly washed their hands before dipping vegetables. Since MINHAG AVOTEINU B'YADEINU, we follow in our ancestors' footsteps by performing the Seder as accurately as possible as they did. Hence, our mandated washing Urchatz at the Seder irrespective of our actions the rest of the year.

A slightly similar, yet novel explanation is given in the Zichron Nifla'ot Haggada. He explains that generally speaking, people are lenient year-round with this pre-dipping hand-washing following Tosafot's understanding, that this washing is intrinsically only relevant during the times of the Beit HaMikdash, as it is conditional to Taharot, Ritual Purity. Yet, he explains, when the Beit HaMikdash will be rebuilt, we will also be required to offer and eat the Korban Pesach on Seder Night, in addition to our obligation of eating a dipped-food. As such, if we would not be makpid on washing beforehand at the Seder, people may not realize the import of the new situation and not wash before dipping the Karpas. However, at that point, with the Beit HaMikdash standing, the intricacies of Ritual Purity will once again be 'back in play'. As such, if one would eat his dipped Karpas without the Urchatz pre-wash, he will have made himself 'pasul' (invalidated) from being able to eat Kodshim, including the Korban Pesach.

Hence, explains the Zichron Nifla'ot, although year-round such washing may be currently deemed unnecessary, it is nonetheless mandated on Leil HaSeder.

Another idea, cited by the Rema in his Darchei Moshe, is that the Haggada is akin to a T'fila, that we relate thanks and praise to Hashem for everything he has done for our ancestors and us. Therefore, immediately prior to the recital of the Haggada we wash our hands in preparation, without a b'racha, similar to the requirement of washing before davening.

One more interesting explanation, suggested by Rav Reuven Margolius, is that this washing is performed at the very beginning of the Seder night DERECH CHEIRUT, to show that we are doing so as free people and nobility, who are accustomed to washing their hands prior to eating even a small amount. This is opposed to slaves, who do not have the rights or ability for such extravagance, but rather 'eat their bread with sweat'. This 'nobility' reasoning would seem to fit well with the minhag many perform of 'serving' the Baal HaBayit for Urchatz, by bringing him a wash basin and washing his hands.

Divergences of Dipping

Interestingly, Rav Tzvi Pesach Frank zt"l, the former Chief Rabbi of

Yerushalayim, opines that the dispute among Rishonim whether only the head of the household is supposed to wash Urchatz or if everyone at the Seder does as well (the most common custom) might be dependent on this debate of why the handwashing at the Seder was instituted. According to the majority opinion that Urchatz was enacted due to the halacha of DAVAR HATIBULO B'MASHKEH, then everyone would be mandated to wash.

However, according to the opinions that this handwashing is only performed on Pesach at the Seder, it is possible that only the head of the household need wash Urchatz, as that should be deemed sufficient enough to arouse the interest and subsequent questions of the children.

Practically, as mentioned previously, the most common custom is that everyone washes Urchatz. Yet, a notable minority minhag, performed mainly by many of Germanic/Dutch origin, as well as Sanz, Lelov, and Satmar Chassidim, is that only the head of the household wash. So it is remarkable that this modern divergence of minhagim might actually depend on how Poskim understood the brief statement of the Gemara regarding children's questions.

Finger Food?

Another interesting machlokes that might depend on which HEKEIR the

Gemara intended is how to dip the Karpas into the saltwater. If the reason Urchatz was mandated is due to the halacha of DAVAR HATIBULO B'MASHKEH, then it stands to reason that if one used a fork or other utensil to dip and not actually getting 'ones' hands dirty' then many poskim would hold that handwashing is technically not required. On the other hand, if the washing prior to dipping is considered the unusual action of Seder night, then we should perform Urchatz regardless of utensil.

Practically, although there are contemporary authorities, including Rav Moshe Sternbuch and Rav Nissim Karelitz, who maintain preference for dipping the Karpas by hand in order that it should satisfy all opinions, nonetheless, due to the other understandings of Urchatz's role, many poskim rule that even if one used a fork for the dipping, we should still perform the handwashing prior. Just another insight into the seemingly simple and straightforward, yet remarkable Urchatz.

HOW DO YOU KARPAS?

Now that we explained the "Why" and "How" of Karpas, this leaves the "What", as in which vegetable should be used. It is interesting that the Mishna in Pesachim did not tell us a specific vegetable, with the Gemara explaining that if stuck, we may even

use the Maror for Karpas as well.

Although Rashi, the Rambam, and Tur tell us that any vegetable may be used for Karpas, and conversely the Maharil, Arizal, and seemingly the Shulchan Aruch, understanding KARPAS to be referring to a specific vegetable with that name, yet, many sefarim cite PETROZIL or PETRESHKA (presumably parsley) as the vegetable of choice, with the Aruch HaShulchan commenting that "we don't know what it is."

Other popular options used over the generations include onions, radishes, scallions, and even cucumbers. The main point is that its proper b'racha be a BOREI PRI HA'ADAMA so that it should exempt repeating this b'racha again when it is time for Maror.

Strictly Celery

However, it seems that the two most prevalent vegetables, at least nowadays, are celery and potatoes. Celery is considered an excellent choice, as the Chasam Sofer relates, his rebbi, Rav Nosson Adler did much research in tracking down the Maharil's elusive KARPAS vegetable, and his findings were that it is none other than celery. The Chasam Sofer writes that therefore that is what he used as well for Karpas. The Machatzit HaShekel writes similarly, that he was told by a "Great Man" (presumably Rav Adler) that after much research in

Medical books, KARPAS is truly none other than celery. The word he uses to identify it - IPIYA or IPUCH, is also cited as such in earlier sefarim, including the Bartenura in classifying KARPAS.

Rav Yechiel Michel Tukachinsky, in his annual Luach Eretz Yisrael, writes that in Eretz Yisrael the “Mehadrin” use “Karpas” that is known by its Arabic name. Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach fills us in that he was referring to celery. The Kitzur Shulchan Aruch cites a preference for celery as well, and this is the minhag of many, including the Mareh Yechezkel, and later, Rav Yisrael Yaakov Fischer.

Pontificating a Perchance for Potatoes

The other common KARPAS, perhaps the most common, is potatoes. Cited by the Aruch HaShulchan and Misgeret HaShulchan, it is the minhag in Belz, Skver, and Spinka, and many Gedolim, including Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv, and Rav Moshe Sternbuch, were known to use potatoes as Karpas.

Yet, there are those, including chassidim of Sanz, Bobov, and Kamarna who will not use potatoes for Karpas. This can be traced back to the famed Yismach Moshe, Rav Moshe Teitelbaum, rebbi of the Divrei Chayim of Sanz.

In his T'hila L'Moshe, the Yismach Moshe writes that he used to use potatoes for Karpas, but then heard that the great Rav Naftali of Ropschitz made a Shehakol b'racha on it (and hence would not be fitting for Karpas). He writes that he found that the Aruch, Rav Nosson M'Romi (literally, of Rome; d. 1106), when referring to the proper b'racha of mushrooms and other food items that do not actually get their nourishment from the earth and consequentially their b'racha being Shehakol, translates them as “Tartuffel”. Not familiar with the archaic word, the Yismach Moshe maintained that the Aruch must have been referring to “Kartuffel”, colloquially known as the potato.

Although there are different rationales for this, this idea is also found in several other sefarim, and there are prominent authorities who therefore made a Shehakol b'racha on potatoes. On the other hand, the facts do not seem to corroborate that potatoes should be classified in the same category of mushrooms, as potatoes not only grow and root in the ground, but they also get their nourishment from the ground, as opposed to mushrooms and their ilk. Several contemporary authorities point out that it is highly unlikely, if not outright impossible, for the Aruch, who lived in Europe in the eleventh century, to have been referring to “Kartuffel”

(potatoes) as the proper translation for mushrooms, as tubers were unknown on that continent until almost five hundred years later!

In fact, according to the Tiferet Yisrael, this act of Sir Francis Drake's, of introducing potatoes to the European continent, merited him to be classified as one of the Chasidei Umot Ha'Olam, as over the centuries potatoes have saved countless lives from starvation.

Moreover, in modern Italian, "tartufo" still translates as "truffle", the prized underground fungus, and not a potato. Therefore, the vast majority of authorities rule that the proper blessing on the potato is indeed "Borei Pri Ha'adama", and hence, it is still the preference for many as KARPAS.

Urchatz Everyday!

Back to Urchatz, the Chida, in his Simchas HaRegel Haggada, continues that although many are aware of the halacha of DAVAR HATIBULO B'MASHKEH, they do not realize that it even applies to something as ubiquitous as dipping cake into coffee! One might contend that the connection between vegetables in saltwater to tea biscuits in coffee seems tenuous, but actually, according to the majority of authorities, from a halachic perspective they are remarkably similar.

So the next time you get that dunkin' urge, it might be prudent to be conscientious by following the Haggada's hidden exhortation, and head to the sink before diving in to your cup-of-joe.

Thanks are due to my 12th-grade Rebbi in Yeshiva Gedolah Ateres Mordechai of Greater Detroit, Rav Yitzchok Kahan, for first enlightening me to this passage of the Chida's.

See website for all the footnotes and sources.

For any questions, comments or for the full Mareh Mekomot / sources, please email the author: yspitz@ohr.edu

Rabbi Yehuda Spitz serves as the **Sho'el U'Meishiv** and **Rosh Chavura** of the **Ohr Lagolah Halacha Kollel** at **Yeshivas Ohr Somayach** in **Yerushalayim**. He also currently writes a contemporary halacha column for the Ohr Somayach website titled **"Insights Into Halacha"**. ohr.edu/this_week/insights_into_halacha/

Disclaimer: This is not a comprehensive guide, rather a brief summary to raise awareness of the issues. In any real case one should ask a competent Halachic authority.

Rabbi Yehuda Spitz's English halacha sefer, "Food: A Halachic Analysis" (Mosaica/ Feldheim) containing over 500 pages featuring over 30 comprehensive chapters discussing the myriad halachic issues pertaining to food, is now available online and in bookstores everywhere.

Gimatriya Match

Shabbat HaGadol

p'sukim are OEGMs, opposite ends gimatriya matches, in that they share the same numeric value - 2721.

GM The haftara of Shabbat HaGadol is from the book of Malachi, specifically, 3:4-24. Malachi is the 12th booklet of Trei Asar, which is the last book of the Nevi'im section of Tanach. The haftara opens with Malachi 3:4 -

וְעִרְבָה לָהּ מִנְחֹת יְהוּדָה
וְיִרְשְׁלָם כִּימֵי עוֹלָם וּכְשָׁנִים
קִדְמוֹנוֹת:

And then the offerings of Yehuda and Yerushalayim shall be pleasant to G-d, as in the days of old and former years.

This pasuk should be very familiar to those who daven regularly, it is the last pasuk of the Amida, at the end of the Y'HI RATZON we say after ELOKAI, N'TZOR L'SHONI ME'RA... and YIHYU L'RATZON...

The last pasuk of the Amida. And what is the first pasuk of the Amida? HASHEM S'FATAI TIFTACH... which is T'hilim 51:17 -

אֲדַבֵּר אֲדַבֵּר שְׂפָתַי תִּפְתָּח וּפִי יִגִּיד
תְּהַלְלֶךָ:

O G-d, You shall open my lips, and my mouth will recite Your praise.

The Amida during the week consists of text composed by the ANSHEI K'NESET HAG'DOLA. The Amida of Shabbat and Chagim has some p'sukim which are quoted along with the text of the brachot. But the two above p'sukim stand out as the "bookends" of the Amida. The two