

ואתם לא תצאו איש מפתח ביתו (שמות יב:כב)

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**A Digest of Divrei Torah
on Pesach**



Rabbi Efrem Goldberg

Boca Raton Synagogue

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A digest of Divrei Torah on Pesach

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INTRODUCTION

If six months ago, on Rosh Hashanah, I would have told you that this Pesach there would not be a single hotel Pesach program in the world, families would not be gathering for Yom Tov, nobody would be having guests and you wouldn't even be able to find a minyan in the entire world, you would never have believed me, and with good reason.

In some ways, we are globally experiencing the eleventh plague, a pandemic that doesn't distinguish between its victims. We find ourselves in extraordinary times, a period of darkness and danger, of crisis and catastrophe for many. And yet, simultaneously, it is a time of opportunity, of simplification, consolidation, a time of return. We have returned to our homes, to our families, to reorienting our priorities and to being grateful for that which we had been taking for granted.

On the eve of redemption, the night that launched the exodus, Hashem instructed us:

וּלְקַחְתֶּם אֲגַדַּת אֲזוּב וּטְבַלְתֶּם בְּדָם אֲשֶׁר בַּסֶּף וְהִגַּעְתֶּם אֶל הַמְּשֻׁקּוֹף וְאֶל שְׁתֵּי
הַמְּזוּזוֹת מִן הַדָּם אֲשֶׁר בַּסֶּף וְאֵתֶם לֹא תֵצְאוּ אִישׁ מִפֶּתַח בֵּיתוֹ עַד בֹּקֶר.
*Take a bunch of hyssop, dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and
apply some of the blood that is in the basin to the lintel and to the
two doorposts. None of you shall go outside the door of his house
until morning.*

Why did we need to stay at home the night that began our birth as a nation and people?

The Midrash (Mechilta 12:22:2) tells us:

וְאֵתֶם לֹא תֵצְאוּ: מַגִּיד מִשְׁנַתְנָה רְשׁוּת לְמִשְׁחִית לְחַבֵּל אִינוּ מִבְּחִין בֵּין צַדִּיק
לְרָשָׁע...

*And you shall not go out, a man from the door of his house: We are
hereby taught that once permission has been given to 'the destroyer' to
destroy, he does not distinguish between the righteous and the wicked.*

Tragically, this year, we are staying home for the same reason as thousands of years ago. We have tragically lost too many to a pernicious pandemic that doesn't distinguish between the righteousness or worthiness of its victims. We daven that those who are ill have a speedy and full recovery and that those stricken with loss find solace and strength.

The *Chassam Sofer* (*Derashim V'Agados* page 62) has another suggestion. The Torah instructed us:

וְיִקְחוּ לָהֶם אִישׁ שֶׁה לְבֵית־אָבֹת שֶׁה לְבֵית:

Take a lamb to a family, a lamb to a household.

Seh, lamb, says the *Chassam Sofer*, connotes a loyal and obedient follower of Hashem. We began our peoplehood by literally getting our house in order. The strength of our nation is only as good as the spiritual and physical health of the individuals and families that comprise it. Therefore, on that opening night, we were instructed to stay home, focus on ourselves, transform our home and those in it into loyal and passionate followers of Hashem.

Just as it was at the birth of our people, our mission, job, and holy command yet again is to stay home and focus on ourselves, not in a selfish, self-centered way, but in a healthy, meaningful, and productive way so that we can emerge as a people healthy and holy.

Mindful that we won't be gathering in Shuls this year and Klal Yisroel won't be hearing *derashos* this Pesach, I am honored to share with you a *Derasha Digest* with sermons I have been privileged, with Hashem's help, to deliver at Boca Raton Synagogue during Pesach over many years. How I wish we could print them and make them available for you to pick up on your way into Shul. I hope you will consider printing them to enjoy over Yom Tov, perhaps even before davening *Mussaf* each day of the Chag.

I want to thank my brother-in-law Binyamin Muschel for his help in editing this digest and all of my writings. His contributions extend well beyond commas and spelling and he is a source of invaluable feedback, further ideas, references, and much more. I also want to thank my friend, Rob Shur, whose creativity and talents improve everything he touches.

We daven that just as our willingness to self-sacrifice and remain home was the catalyst of redemption in the past, may it bring redemption now, restoring the world and our people to a time of health, safety, security, gathering, community, and connection.

With blessings for good health, happiness and holiness.

Chag Kasher V'Sameach

Rabbi Efreim Goldberg

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THE BROKEN MATZAH

PESACH 2009/5769

What is the predominant number at the seder? When we consider the themes, mitzvos, people, what number comes to mind? The answer, of course, is four. Four cups, four questions, four sons, four *pesukim* we expound and elaborate on. And yet, when it comes to the main mitzvah of the night for us, the matzah, it comes in three. In contrast to what appears to be a night of fours, we have the three matzahs. Why the change?

Many answers have been given and many explanations offered:

- The Halachic explanation is that we need to have *lechem mishna*, two full matzahs like we have two challahs every week. Since we plan on breaking one at *yachatz*, we need to begin with three.
- The three matzahs also commemorate the three measures of fine flour that Avraham told Sarah to bake into matzah when they were visited by the three angels. Rashi teaches us that the angels' visit was on Pesach.
- The *Magen Avraham* suggests that the three represent Moshe, Aharon, and the Jewish people.
- One suggestion is that the three are for *Chachma, Bina* and *Da'as*, known by its more common acronym, *Chabad*.
- More popular explanations include: three to represent the *Kohen, Levi* and *Yisroel*, or Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov.

Though we have come to take it for granted that there are three matzahs, I want to share with you a fascinating tradition that appears in the sefer *Minhagei Yisroel* by Professor Daniel Sperber of Bar Ilan. In the 17th century, the custom was to have four matzahs at the Seder instead of three.

Rav Yaakov Reischer was a dayan in Prague who was later called to the Rabbinate in Galicia and ultimately in Worms where he is buried. In his *Chok Yaakov*, he mentions that the custom in his community was to bake four matzos, in order to have a spare. His commentary was published in 1696, indicating that this was the prevalent custom already at that time in Eastern Europe. We also have mention of the custom in the eighteenth century in England.

The custom was opposed by great Halachic authorities, not because they didn't like the idea but for a technical reason. They felt the more matzah baked, the more dough necessary and the more dough necessary, the greater the chance of chametz. So, in the end, we only have three matzahs, but I believe the symbolism of the fourth is very meaningful for us as well.

Why have the fourth matzah? It was called the *matzas safek*. Its purpose was to be a reserve matzah in case one of the other ones breaks. While the matzah is indeed delicate, so is the pittom of an esrog and we don't instruct anyone to have an extra handy. We don't have a spare shofar, or an extra Megillah. Why specifically do we have a backup, reserve matzah?

Studies show that depression and anxiety spike during a specific time of the year. That time is holiday season in which suicide rates double and depression runs rampant. Sociologists explain that holiday time is spent with family. Siblings are reunited, kids are back at their parents' tables or vice-versa. Each reunion and interaction brings with it great expectations. The host and hostess have their expectations of how everything is going to turn out. The guests come in with their high hopes. Families actually believe this will finally be the utopian year in which everyone gets along. Inevitably, things break down, expectations are not met, and the result is terrible disappointment and depression.

Shofar, esrog, the menorah, etc. can all be accomplished and fulfilled on one's own. There is no dialogue, no relationship and no interaction as part of those mitzvos. The Seder is characterized by Haggadah – a dialogue and conversation. Pesach, above all other holidays, brings people together. “How many are you having for Yom Tov?” or “How many are you having for the Seder?” are common questions this time of year.

We bring high expectations to our holiday reunion. This year will be great.

Everyone will get along. I won't have to compete for attention. The kids will be enraptured by the Seder and not distracted. Nothing will spill. The Rabbis wanted us to understand going into the Seder that matzah is going to break. Torah does not describe or account for a utopian life. The Torah is designed to inspire and enrich our lives and all that goes with them.

The message of the *matzas safek*, though we may no longer practice it, is to adjust your expectation and set yourself free. Maintaining hope in a perfect experience, relationship or holiday is exhausting and burdensome. Understanding at the outset that things will go wrong and bumps will be encountered along the way is liberating and cathartic.

Part of the Seder, the order of life, is preparing for the broken pieces. A chassan and kallah stand underneath the chuppah and the ceremony concludes with the chassan breaking a glass. It is critical, before they even take leave of this most auspicious and special moment, that the young man and woman must realize that things will break, obstacles will be encountered, and that is ok. We can't control other people and we can't control all events and circumstances. We can control our expectations and, in turn, how we respond. That ability to control and adjust our expectations is freedom.

May our lives and our matzahs remain whole, but let us be prepared for something to break and know that we have the ability to put it back together again.

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WELCOMING THE CHALLENGING QUESTIONS

PESACH 2010/5770

His request approved, the news photographer quickly used a cell phone to call the local airport to charter a flight. He was told a twin-engine plane would be waiting for him at the airport. Arriving at the airfield, he spotted a plane warming up outside a hangar. He jumped into the plane with his bag, slammed the door shut, and shouted, "Let's go." The pilot taxied out, swung the plane into the wind and took off. Once in the air, the photographer instructed the pilot, "Fly over the valley and make low passes so I can take pictures of the fires on the hillsides." "Why?" asked the pilot. "Because I'm a photographer and I need to get some close up shots." The pilot was strangely silent for a moment, then he finally stammered, "So, what you're telling me, is... You're NOT my flight instructor?"

וְהָיָה כִּי תֵבֹאוּ אֶל הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר יִתֶּן ה' לָכֶם כְּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר וְשִׁמְרֶתֶם אֶת הָעֲבֹדָה
הַזֹּאת. (שמות יב:כה)

And it shall be that when you come to the land that Hashem will give you, like He said, and you shall observe this service.

Immediately prior to the final plague being administered to the Egyptians, Moshe delivers directions to the Jewish people instructing them what they must do to avoid suffering the same fate. He advises the people that when they enter the land of Israel, the activities that they are doing now will be celebrated and will be remembered annually through participation in the holiday of Pesach.

Moshe continues that at this yearly ceremony acknowledging the miracles they are experiencing now, they must anticipate a challenge that they will receive from their children:

וְהָיָה כִּי יֹאמְרוּ אֲלֵיכֶם בְּנֵיכֶם מָה הָעִבְדָּה הַזֹּאת לָכֶם. וְאָמַרְתֶּם זָבַח פֶּסַח הוּא לָהּ אֲשֶׁר פָּסַח עַל בְּתֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּמִצְרַיִם...

And it shall be when your children ask you, "what is this service to you," and you shall tell them that it is a sacrifice of Pesach to Hashem for He passed over the homes of Bnei Yisroel in Egypt.

Moshe warns the people that the children will ask a question and he provides the appropriate answer. The people, reacting to the news that they will enter the land of Israel, celebrate Pesach, and will have this exchange with their children, respond in a visceral way: *vayikod artza va'yishtachavu*, they fall forward and bow down.

Rashi is bothered by the dramatic response to the words of Moshe, and explains that they reacted with great joy to the news that they would be redeemed, would enter the land of Israel, and "*u'besuros ha'banim she'yeheyu la'hem*," on the news of the children that they would have.

The *Parshas Derachim*, a sefer authored by Rabbi Judah Rosanes, author of the *Mishneh L'Melech*, asks a very compelling question. We know from the Haggadah that the child destined to pose this question Moshe referred to, *mah ha'avodah ha'zos lachem*, is the *rasha*, the wicked child. If this is so, asks the *Parshas Derachim*, why did the people react with such joy to the news that they would have children who would pose the questions of a *rasha*?

Korean airliners were once crashing at a disturbing rate. Otherwise talented pilots were making mistakes and the mistakes were leading to catastrophe. In his best-selling book *Outliers*, Malcolm Gladwell analyzes Korean Air Flight 801, which flew on August 5, 1997, in detail. There was no single disastrous mistake during that flight. Instead, a series of smaller mistakes snowballed until the plane ended up running headfirst into the side of a mountain. Subsequent analysis made it clear that the mistakes of the pilot and crew were largely communication errors. Further, there was a distinct cultural component to these errors. It turns out that Korean

cultural traditions of respect and politeness prevented the pilots and the crew from making crucial decisions that could have prevented the crash. A new set of procedures was put in place and, today, Korean Airlines has an exemplary record of air safety.

A feeling of comfort with questioning and challenging the status quo can be the difference between life and death. Long before Malcolm Gladwell or Korean Airlines learned the importance of promoting a culture that not only tolerates but promotes asking, confronting, and challenging, the Torah appreciated how critical this quality was and is. Indeed, having children who are willing to ask, to challenge, to be minimally engaged, is worthy of *va'yikod artzah va'yistachu*.

There is an epidemic that plagues many people today. It is not a physical plague like those suffered by the *Mitzrim*. Instead, it is a philosophical one, a plague of attitude. The plague is apathy, complacency, and indifference.

The Jewish people in Egypt, who had suffered terribly simply because they were the sons of Jacob, had a terrible fear that their children would have no interest in their heritage. They dreaded the possibility that at the end of their persecution and sacrifice, their children would be indifferent to their legacy, tradition and birthright.

And so, *vayikod artza va'yistachu*. When Moshe tells them that your children will ask, "why you are doing this," they respond with great joy. A child may pose the question of the *rasha*, but it means they are engaged in the system, they seek to understand. At least the *rasha* is at the table, shows up for the Seder and cares enough to challenge.

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PRAISE CRAZE OR TOUGH LOVE?

PESACH 2011/5771

What kind of a mother hauls her seven-year-old daughter's dollhouse out to the car and tells the kid that her dollhouse is going to be donated to the Salvation Army piece by piece if the daughter doesn't master a difficult piano composition by the next day? What kind of a mother informs her daughter that she's "garbage" or says, "Hey fatty, lose some weight?" And what kind of mother believes, as Amy Chua does,

"an A- is a bad grade; ... the only activities your children should be permitted to do are those in which they can eventually win a medal; and ... that medal must be gold"?

The answer to all the above is – a "Tiger Mom."

ולפי דעתו של בן, אביו מלמדו; מתחיל בגנות ומסיים בשבח ודורש מארמי
אובד אבי עד שיגמור כל הפרשה כולה.

The Mishna in the tenth perek of Pesachim provides the familiar format of the Seder. We must begin with shame and move towards praiseworthy. What exactly does that mean? The Gemara elaborates :

מתחיל בגנות ומסיים בשבח מאי בגנות? רב אמר: מתחלה עובדי עבודה
גלולים היו אבותינו. ושמואל אמר: עבדים היינו.

Many commentators analyze what Rav and Shmuel are arguing about. Some suggest it's a question of focusing on a movement from physical bondage to freedom versus spiritual decadence to spiritual achievement. Others see the debate as to whether the Seder focuses exclusively on the narrow historical slavery and liberty from Egypt versus a broader view of our history: from idolaters to the chosen nation.

The question I have is very simple – on an evening of celebration marking our liberation and freedom from Mitzrayim, why bring up the *genus* at all? Shouldn't we revel in the miracles performed by the Almighty and wonders He performed for us? Why dwell on *genus*, on episodes for which we should feel shame? Where is there room for negativity and derogatory comments at all, especially at the Seder?

The 14th century Spanish commentator, Rav Dovid Avudraham, suggests that the *genus* enhances and expands the *shvach*. To truly and profoundly praise Hashem, one has to understand and acknowledge the depths of how far we had sunk. Only in the context of realizing where we were can we appreciate just how far Hashem had taken us. In other words, the *genus* has no role inherently at all at the Seder. We use it to make the *shvach* even more impressive and remarkable.

I would like to suggest a different possible approach by contrasting two new books that were recently published. The first is *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother*, by Amy Chua, the book we began with today. Chua writes:

A lot of people wonder how Chinese parents raise such stereotypically successful kids. They wonder what these parents do to produce so many math whizzes and music prodigies, what it's like inside the family, and whether they could do it too. Well, I can tell them, because I've done it. Here are some things my daughters, Sophia and Louisa, were never allowed to do: attend a sleepover, have a playdate, be in a school play, complain about not being in a school play, watch TV or play computer games, choose their own extracurricular activities, get any grade less than an A, not be the #1 student in every subject except gym and drama, play any instrument other than the piano or violin, not play the piano or violin.

In one study of fifty Western American mothers and forty-eight Chinese immigrant mothers, almost 70% of the Western mothers said either that “stressing academic success is not good for children” or that “parents need to foster the idea that learning is fun.” By contrast, roughly 0% of the Chinese mothers felt the same way. Instead, the vast majority of the Chinese mothers said that they believe their children can be “the best”

students, that “academic achievement reflects successful parenting,” and that if children did not excel at school then there was “a problem” and parents “were not doing their job.” Other studies indicate that compared to Western parents, Chinese parents spend approximately ten times as long every day drilling academic activities with their children.

The fact is that Chinese parents can do things that would seem unimaginable, even legally actionable, to Westerners. Chinese mothers can say to their daughters, “Hey fatty, lose some weight.” By contrast, Western parents have to tiptoe around the issue, talking in terms of “health” and never ever mentioning the fat word, and their kids still end up in therapy for eating disorders and negative self-image.

As you can imagine her book was received very harshly and many rejected her parenting style as cruel, abusive and unforgiving.

By contrast, Richard Weissbourd, a psychologist at Harvard’s School of Education, published a book called *The Parents We Mean to Be*. Among the trends that Dr. Weissbourd finds particularly harmful is the fixation of parents on building “self-esteem,” the “praise craze,” as he calls it. A psychologist he talks to tells him that by age twelve some children have been so overpraised that they regard compliments as implicit criticism. Empty flattery must be compensating for their lack of talent or be meeting a need for extra encouragement. Other children become “praise sponges,” Weissbourd says. In either case, he wonders, what’s so great about self-esteem?

So who is right, the “Tiger Mom” or the parents with the “praise craze”? Should we be more critical, honest and disciplinary, or should we focus on building self-esteem and build up our kids? Seder night teaches us that, not surprisingly, it is all of the above.

The Mishna says “*aviv melamdo*,” the father teaches the child that *maschil lb’genus u’mesayeim b’shvach*. As we spend Seder night reflecting on who we are, where we have come from, and where we are going, we seek to strike a healthy balance between *genus* and *shvach*.

Unlike the praise craze parents, we are not afraid to bring up the *genus*. We don’t practice revisionism and we don’t censor the reality of mistakes.

We aren't afraid to point out our collective errors and we must not be afraid to point out to our children their challenges and where they need more work. Yet, unlike the Tiger Mom, we make sure to dwell on praise and indeed, *mesayeim*, we are sure to finish, with *shvach*, leaving a taste of praise in our children's mouths.

The need to strike a balance between criticism and praise is obvious, yet most of us struggle to find that balance. Some intuitively excel at highlighting for the people around them, usually spouses or children, everything they are doing wrong and that needs improvements. They excel at *genus* and need to remember to be *mesayeim*, to spend more time and to conclude with *shvach*, with praise. When is the last time we offered a gratuitous compliment to someone around us? Have we praised our spouse for their hard work in getting ready for Pesach? Have we admired the *divrei Torah* and projects of our children?

Others excel at *shvach* and struggle with *genus*. They have children who can do no wrong and who receive nothing but praise and positive feedback. They need to be *maschil* with some *genus*, offer some constructive criticism, and not be afraid to offer tough love.

STORIES THAT BIND US

PESACH 2013/5773

On July 4, 1776, the same day that independence was declared by the thirteen colonies, the Continental Congress of the newly formed United States of America convened a committee to design what would become our Great Seal, our emblem and the symbol of our sovereignty.

The committee was comprised of three of the five men who had drafted the Declaration of Independence: Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, and John Adams. Adams chose a painting known as the “Judgment of Hercules” to adorn the seal. Jefferson suggested a depiction of the Israelites in the wilderness, led by a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night.

Benjamin Franklin also chose a design based on the Jewish story: “Moses standing on the Shore, and extending his Hand over the Sea, thereby causing the same to overwhelm Pharaoh who is sitting in an open Chariot, a Crown on his Head and a Sword in his Hand.” Franklin actually suggested a corresponding motto for this new country: “Rebellion to Tyrants is Obedience to God.”

As with most committees, it took six years, three committees, and the contributions of fourteen men before the Congress finally accepted a design in 1782, and it wasn’t any of the original three suggestions. Jefferson, however, liked the motto “Rebellion to Tyrants is Obedience to God” so much that he used it on his personal seal.

The story of our Exodus has universal appeal and, indeed, has been embraced by countless groups to inspire their own journey towards freedom, including the founding fathers and the civil rights movement.

But the truth is that while the story can inspire others, it is uniquely ours and describes a history that belongs to us alone. At its core, it is our family's narrative.

While others have written about it, drawn emblems based on it and created songs and poems and movies around it, we alone relive it, and we alone invoke the memory of having experienced it directly with sensory experiences. Others tell the story, but we are the only ones who taste the story. "*Lo amarti ela b'sha'a she'yeish matzah u'marror munachim lefanecha.*" We retell the story of our journey from bondage to freedom specifically with matzah and marror before us. "*Rabban Gamliel omeir, kol shelo amar shelosha devarim eilu b'Pesach lo yatzah y'dei chovaso.*" After reminding ourselves of the centrality of matzah and marror, we proceed with fulfilling these mitzvos, first eating matzah and only then consuming the requisite measure of marror.

Perhaps you have noticed this anomaly yourself, or maybe it is so simple you have overlooked it until now, as I have. Every time we invoke the themes of matzah and marror, we seem to do so in the wrong order. After all, matzah represents our freedom and liberty, the culmination and climax of the story. Marror is *al shum she'mireru ha'Mitzrim es chayei avoseinu b'Mitzrayim*, because the Egyptians made the lives of our forefathers in Egypt bitter.

The marror, the memory of bitterness, servitude, suffering, and oppression, should come first; only after recalling the bitterness should we then taste the matzah and remember our journey towards freedom and prosperity. Why do we consistently address matzah and marror in the wrong order?

Many have addressed this question, including the Shach, the Satmar Rebbe, and Rav Ovadia Yosef. Nevertheless, I would like to humbly offer you my own understanding.

For years researchers have sought to understand what holds families together. What are the ingredients that make some families united, strong, resilient, and happy, while others are in disarray, fractured, broken, and fragile? Why are some families functional and others utterly dysfunctional?

The last few years have seen remarkable breakthroughs in knowledge about how to make families stay together and function more effectively. As it turns out, the single most important thing you can do for your family is to develop a strong family narrative. The New York Times recently published a fascinating article titled, "The Stories That Bind Us," which provides the background for how this conclusion was reached.

In the mid-1990's, Dr. Marshall Duke, a psychologist at Emory University, was doing research into the dissipation of the family. His wife Sara, a psychologist who works with children with learning disabilities, noticed something about her students. She told her husband, "The ones who know a lot about their families tend to do better when they face challenges."

Duke decided to test the hypothesis by developing a measure called "Do You Know," a test for children with questions about their family. Examples of questions were: Do you know where your grandparents grew up? Do you know where your Mom and Dad went to high school? Do you know an illness or something terrible that happened in your family?"

Duke took the answers he received and compared them to a battery of psychological tests that the same children had taken, and he reached an overwhelming conclusion. The more the children knew about their family's history, the stronger was their sense of control over their lives, their self-esteem was higher, and the more successfully they believed their families functioned.

Psychologists have found that every family has a unifying narrative which takes one of three shapes. The ascending family narrative is exclusively positive: "Son, when we came to this country, we had nothing. We worked hard, opened a store, your grandfather went to high school, your father went to college and now you..."

The second is the descending narrative: "Sweetheart, we used to have it all, then, we lost everything." Dr. Duke explains that the third narrative, the oscillating family narrative, is the healthiest one. "Let me tell you, we've had ups and downs in our family. We built a strong business, your grandfather was charitable, but we also had setbacks. You had an uncle who was once arrested. We had a house burn down. Your father lost a job. No matter what happened, we always stuck together as a family."

Duke and his colleagues concluded that children who have the most self-confidence and resilience have the strongest “intergenerational self.” They know they belong to something bigger than themselves. Dr. Duke recommends parents pursue opportunities to convey a sense of history to their children, using holidays, vacations, family get-togethers, or even rides to the mall to tell family stories and personal anecdotes. He recommends adopting rituals and traditions that can get handed down from one generation to another. The hokier the family’s tradition, he says, the more likely it is to be passed down.

Duke’s bottom line is this - if you want a happier family, you must create, refine and retell the story of your family’s positive moments and your collective ability to bounce back from difficult ones.

When I saw this article and read about Duke’s research, all I could think of is the Pesach Seder and the wisdom of our sacred traditions. This new research simply affirms what we knew and have practiced for millennia. When we sit at the Seder and tell the story of our people, our children feel part of something larger than themselves. When they hear our personal stories of ups and downs, bitterness and sweetness, they feel part of something larger and greater than themselves. They don’t see their own circumstance in a vacuum or feel the need to face their challenges alone. When they see themselves as part of our collective history and our family’s personal narrative, they are encouraged, strengthened, and uplifted. When we hide the afikomen, dip the karpas, and eat matzah and marror, we are creating rituals and traditions that will keep our story strong and ensure it is passed from one generation to another.

Perhaps this research explains why we eat the matzah and marror out of order. Maybe we don’t just eat the marror at the seder as a prop in order to tell the story chronologically. It isn’t just a function of reminding our children that we were once slaves but now are free.

Rather, we eat the marror to remind our children that our narrative is an oscillating one with ups and downs, sweetness and bitterness, successes and yes, even failures. We become stronger, more resilient, more effective, more functional, and more united when we don’t hide the marror part of our past, but instead, we embrace the marror as part of our oscillating

narrative. We don't have marror and then matzah, implying that everything is smooth sailing from there. Instead, we have matzah and then marror and then matzah and then marror, and this is a representation of how life works.

Knowing that our narrative is an oscillating one gives us courage and strength, and empowers us to confront the marrors we may face today. The Pesach Seder teaches us to be honest, direct, and truthful in our conversations with our family. The more we share about both the matzah and marror moments, the stronger we will be, the more united we will feel, and the greater our capacity to overcome whatever may come our way.

ואתם לא תצאו איש מפתח ביתו

WHO PACKED YOUR PARACHUTE?

PESACH 2014/5774

It is almost impossible to imagine the Seder night without the singing of Dayeinu. You'll find nearly everyone this week humming the addictive melody, which is almost as catchy as a song from Frozen. Dayeinu is a centerpiece of the Hagaddah and a highlight of our Seder experience. The tune is catchy, but the words and theme are frankly bizarre. "Had You taken us from Egypt but not split the sea, dayeinu." Really, would it have been enough? "If You had taken us to Har Sinai but not given us the Torah, dayeinu, it would have been enough." Really? Don't we talk about how the Torah is the air that we breathe, indispensable to our lives and to our very existence? Had He given us the Torah but not brought us into Israel, it would have been enough. Really?

Every commentator and every Hagaddah asks the same question: What do you mean dayeinu, it would have been enough? Undoubtedly you have heard a dvar Torah at your Seder that explained one or more of the lines of Dayeinu and why, in fact, that item or experience would have been enough. Most of the discussions of Dayeinu, in fact, center on an analysis of individual and particular stanzas.

This morning, I want to share with you an entirely new way to understand Dayeinu. Understanding what Dayeinu is really all about and why it is a centerpiece of our Seder requires us to zoom out the lens, and instead of investigating specific lines, to look at the composition as a whole. What do the fifteen stanzas have in common? Why were these events or experiences chosen?

Rabbi Nachman Cohen, in his *Historical Haggadah*, offers a fantastic insight. If you look at the Chumash and in Tehillim (chapter 106 in particular), you will notice that every stanza of Dayeinu corresponds with

a gracious act God did for us and our absolutely ungrateful response. He goes through all of them in his Hagaddah.

For example, we say “*ilu hotzianu mi'Mitzrayim, dayeinu,*” it would have been enough. Yet, if you look in the book of Devarim (1:27), it wasn't enough.

בְּשִׂנְאָת ה' אֲתָנוּ הוֹצִיאָנוּ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לְתַת אֲתָנוּ בְּיַד הָאֱמֹרִי לְהַשְׁמִידָנוּ:

Because God hates us, He has brought us out of the land of Egypt to deliver us into the hands of the Amorites to destroy us.”

Another example: we say, “*ilu he'echilanu es ha'man, dayeinu,*” it would have been enough. But it wasn't enough. We said, “*v'nafsheinu katza b'lechem ha'klokel,* our soul loathes this bread.” We say, “*ilu hichnisanu l'Eretz Yisroel, dayeinu,*” it would have been enough, but it wasn't. As the Torah relates in Parshas Shelach, we cried, “*eretz ocheles yoshveha hee,* the land eats up its inhabitants.”

Dayeinu, says Rabbi Nachman Cohen, is a tikkun. On Seder night we look back on our national history, we review our story and we identify those moments, those gifts from God that we failed to say thank you for. We rectify and repair our ingratitude and thanklessness through the years by saying “Dayeinu” now. We now proclaim “Dayeinu!” to relate to God, and to ourselves, that each of these things was enough to be exceedingly grateful for.

Freedom demands gratitude. If you are set free but fail to acknowledge how you attained that freedom, you in fact remain enslaved to your ego and your selfishness. If you can't recognize what has been done for you and that you could not have done it yourself, you are not freed from your narrow, self-absorbed way of life. Gratitude is a byproduct of true freedom.

The Midrash advises: “He who has no gratitude is like one who negates the existence of God.” If you are so insensitive to those who benefit and sustain you, certainly you will never recognize the blessings which God provides.

Ingratitude is a fatal character flaw both individually and nationally. On the night of Pesach, when we relive the experience of becoming a people

and celebrate our national birth, we repair the ingratitude of our past with the recognition that we are unworthy and say “dayeinu,” all that God did for us was beyond what we deserved.

A few months ago, the *Wall Street Journal* had an article titled, “Raising Children With an Attitude of Gratitude; Research Finds Real Benefits for Kids Who Say Thank You.” The author, Dianna Kapp writes,

A field of research on gratitude in kids is emerging, and early findings indicate parents’ instincts to elevate the topic are spot-on. Concrete benefits come to kids who literally count their blessings. Gratitude works like a muscle. Take time to recognize good fortune, and feelings of appreciation can increase.

The mere act of giving thanks has tangible benefits, research suggests. A 2008 study of 221 kids published in the *Journal of School Psychology* analyzed sixth- and seventh-graders assigned to list five things they were grateful for every day for two weeks. It found that they had a better outlook on school and greater life satisfaction three weeks later, compared with kids assigned to list five hassles.

“The old adage that virtues are caught, not taught, applies here,” says University of California, Davis psychology professor Robert Emmons. Parents need to model this behavior to build their children’s gratitude muscle. “It’s not what parents want to hear, but you cannot give your kids something that you yourselves do not have,” Dr. Emmons says.

Everyday actions may be even more important than big efforts, researchers say. “Express gratitude to your spouse. Thank your kids,” Hofstra’s Dr. Froh says. “Parents say, ‘Why should I thank them for doing something they should do, like clean their room?’ By reinforcing this, kids will internalize the idea, and do it on their own.”

Seder night is a perfect opportunity to model gratitude for our children, grandchildren and all gathered. During Dayeinu, pause to be appreciative, not only to Hashem for what He has done for our people and for each of us. Be thankful to those who worked so hard to make Pesach happen. Someone or someones had to work hard to earn the money to pay for

Pesach. Someone had to shop, cook, clean, prepare, set up, clean up, etc. Don't just thank your spouse or your parents, but as the article says, thank your children for what they did to pitch in.

Dayeinu teaches that Pesach is not just a time to learn the attitude of gratitude and to say thank you for the present. Pesach reminds us that to set ourselves free we need to look back at our lives and identify those who made all the difference and whom we neglected to thank. Pesach pushes us to make a tikkun, to repair the ingratitude and reach out to say thank you.

Charles Plumb, a U.S. Naval Academy graduate, was a jet fighter pilot in Vietnam. After seventy-five combat missions, his plane was destroyed by a surface-to-air missile. Plumb ejected and parachuted into enemy hands. He was captured and spent six years in a Communist prison. He survived that ordeal and one day, years later, when Plumb and his wife were sitting in a restaurant, a man at another table came up and said, "You're Plumb! You flew jet fighters in Vietnam and you were shot down!" "How in the world did you know that?" asked Plumb. "I packed your parachute," the man replied, "I guess it worked!"

That night, Plumb couldn't sleep while thinking about that man. He kept wondering what this man might have looked like in a sailor uniform. He wondered how many times he might have passed him on the ship and never acknowledged him. How many times he never said "Hello," "Good morning," or "How are you." Plumb was a fighter pilot, respected and revered, while this man was just an ordinary, lowly sailor. Now it grated on his conscience. Plumb thought of the many lonely hours the sailor had spent on a long wooden table in the bowels of the ship carefully weaving the fabric together, making sure the parachute was just right, and going to great lengths to make it as precise as can be, knowing that somebody's life depended on it. Only years later did Plumb have a full appreciation for what this anonymous man did. Plumb now goes around the world as a motivational speaker asking people to recognize who's packing their own parachute.

I have a friend in New Jersey who set up a couple twenty years ago. He told me something remarkable. Every single year on their anniversary,

this couple not only gets each other gifts, but they get my friend, their shadchan, a gift as well. For their big anniversary, they got him a big gift, recognizing that the happiness they have together would never have happened without his bothering to set them up.

I know someone who received scholarships from the schools he attended growing up from elementary school through graduate school. When he became financially successful, over fifty years later, the first thing he did was write a beautiful thank you note and make donations to each of the schools that helped give him a chance.

Have we thanked those who made and packed our parachutes in life? Imagine if our kindergarten teacher got a note from us thanking her for nurturing us with love. Imagine if our high school principal, our childhood pediatrician, our housekeeper growing up who cleaned our room, out of the blue got a gesture of gratitude showing that we cared enough to track them down and say thank you after all of these years. Did we ever properly thank the teacher who was patient with us, the orthodontist who straightened out our teeth, the bus driver who drove us? Did we express enough appreciation to the person who set us up with our spouse, gave us our first job, safely delivered our children?

We all have family, friends, mentors, and neighbors who contributed to our lives and help make us who we are today. Freedom means knowing that we didn't get here on our own. This Pesach, let's sing our own personal Dayeinu and repair our ingratitude by saying thank you to those who packed our parachutes.

ואתם לא תצאו איש מפתח ביתו

FREEDOM IN PRISON

PESACH 2015/5775

This week, Yosef Mendelevitch, the famous Russian refusenik, published the remarkable story of how he observed the Pesach in 1978 in the Chistopol Prison in the Soviet Union.

“This was a very harsh prison. I was sent there for having kept the Shabbat in the hard labor camp. This was considered to be an offence. It was the tenth year of my incarceration. I was for some time in the same cell with another Prisoner of Zion, Hillel Butman. A month before the Passover festival I suggested that we hold a Pesach Seder... I was lucky. Among my personal belongings I kept a postcard from Israel on which there was a photograph of a Pesach Seder Plate from the Israel Museum; a Pesach Seder Plate from Germany, from the 18th century. Therefore, from this postcard I learned what I would need for the Seder Plate. And there was a further small miracle: in the margins of the postcard there was all the order of the Pesach Seder: Kadesh, Urechatz.. I began at once to write my own Pesach Haggada according to the order written in the postcard.”

Mendelevitch continues by explaining how he made wine. He had saved a few raisins his father had sent him ten years earlier. “Every day a prisoner would receive a spoonful of sugar. People at once ate the sugar. But I decided to collect it. Every day I added another spoonful and another. After a month I had enough sugar. I poured the sugar, raisins and hot water into the water bottle and hid it underneath the bed. I was afraid that there might be a sudden search and they would discover my wine, but I had no choice.”

What did he do for marror? “Suddenly there began an outbreak of influenza in the prison. The prison management didn’t have medicines. They heard that onion prevents flu. One day every prisoner received a fresh onion bulb. It was a real asset! For years I hadn’t eaten a fresh vegetable. All the prisoners swallowed the onion in a trice. But I thought to myself that if I put the onion in water the onion would sprout leaves and I would be able to make bitter Chazeret from them. And that is what I did. I had an empty tin in which I put water the little onion bulb and placed it on the cell windowsill exactly under the bars. They all laughed at me – ‘Are you crazy? Why didn’t you eat it? Are you trying to grow flowers here?’ And I remained silent.”

He used a small leaf that grew from the asphalt in the courtyard as karpas. He made the egg from egg powder and the zero’a was represented by a soup cube from Israel with a picture of a chicken on the wrapping. It was still permitted to receive matzah, which the prison authorities called “dry bread,” and so he had real matzah.

The night began: “In the evening I asked the warden to bring me the *Pravda* newspaper to read. I made from the newspaper a circle and wrote on it as on a Seder plate: Zeroa, Egg, Maror (leaf of the onion). Everything was ready. I hid the Seder plate under my blanket. When the evening of Tet-Vav Nissan arrived I called Hillel (my cellmate) and said, “Pesach has arrived, come let us sit at the Seder table.”

He laughed at me: “You again with your stupid ideas, I already told you that it is impossible to hold a Seder in the prison!” Then I showed him the Pesach Seder plate. He examined it. Everything was in place. And then he said to me: “But you don’t have wine – it’s impossible without the Four Cups.”

I bent down and took out the water bottle with raisins from under the bunk. The truth is that I wasn’t sure if I would get wine. Hillel uncorked the bottle, smelt, and declared “Real wine. If that’s the case, come let us sit down and hold the Pesach Seder.”

Yosef Mendelovitch sat in prison. He was not free in the sense that he could go and come as he pleased. And yet, that Seder night he was more free than his Communist captors, for he didn’t allow them to dictate how he saw himself, how he felt, who he was and what he valued. The Soviets

may have denied him liberty, but make no mistake Yosef Mendelovitch was free even while yet behind bars.

Rabbi Soloveitchik, whose *yahrzeit* is this week, offers a brilliant insight into freedom that I want to share with you this morning. In antiquity, rebellion by slaves meant total destruction. History records many bloody and ruthless insurrections of slaves against their masters. Ancient Rome experienced multiple confrontations with slaves who had set themselves free. European history knows of the Peasants' Rebellion in medieval Germany and of the bloody Cossack revolt in Ukraine. Horrific massacres were typical as formerly oppressed people satisfied their irresistible urge for revenge.

What happened on the night of *Yetzias Mitzrayim*? After generations of suffering, persecution and servitude, after centuries of back-breaking labor, murder of Jewish baby boys and more, how did our ancestors respond to being set free?

One can only imagine how they felt that evening. They watched as:

וַתְּהִי צְעָקָה גְדוֹלָה בְּמִצְרַיִם כִּי אֵין בַּיִת אֲשֶׁר אֵין שָׁם מֵת.

There was a great cry in Egypt for there was not a house where there was not one dead.

The Egyptians were hysterical, moaning and crying. The Jews observed and it struck them – they were in fact finally liberated, they had been set free. That night, for the first time in generations, not only were they not oppressed, persecuted or tortured, they were now the masters and the Egyptians the subordinates. What did they do with that freedom? How did they react to their former masters?

Did they grab babies out of the embrace of their mothers and cast them in the Nile just as had been done to them? Did they beat up their taskmasters who just a few days earlier had tortured them mercilessly? Did they riot and set fire to the neighborhoods of their former overlords? Did their youth smash the windows of the offices from which they administered their hate and persecution of the Jews? Nothing of the sort! Not one person was hurt, not one house destroyed, not one act of vandalism, hate, revenge, or violence.

What did this group of liberated prisoners, this nation of freed slaves do with their newfound independence instead? Hashem that night:

ואתם לא תצאו איש מפתח ביתו עד בקר.

As for you, no man shall leave the entrance of his house until morning.

Instead of swarming the streets of Goshen, in their hour of freedom, they retreated to their homes, gathered in a *chabura* with their families, ate the korban Pesach and recited Hallel to Hashem.

Rabbi Soloveitchik described that this response is unique in the history of revolutions. Writes the Rav (Festival of Freedom, page 34):

Would we blame the Jews if they had engaged in a few acts of vandalism and even murder on the night of the fifteenth of Nissan, killing a few of the taskmasters who had thrown their babies into the Nile? Still, the Jews, at the command of God, said no. They defied themselves and refused to gratify a basic need of the human being, the need for revenge. But, by defeating themselves, they also won the greatest of all victories: they became free. This is exactly what we commemorate and celebrate on the night of the Seder.

Freedom is self-determination, the capacity to rise above our innate emotions or our instinctual and visceral response to the behavior and choices of others. Freedom is the ability to decide we won't let others define us and we won't let others own how we feel, but we, and we alone, will determine our feelings our response and our reaction to them.

The Jews of Egypt were entitled to be filled with anger and the desire for revenge. It would have been understandable had they been consumed by negative emotions directed at the Egyptians. But, rather than focus on toxic emotions that would weigh them down, fill them with hate and hold them back, they truly became free because they chose instead to focus on their newfound freedom, and to sing Hallel to Hashem Who had provided it.

Yosef Mendeleovich would have been entitled to see himself as a victim of the Russians and as an oppressed prisoner filled with bitterness. Instead, by holding an extraordinary Seder behind bars, he set himself free.

Pesach and the Seder night are a time for setting ourselves free from the self-imposed shackles that hold us back. Thank God, we have not experienced the torment of our ancestors in Egypt, nor have we sat in a Soviet prison. But many of us are imprisoned by the visceral emotions and reactions to the behavior of those around us. We make someone else our master by letting them control how we feel. We become enslaved by our hurt, our pain, our anger, our jealousy, or our desire for revenge.

On Pesach we let go, we put those feelings down and we recognize that to truly be free means to accept that we cannot control how those around us behave, but we can control how they make us feel.

Many of us continue to carry heavy baggage without even appreciating we have an option to put it down. "He really bad-mouthed me behind my back." "Can you believe they scheduled the Bar Mitzvah on the same day that I had already reserved for my daughter's wedding?" "She absolutely humiliated me at the committee meeting after I worked myself to the bone for this project." "I've been taking care of Dad for the past five years and not once did he visit for more than a couple of hours; not once did he ask if I needed any help!"

The longer you carry the baggage, the heavier and heavier it becomes. And here is the remarkable thing: the person you are disappointed in, the person who has hurt you, may not even know it. By carrying those feelings, you are not hurting them; you are only hurting and enslaving yourself.

There's a story told about the famous escape artist Harry Houdini. Houdini was famous for his ability to break out the most secure locks and cells. One time, a prison warden bragged that he had a cell that even the great Houdini couldn't unlock. Of course, Houdini accepted the challenge.

Houdini was placed in the cell, and he began trying to try to find a way out. He used every trick he knew and explored every inch of the cell but simply couldn't find a way out. Finally, out of sheer exhaustion and frustration, he leaned against the door, and it swung right open... The door had never been locked. Even the great Houdini struggled to open a bolt that wasn't locked to begin with.

In the course of human relationships and life, it is normal to feel sadness, fear, frustration, hurt, and even anger. Nevertheless, if we indulge these negative emotions for too long we eventually become trapped and imprisoned by them.

It is indeed natural, certainly understandable, and even forgivable for someone who suffered at the hands of others to submit to his or her visceral feelings for revenge. But when we act on these feelings we may find ourselves in a prison of our own making. Instead, we should walk through what we mistakenly perceive as a locked door that is simply waiting for us to push open.

Today, on Pesach, let's resolve to set ourselves free. Let go and, like our ancestors, choose to sing Hallel to Hashem for that which is good, rather than be driven by negativity and bad feelings, even if they are natural, understandable and legitimate. For only when we rise above our instincts and inclinations are we truly *bnei chorin*, are we truly free.

FREEDOM IS SPEECH

PESACH 2016/5776

When my oldest daughter was taking her driving test, it was very exciting. I took her to the Department of Motor Vehicles, where she was administered the driving test in my car. Admittedly, I was anxious, so I called Yocheved and was giving her the play-by-play as I watched the car make its way around the parking lot: “So far so good... she nailed the K-turn.” As she got close to where I was standing, she was being tested on her ability to pull into a parking spot.

I was nervous about how close she was to the line, so I was telling Yocheved, “oh no, she is so close to the line, this guy didn’t seem very friendly, I hope he isn’t a strict stickler. Oy, I am so worried for her.” I waited for a response, but Yocheved wasn’t answering. I hung up as I assumed the call had been dropped for some reason.

When they pulled up and got out, my daughter shot me a dirty look. When the tester walked away, I asked her what happened and she said, “you know when we got close to you, your cell phone transferred to the Bluetooth in the car and we both heard Mommy asking if I was going to fail because I was too close to the line and the tester didn’t seem like he was in a friendly mood.” *Baruch Hashem*, she passed with flying colors and has been doing errands for us ever since.

Perhaps, my story is one reason Chazal in Pirkei Avos discourage being too talkative.

אמור מעט ועשה הרבה. (א:טו) וכל המרבה דברים, מביא חטא. (א:יז)

Say little and do much. One who is verbose and loquacious brings mistakes.

This generally negative attitude towards verbosity makes Pesach a true anomaly.

Pesach is all about talking. The Gemara tells us that matzah is called *lechem oni*, since it is *lechem she'onim alav devarim harbeh*. There is a specific mitzvah of *maggid* and *sippur*, to tell the story. We are encouraged not to be succinct, but rather,

וכל המרבה לספר ביציאת מצרים הרי זה משובח.

It is praiseworthy to dwell on the story and tell it as fully as possible.

Why on Pesach do we have an entirely different attitude towards speech?

In “*Man’s Search for Meaning*,” Victor Frankl describes what happened after they were liberated:

The body has fewer inhibitions than the mind. It made good use of the new freedom from the first moment on. It began to eat ravenously, for hours and days even half the night. It is amazing what quantities one can eat. And when one of the prisoners was invited out by a friendly farmer in the neighborhood, he ate and ate and then drank coffee, which loosened his tongue, and he then began to talk, often for hours. The pressure which had been on his mind for years was released at last. Hearing him talk, one got the impression that he had to talk, that his desire to speak was irresistible. I have known people who have been under heavy pressure only for a short time to have similar reactions. Many days passed, until not only the tongue was loosened, but something within oneself as well; then feeling suddenly broke through the strange fetters which had restrained it.

Rav Aharon Soloveichik zt”l writes in “*Logic of the Heart, Logic of the Mind*”:

Upon delivery from the Egyptian bondage, the Israelites regained their self-expression. As long as they were subjected to Egyptian bondage, their self-expression was stifled and suppressed. But at the moment of Exodus, the Israelites regained their speech. Slaves cannot express or assert themselves properly. They cannot realize their potential. Only the free man is capable of doing so.

Long before Rav Soloveichik, the Arizal (*Pri Eitz Chaim, Shaar Mikrah Kodesh*) saw the connection between speech and freedom in the very name of the holiday. Pesach, he explained, comes from “*Peh Sach*” – a mouth converses. Part of affirming our freedom on Pesach is affirming the awesome responsibility that comes with freedom of speech.

Part of what makes America an exceptional country and a true democracy is the First Amendment which promises and protects free speech. Free speech means we can protest, advocate, object, and speak our minds. Even free speech, however, has restrictions. One may not use their words to incite or to libel another. One may not freely share obscenity or plagiarize someone else’s words.

Judaism, too, believes in freedom of speech and indeed sees the capacity to speak as one of the greatest expressions of freedom. American law tolerates speech which is negative, insensitive, and tactless. When Justice Louis Brandeis affirmed the freedom of speech in a Supreme Court decision in 1927, he acknowledged that such liberty made possible the “dissemination of noxious doctrine.”

Torah has no tolerance for noxious doctrine. Not only are we prohibited from speaking gossip, whether true or untrue, we are enjoined to be mindful of our choice of words. In contrast to noxious, we measure the acceptability of speech by whether or not it is *lashon nekiya*, clean, proper, concise and elevating. *Lashon hara* is prohibited as it hurts others, and profanity is forbidden because it degrades and hurts ourselves.

In his commentary the Tur, Rav Yaakov ben Asher provides a method to understand the Jewish calendar called “*At Bash*.” Aleph corresponds to Taf, Beis goes with Shin, and so on. He notes that the Aleph, which represents the first day of Pesach, is the same day of the week as the Taf, when Tisha B’Av occurs. The Beis, the second day of Pesach, is the same day of the week as when the Shin, for Shavous, occurs. The Gimmel, the third day of Pesach, is the same day of the week as when the Reish, Rosh Hashanah occurs. And so on.

[Though the Tur doesn’t go that far, if you keep going, the Zayin, which is the seventh day of Pesach, always falls out on the same day of the week as the Ayin. In contemporary times, it has been pointed out that Yom Ha’atzmaut,

the 5th of Iyar, is always the same day of the week as the seventh day of Pesach when we experienced the miracle of the splitting of the sea.]

Pesach and Tisha B'Av are always the same day of the week and share a close association. Some suggest that on Pesach we are acutely aware of the loss of the Beis HaMikdash and we remember how the evening is incomplete without the korban Pesach. This is why we eat an egg, the symbol of mourning and we remember how Hillel used to eat his sandwich when the Beis HaMikdash stood.

However, the Vilna Gaon was very opposed to seeing mourning included as any part of the regal Seder night. What, then, is the connection between Pesach and Tisha B'Av?

In his *HaLekach V'Halibuv*, Rav Avraham Schorr suggests that we open the Haggadah by reciting “*Kol dichfin yeisei v'yeichol*,” whoever is hungry come and eat, as a way of expressing *ahavas Yisroel*. *Kol*, anybody and everybody, is invited to join us for our Seder. Those to the right of me and to the left of me, those more religious and those less religious, those who agree with me and those who couldn't disagree more, those who like my candidate and those who support another one.

Kol – on Seder night, everyone is invited to break matzah with me. My friends are invited, the stranger is invited, and even my so-called enemies are invited. *Kol dichfin*, everybody. On Pesach, says Rav Schorr, we seek to be *mesakein*, to fix, the damage of Tisha B'Av. Destruction results from my abusing my power of speech. Redemption only occurs when I use my speech to build bridges, create connections, and repair the world.

Pesach is an exalted time. Celebrating freedom elevates us to a higher consciousness. Rav Kook (*Orot HaKodesh* vol. III) writes:

“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.”

On Seder night, the night of Pesach and of “*peh sach*,” we renew that promise to use the speech that comes with our newfound freedom to be kind to one another, to be thoughtful and considerate not only in what we say, but how we say it. The Torah doesn’t seek to stifle opinions or suppress perspectives. The Pesach celebration of freedom of speech is a celebration of our ability to think differently, speak differently and write our different opinions freely. What it doesn’t allow us to do is to ignore the impact of what we write and say on others and how they feel, of how our message and messaging triggers hurt or pain in others.

The *Kav HaYashar* writes, “One must recite the Hagaddah deliberately and joyfully. It must not be a burden in people’s eyes. In fact, the word *maggid* bears a similarity to the word *megged*, which means something sweet and pleasurable.”

Too many politicians and leaders are polluting the world with their “noxious doctrine,” and their caustic and bombastic tone. The Hagaddah reminds us that it is not just what we say, but the way that we say it. Say *maggid* with *megged*, with sweetness.

Before Pesach we cleaned our homes, on Pesach we clean our speech and remember that with freedom comes the responsibility for *lashon nekiyah*. We are mindful of what we say and the tone with which we say it and the impact it has on others, whether intentionally or unintentionally.

Pesach is a time to not only to be concerned with what goes into our mouth, but ever aware of what comes out of it.

ואתם לא תצאו איש מפתח ביתו

THE SWEETNESS OF THE BITTER

PESACH 2017/5777

For many, the marmor is not the most bitter thing at the Seder table. There are people who suffer from chronic negativity, who drag down those around them and make most interactions unpleasant, often confrontational, almost always negative.

There is lots of new research that has been coming out about how people who live “marmor” lives can work to cultivate and foster more positive emotions and attitudes. Barbara Fredrickson, a psychologist at the University of North Carolina, has developed a theory about accumulating what she calls, “micro-moments of positivity.” She demonstrated that more than a sudden burst of good fortune, it is repeated brief moments of positive feelings that can provide a buffer against stress and depression, and foster both physical and mental health.

To foster more positive thinking, she and her colleagues suggest people:

- Recognize a positive event each day.
- Savor that event and log it in a journal or tell someone about it.
- List a personal strength and note how you used it.
- Set an attainable goal and note your progress.
- Recognize and practice small acts of kindness daily.
- Practice mindfulness, focusing on the here and now rather than the past or future.

All their suggestions revolve around amassing positive experiences, thoughts and feelings, and having them overwhelm the negative. In other words, have so much charoses that you can't even taste the marmor. One almost didn't need the research to know we benefit mentally and physically from focusing on positive thoughts. However, the Halacha comes to a different conclusion, and with it, I believe a great insight into

transforming ourselves from negative to positive people. Yes, we dip the marror in charoses, but we don't overwhelm or overpower the taste of marror; we specifically eat it to invoke its bitterness.

Almost every Hagaddah is bothered by the presence of marror at the Seder. After all, it is a night of freedom, joy and celebration. It is one thing to be *maschil b'genus*, to start from the beginning of the story despite it being degrading or humiliating, but why harp on the negative? By the time we have completed *maggid*, the essential telling of the story, we have arrived at the miracle of our liberation from bondage to freedom. Why not celebrate with sweet treats, rather than with bitter marror?

Rabbi Sacks says we eat marror because “within freedom, we are commanded each year never to forget the taste of slavery, so that we should not take liberty for granted, nor forget those who are still afflicted.” The *Sfas Emes* says we eat the marror to remember that not only were the matzah and freedom from Hashem, but the suffering and bitterness, too, were part of His master plan and design. Others say we eat marror to remember that even after matzah, even after being set free, there are bitter moments in life and they, too, are part of our continued journey and story. Many more answers all include an explanation that the bitter taste serves to remind us about bitterness. This year, I saw an insight from Rav Kook on this question that not only transformed the mitzvah of marror for me, but my perspective on life as well.

Two weeks ago, something happened that I have never experienced before. Rabbis Moskowitz, Broide, Blumenthal, Gibber and I were all on the same flight coming back from AIPAC. The usual announcements and demonstrations were made, the flight attendants took their seats, the pilot declared we were ready to begin the flight, and, with the engine roaring, we headed down the runway. Just as we were about to achieve lift-off, the pilot pressed on the breaks and brought us to a halt.

He then announced to all of us startled passengers that as he was about to take off, an alert lit up and he decided to remain on the ground until he figured out the issue. He looked through the manual and couldn't figure it out so we headed back to the gate so an engineer could take a look. Soon after being at the gate, the pilot announced the engineer also couldn't

figure it out and so it would take a while and we were free to get off the plane if we wanted. On the way out I made a joke to the flight attendant that sometimes when my phone or laptop freezes up, I just restart them and everything is ok; for some reason, she wasn't amused.

After we stretched our legs in the terminal for a bit and davened Mincha, the flight crew announced the issue had been solved and we should re-board the plane. It turns out they couldn't figure out why the alert went off, but lo and behold, when they rebooted the plane, the alert was gone.

The false alert was annoying, but as we flew back on our rebooted plane I couldn't help but be reminded of how amazing it is that thousands of planes fly every hour without incident or, God-forbid, catastrophe. The beauty of an alarm or alert is that it proclaims something is unusual and out of the ordinary and reminds us that the rest of the time, everything is fine.

Rav Kook explains that we don't eat the marror to invoke bitterness; we eat it to affirm our freedom. A slave whose entire life is bitter and only has access to bitter foods no longer tastes anything as bitter. Bitter simply becomes their default taste, their new normal. When we bite into something and an alert goes off, and we recoil by its bitterness, it is a sign that we are in fact so incredibly fortunate because it means we are not accustomed to that taste, we have not adapted to that as our reality. Says Rav Kook, we eat the marror not to invoke bitter times or experiences, but the opposite. The fact that we can taste something as bitter is an affirmation of how sweet our lives generally are.

Perhaps we can transform ourselves from negative to more positive people not by overwhelming the negative with positive, but by embracing the negative. We can recognize that if what we look at as our negative is our biggest negative, we in fact have very positive lives. Of course, I am not referring to out-of-the-ordinary, serious negative, deeply painful and devastating situations that understandably justify pain, negativity and sadness.

But, I think that just as we can be transformed with micro-moments of ordinary positivity, most negative people suffer from the composite or compounding of micro-moments of ordinary negativity. Instead of

harping on the small negatives and frustration – someone said something hurtful, they ran out of the Pesach product I needed, the traffic made me late, the service at the restaurant was poor – we should stop and remind ourselves that if these are my biggest problems, how much is going right and well in my life. If this is my marmor, my bitterness, how sweet is my life.

There is a phenomenon called “first-world problems,” referring to when people complain about problems as if they are devastating when they are challenges that those living in a third-world country would give anything to have. These are actual examples of major challenges people have posted online:

- My phone charger won't reach my bed
- My house is so big I need two wireless routers.
- My mint gum makes my ice water taste too cold
- I have to write a check to my maid but can't remember her last name.
- The wi-fi on the plane is so slow
- My closets are so stuffed, I can't find my favorite outfit.
- I took such a long shower this morning that the hot water ran out.
- All the dishes in the dishwasher are dirty, so I had to eat my waffles off a Tupperware lid.
- My Starbucks latte came with ONE espresso shot instead of the TWO I asked for!

My friends, first-world problems are not problems. They may be micro-moments of frustration, but they are not problems. If they are an overwhelming problem for you, generating negativity and bitterness, you are quite lucky to not have any real problems, because if you did, you wouldn't see the length of your phone cord or the speed of wi-fi as a crisis.

The great coach Lou Holtz once said, “Life is 10% what happens to you and 90% how you respond to it.” The moments of small pain and inconsequential frustration not only alert us that something is momentarily wrong, but they are a very healthy reminder about how much is right.

We are commanded to eat marmor to remember that the romaine lettuce or grated horseradish should be the only bitter and negative thing at our table. If we can taste bitter, we in fact have sweet lives for which we should be not only profoundly grateful, but eternally positive people.

THE TYRANNY OF CHOICE

PESACH 2018/5778

Supermarkets on average carry over 42,000 products; I think salad dressings make up half of them alone. Did you know there are 37 kinds of ketchup? The average American household receives over 206 channels of Television. There are over 10,000 kinds of toilet brushes available on Amazon. There are more than 2.2 million apps to choose from in Apple's app store, and 2.8 million in the Android store.

We are living in the age of choices, of autonomy. For a long time, the world believed that the more choices, the greater the freedom and, by extension, the greater the happiness and meaning. However, with the explosion of options in every realm of our lives, it turns out limitless possibility doesn't bring greater happiness or freedom; it actually does exactly the opposite.

הללו עבדי ה' הללו את שם ה'.

We began Hallel this morning by declaring ourselves servants of Hashem. On these words, Chazal (Midrash Tehillim 113:1) comment, ולא עבדי, פרעה, we are servants of Hashem and not slaves to Pharaoh. Almost 3,000 years ago last night, at a moment before midnight, we were still in bondage, slaves to Pharaoh and Egypt. At midnight, we became slaves to Hashem, and have been ever since.

The question I have for you this morning is very simple. Where does freedom come in? If we went from slaves of Pharaoh to slaves of Hashem, from *avdei Pharaoh* to *avdei Hashem*, when exactly were we free? All we did was exchange one taskmaster for another, one set of rules and demands for another. Instead of Pharaoh, now it is Hashem telling us what we can eat, what we can say, what we can look at, how to spend our time. Hashem and Torah have expectations from us from when we wake up until we fall

asleep. On this holiday celebrating our freedom, one cannot help but ask, are we really free?

In his book, *The Paradox of Choice*, Dr. Barry Schwartz, professor of social theory at Swarthmore College, writes,

“If we’re rational, social scientists tell us, added options can only make us better off as a society. This view is logically compelling, but empirically it isn’t true.”

The standard thinking is that choice is good for us, that it confers on us freedom, personal responsibility, self-determination, autonomy and lots of other things. As it turns out, that just isn’t true. Schwartz writes,

“As the number of options increases, the costs, in time and effort, of gathering the information needed to make a good choice also increase, the level of certainty people have about their choice decreases. And the anticipation that they will regret their choice increases.”

In a TED talk, Schwartz describes his experience buying a new pair of jeans.

“I wear jeans almost all the time. There was a time when jeans came in one flavor, and you bought them, and they fit terribly, they were incredibly uncomfortable, if you wore them and washed them enough times, they started to feel OK. I went to replace my jeans after years of wearing these old ones, and I said, “I want a pair of jeans. Here’s my size.” And the shopkeeper said, “Do you want slim fit, easy fit, relaxed fit? You want button fly or zipper fly? You want stonewashed or acid-washed? Do you want them distressed? You want boot cut, tapered, blah blah.” On and on he went. My jaw dropped. And after I recovered, I said, “I want the kind that used to be the only kind.”

“I had no idea what that was, so I spent an hour trying on all these darned jeans, and I walked out of the store – truth! – with the best-fitting jeans I had ever had. I did better. All this choice made it possible for me to do better. But – I felt worse. Why? I wrote a whole book to try to explain this to myself. The reason I felt worse is that, with all of these options available, my expectations about

how good a pair of jeans should be went up. I had very low, no particular expectations when they only came in one flavor. When they came in 100 flavors, come on, one of them should've been perfect. And what I got was good, but it wasn't perfect. And so I compared what I got to what I expected, and what I got was disappointing in comparison to what I expected. Adding options to people's lives can't help but increase the expectations people have about how good those options will be. And what that's going to produce is less satisfaction with results, even when they're good results. Nobody in the world of marketing knows this."

Too many choices creates FOMO, the "fear of missing out" on the option we didn't take. It causes regret, self-blame and, ironically, leaves us less satisfied because of what he calls our "escalation of expectations."

Why am I sharing this with you this morning? I found it fascinating that Dr. Schwartz refers to this growing phenomenon as "The Tyranny of Choice." Rather than free us, having too many choices enslaves us. Many commentators point out that the word *Mitzrayim* comes from the word *meitzar*, a narrow boundary or border that limits us. Today is not just about freedom from an external oppressor who physically enslaves us, but it is about attaining freedom from the internal, self-imposed shackles that hold us back. Schwartz's research shows us that paradoxically, when we have no rules or regulations guiding our lives, when we free ourselves from a system of law or expectations and give ourselves limitless options, we are in fact more constricted and more enslaved to the tyranny choice.

Schwartz has a recommendation to escape living under the tyranny of choice. Are you ready? He says choose when to choose. Create a finite list of restaurants you will go to and pledge not to shop at more than two stores for clothing so you don't drive yourself crazy. Limit your options of where you can eat, where you will go, what you will buy, and you will be happier. Sound familiar?

The Mishna in Avos (6:2) teaches:

וְהַמְכַתֵּב מִכְתָּב אֱלֹקִים הוּא הָרוּת עַל הַלְחָת, אֶל תִּקְרָא הָרוּת אֶלָּא הָרוּת,
שְׂאִין לָךְ בֶּן חוּרִין אֶלָּא מִי שְׁעוּסֵק בְּתַלְמוּד תּוֹרָה.

And the writing was the writing of God, graven upon the tablets," do not read "graven" (charus) but rather "freedom" (cherus), for there is no free man except one that involves himself in Torah learning.

With Schwartz's research, I think we can easily understand how going from *avdei Pharaoh* to *avdei Hashem* truly liberates us. A life of faith and of commitment to Torah values, Jewish, law and Jewish living is the manifestation of true freedom. Instead of being owned by, and enslaved to, the world of endless possibility and choice, we are provided a prescription for happiness and meaning. We begin each day not trapped by the tyranny of choice, but by the freedom of knowing what we have to do, when we have to do it, and what is expected of us as long as we can exhibit self-control and discipline.

The limited options that come with being Shomer Shabbos and keeping kosher don't restrict us, they set us free and improve our quality of life. They take us out of *Mitzrayim*, a place of torture and FOMO, to a life and lifestyle filled with purpose, meaning, and joy. Being a Torah-Jew eliminates so many of the choices and decisions that supposedly free people enjoy, while in fact all those choices and decisions deplete them of time and energy and deprive them of happiness.

In an interview while he was still in office, President Obama shared, "You also need to remove from your life the day-to-day problems that absorb most people for meaningful parts of their day. You'll see I wear only gray or blue suits. I'm trying to pare down decisions. I don't want to make decisions about what I'm eating or wearing. Because I have too many other decisions to make."

Being an *eved Hashem* and eliminating or limiting the decisions we have autonomy to make each day doesn't cause us to forfeit freedom; it helps us acquire it and focus our attention, energy, and resources on meaningful activities and experiences. The rest of the world are still slaves to Pharaoh, trapped by options, choices and FOMO, owned by the marketing industry, by public opinion, by fear and anxiety about what will be. We, by contrast, by becoming exclusively *avadim* to Hashem, have set ourselves free. We have no reason to fear, we have only to care about His opinion of

us, we have His expectations and guidelines to help limit our options and save our capacity to choose for things that truly matter.

And that is why we celebrate our freedom and independence not with fireworks, a sale or a barbecue, but with Seder, order. When college students complete the semester and come down to Florida for spring break, they seek no accountability, no rules, no limits and they think it sets them free. When we celebrate in spring to break free, we do so with a night called *Leil HaSeder*, a night of order and rules.

In fact, we begin the majestic meal by literally singing our fifteen-step agenda for the evening. We commit to go through each part, to drink the prescribed amount of wine, to eat the requisite measures of matzah and marror, to recite the specific texts of the Haggadah. We can't begin the Seder before a certain time and we must finish eating by a set time. Our night of emancipation is all about order, rules and regulations because our commitment and capacity to observe rules are what set us free.

I close with the words of Rabbi Solovietchik (in "Festival of Freedom"), whose 25th *yahrzeit* we will observe this week:

If we had been taken out of Egypt without accepting His code, without surrendering to His authority, without reaching a covenant with Him, without obligating ourselves to surrender freedom in order to gain a higher form of freedom – then we would have been in bondage again. Instead of bondage to Pharaoh, it would have been bondage to our own fears, phobias, to nature, to society, to slogans. On Pesach, we celebrate our true freedom.

This Yom Tov, my friends, let's fully embrace our role as genuine *avdei Hashem*, let's stop being *avdei Pharaoh* and finally set ourselves free from the tyranny of choice.

ואתם לא תצאו איש מפתח ביתו

DAYEINU: WHAT WE HAVE IS ENOUGH

PESACH 2019/5779

There is no doubt that Yiddish has exerted an influence on English. There are expressions in English that seem to have been around for a long time but in reality are relatively modern and originated in Yiddish. For example, “I need something like I need a hole in the head” only began in the early 1950’s. It is a direct translation of the Yiddish expression, “*tsu darfn vi a loch in kop.*” “OK by me” is also relatively recent and comes from Yiddish.

Another example: The expression “enough already” is constructed very poorly using the rules of English grammar. There’s a good reason for that, since it, too, comes from the Yiddish and is just a translation of the phrase “*genug shoyrn.*”

I want to suggest to you this morning that *genug shoyrn* is not just an expression, it is one of the most important themes of Pesach, one that can in fact set us free.

The Rambam does not have Dayeinu in his Hagaddah, and even Rav Sa’adia Gaon, whose Hagaddah serves essentially as the basis for ours, only includes Dayeinu as an addendum at the end of the Haggadah among those songs that only those who can hold their wine sing.

But for us, it is almost impossible to imagine the Seder night without the singing of Dayeinu. Everyone from young children to octogenarians look forward to this moment during the Seder, not only because it indicates we are finally coming close to the meal, but because it is a centerpiece of the

Hagaddah and a highlight of the Seder experience.

Dayeinu's message is simple; *genug shoyn*. Enough already! Enough is enough. On this evening during our journey from slavery to liberty, we achieve our very freedom by saying Dayeinu, *genug shoyn*, we have enough, we experienced enough, we are satisfied enough.

Dayeinu. It is enough to enjoy this moment, to be present in this experience, to savor this gift and to cherish this opportunity without having to already look forward or crave the next one. Of course, each stage and each stanza is incomplete and imperfect, but nevertheless, *dayeinu*—each is still enough. Enough to say thank you and even enough to make us happy.

Like the stanzas of Dayeinu, our lives are often incomplete, they are imperfect. If we focus on what is missing, what we don't yet have or may never have, we become debilitated and deprived of happiness. But, if we find the capacity to sing Dayeinu, to focus on what is and not what isn't, to enjoy what we have and not long for what we don't, we set ourselves free to find happiness.

Chazal (Koheles Rabbah 1:34) highlight a basic human quality: *Mi she'yesh lo mana, rotzeh masayim*, he who has one hundred desires two hundred. Ambition, aspiration, and determination are admirable qualities; they push us towards greatness. But they come with a great cost. An insatiable appetite for more, a voracious need for the latest, being unsatisfied without the newest and the best, robs us of serenity, denies us happiness, and often distracts us from what matters the most.

We live with unprecedented freedoms: freedom to practice our religion, freedom of speech, freedom to pursue happiness. And yet, with all this freedom, our generation remains enslaved. We are slaves to "more." We are dominated by needs. Our need for more money, need for more time, need for more things, need for the latest things, need for a better seat, need for a better room, need for more power, need for more friends, need to have the last word, even our need to be needed.

Our needs, wants, and lack of contentment become our taskmasters. They occupy space in our head and in our hearts, they hijack our thoughts, they

dictate to us how to feel and they command us to say things and do things that are self-destructive.

On Pesach we set ourselves free by singing Dayeinu, by proclaiming *genug shoyen*, enough. We indeed have enough. We are satisfied with our things. We are happy with our friends. We will make the most with our time. Dayeinu, *genug*. We are happy to pause with what we have and say thank you.

Moreover, we are so firm in our belief that we have enough that we are even willing to share. We begin the Seder with an apparently disingenuous invitation: *kol dichfin*... whoever is hungry, come and eat. Our door is locked, our windows are closed, and here we are making this generous offer. Why? Is it not blatantly an artificial invitation? With a different perspective, we can suggest that this statement is not directed at others, it is a statement about and directed to ourselves. We begin the night of redemption by proclaiming we own our things, they don't own us, and therefore we are happy to share them. We recognize that by giving others we will have more, not less. We start the night by stating that we aren't enslaved by the need to hold on to what we have, we aren't imprisoned by the fear that we won't have enough.

Dayeinu is not just a song, it is a way we emulate Hashem. The Midrash describes that when He created the world, the elements didn't want to observe limits and each tried to overstep its bounds and dominate the world. Water wanted to swamp the earth, fire wanted to consume, and the land wanted to encroach on the sea. Each only wanted to expand and Hashem turned to them and said *dai* – enough! That is why one of His great names is Shad-ai, meaning *mi she'amar l'olam dai*, Who told the world *genug shoyen*, enough already, you each have enough, *dai*.

Hashem showed us this quality in another context. When Hashem solicited for the Mishkan, the people brought, and they brought again, and then they gave even more. Ultimately, Moshe had to stop the campaign, as they had enough:

וְהַמְלָאכָה הָיְתָה דַּיִם לְכָל־הַמְלָאכָה לַעֲשׂוֹת אֹתָהּ וְהוֹתֵר:

For the stuff they had was sufficient for all the work to make it, and it was too much."

Hashem didn't want too much; He didn't want more. *Dayam, dai*, it was enough. The Mishkan was built not out of more, but the building blocks of holiness are made out of "enough."

Living with limits, finding happiness within what we have, maintain the capacity to say "enough" is liberating, empowering, and enriching. When we always want more, we never pause to enjoy what we have, we forfeit what is in the pursuit of what is next. Tal Ben-Shahar, the Harvard expert on happiness, says, "When you appreciate the good, the good appreciates."

Hashem told the world *dai*, enough, Moshe told the people *dayam*, we have enough and Pesach tells us *dayeinu*, enough. An attitude of *dayeinu* is not for Hashem or for anyone else. It is for ourselves, it sets us free: free to feel, free to think, free to dedicate our time not to the pursuit of more, but to the pursuit of that which is more important, more meaningful, even more valuable.

Over this Yom Tov, take a few moments to reflect. Look around your table, take stock of your life and don't notice what isn't, what is missing, what you wish was there. Instead, sing *Dayeinu*, say *genug shoyen* and say "enough." These people are enough. These things are enough. This life, no matter how impaired or imperfect, is enough. This Pesach, say, "I have enough" and set yourself free.

