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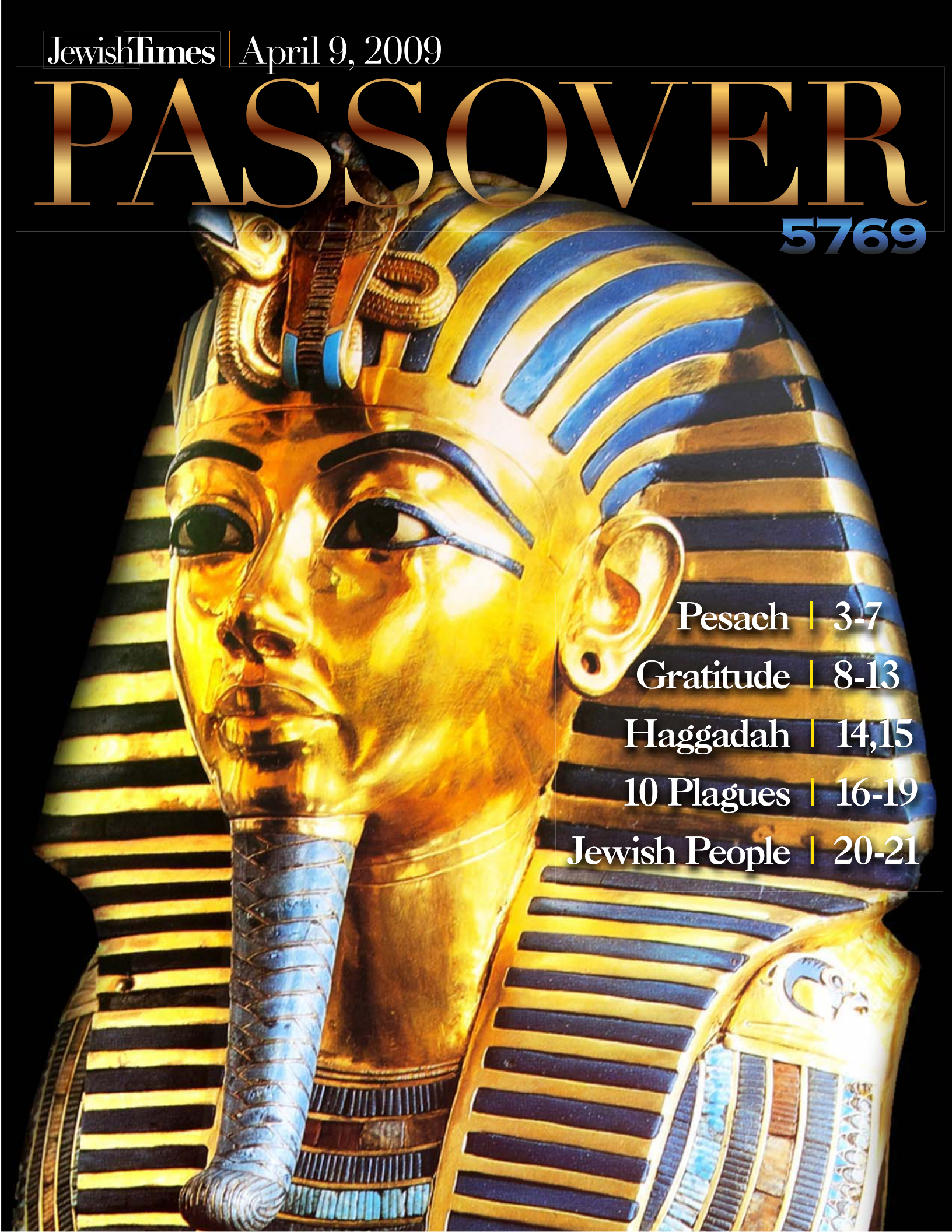
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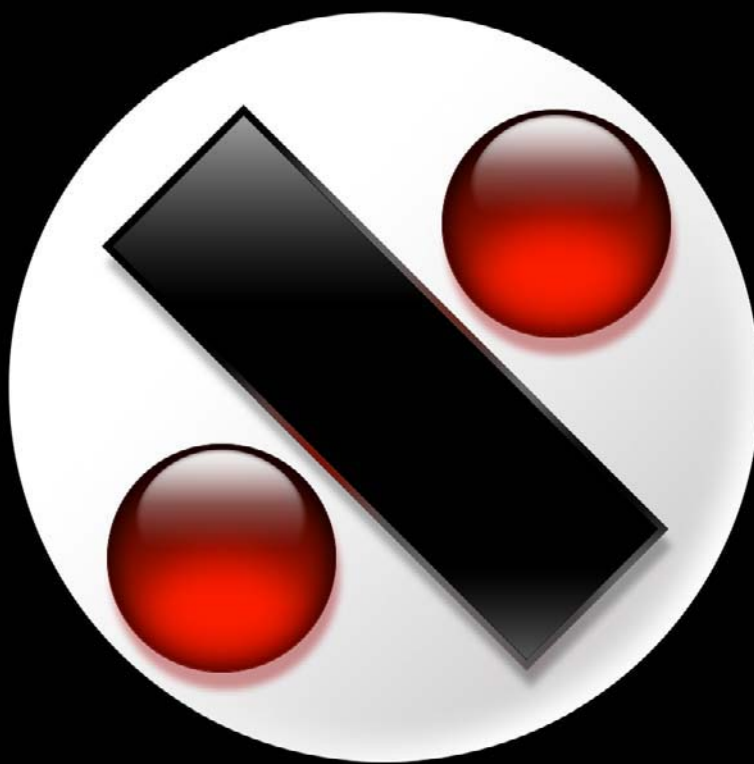
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Rebbe Yehudah's Mnemonic of the Ten Plagues

The following are the ten plagues that the Holy One Blessed Be He brought upon the Egyptians in Egypt: Dam (Blood), Tzfardeah (Frogs), Kinim (Lice), Arov (Wild Beasts), Dever (Pestilence), Sh'chin (Boils), Barad (Hail), Arbeh (Locusts), Choshech (Darkness), Macat Bechorot (The Plague of the Firstborn). Rebbe Yehudah expressed them through their initials – D'TzACh, ADaSh, BeAChaB. (Haggadah of Pesach)

The redemption from Egypt was preceded by ten plagues. The Pesach Haggadah lists these plagues. Then the Haggadah tells us that the Sage Rebbe Yehudah created a three-word mnemonic from the initials of the ten plagues. This mnemonic cannot be accurately transliterated from Hebrew to English. This is because some Hebrew letters have alternate pronunciations. In some instances a letter is pronounced in one manner in as part of the Hebrew name for the

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plague and in another manner in the mnemonic for the ten plagues.

The commentaries discuss the purpose of this mnemonic. We usually employ such devices in order to commit complicated or intricate material to memory. This is not the likely explanation of Rebbe Yehudah's device. Ten plagues are not terribly difficult to memorize. What was Rebbe Yehudah's objective in creating this mnemonic?

There are various approaches to answering this question. Many of these Sages note that the plagues are recorded in Sefer Tehillim in a somewhat altered order.[1] This might create some confusion as to their actual sequence of occurrence. Rebbe Yehudah wished to indicate that the actual sequence of occurrence is found in the Torah. He created a mnemonic that represents the plagues in the order that they occur in the Torah's narrative.[2]

This explanation implies that the order in which the plagues occurred was significant. In other words, there was a specific reason for the plagues to occur in this sequence and in no other. The Midrash seems to confirm this assumption. The Midrash comments that the names of the plagues were carved onto Moshe's staff. These names were arranged in the order of their occurrence. This seems to confirm the importance of the order.[3]

Why did the plagues occur in a specific sequence? Again, the commentaries offer a variety of responses. One well-known explanation is offered by the Midrash. The Midrash explains that the order corresponds to the strategy that would be followed by a king putting down a rebellion. First, the king places a siege around the rebellious city. He cuts off the water supply. Similarly, Hashem turned the water in Egypt into blood. Then, the king commands his troops to sound their trumpets. This is an attempt to confuse and discourage the rebels. The frogs fulfilled this function. Their constant croaking unnerved the Egyptians. The Midrash continues to delineate the similarities between the sequence of the plagues and the strategy of the king.[4]

Other commentaries offer a completely different explanation of Rebbe Yehudah's mnemonic. They explain that Rebbe Yehudah was not merely attempting to indicate the sequence of the plagues. Instead, his three-word mnemonic divides the plagues into three distinct groups. What are these three groups? The first three plagues were plagues of the earth or water. The water was turned to blood. Then, an infestation of frogs was generated from the water. Next, the dust of the earth turned to lice.

The next group is harder to characterize. These seem to be plagues that emerge from the general surroundings. The first of these was an infestation of wild beasts. These animals emerged from the surrounding wilderness. Pestilence and boils also emerged from the surrounding environment.

The final group of plagues descended from the heavens. These were the plagues of Hail, Locusts and Darkness. Appended to this last group is the Plague of the Firstborn. This plague is not truly a member of this group. However, it is attached to the last group in order to preserve the three-word mnemonic.[5]

There is a basic difference between these two approaches to explaining Rebbe Yehudah's mnemonic. In order to better understand this dispute, it will help to consider a pasuk in the Torah. Hashem sends Moshe to Paroh to warn him of the coming plague of Hail. Moshe makes an interesting statement. He tells Paroh that Hashem could immediately end the bondage of Bnai Yisrael in Egypt. He could bring a plague of pestilence upon Egypt that would obliterate the Egyptians. However, Hashem does not choose to do this. Instead, it is His will to extend His conflict with Paroh. Why does Hashem wish to prolong the struggle? Moshe explains that Hashem wishes to demonstrate and publicize His omnipotence.[6]

What is Moshe's message to Paroh? Moshe is explaining that Hashem could destroy Paroh and his nation immediately. Why is Hashem not acting more forcibly? Moshe explains that this part of Hashem's will to demonstrate His omnipotence.

How did the plagues illustrate Hashem's omnipotence? This demonstration required two elements. First, the plagues could not be mistaken for a natural set of catastrophes. Second, they demonstrated the extent of Hashem's control over all elements of the environment. The plagues included both of these elements. They followed a plan. This is the message of the Midrash. The plagues followed the strategy of a king suppressing a rebellion. The expression of this strategy in the sequence of plagues demonstrated the element of design. Clearly, these plagues were not a series of natural catastrophes.

The plagues also affected every element of the environment. The first three plagues originated in the earth and water. The second set of three was produced by the general surroundings. The last three descended from the heavens. This demonstrated Hashem's control over every element of the environments.

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We can now understand the dispute between the commentaries. Which of these elements is represented by Rebbe Yehudah's mnemonic? According to the first interpretation, the mnemonic represents the element of design in the plagues. According to the second interpretation, the mnemonic communicates Hashem's control over the various elements of the environment that was illustrated by the plagues.

Discussion of the Pesach Sacrifice, Matzah and Marror

Raban Gamliel said, "Anyone that does not discuss these three things does not fulfill one's obligation. And these are the things: the Pesach sacrifice, Matzah, and Marror." (Haggadah of Pesach)

Raban Gamliel explains that at the Seder we are obligated to discuss the various mitzvot that are performed during the evening. He comments that any person who does not discuss the mitzvot of the Pesach sacrifice, Matzah, and Marror does not fulfill one's obligation. This statement is included in the Pesach Haggadah. The author derived the statement from the mishne of Tractate Pesachim.

Raban Gamliel's statement is somewhat mysterious. He asserts that it is absolutely necessary to discuss the various mitzvot performed on the Seder night. One's obligation cannot be fulfilled without this discussion. However, he does not identify the specific obligation to which he refers. Exactly, which mitzvah is fulfilled with this discussion or if this discussion is omitted, which commandment is incompletely performed?

Maimonides seems to provide an answer to this question. In his Mishne Torah, he places Raban Gamliel's law in the seventh chapter that deals exclusively with the laws Sipur Yetziat Mitzrayim – retelling the account of our redemption from Egypt. The placement of Raban Gamliel's requirement in this chapter indicates that it is essential to the mitzvah of Tzipur. One does not fulfill the obligation to recount the events of our redemption without a discussion of the mitzvot of Pesach, Matzah, and Marror. In other words, the redemption must be described through a discussion of the significance of the Pesach sacrifice, Matzah, and Marror.

The Tosefot offer a different perspective on Raban Gamliel's law. In order to discuss this perspective, a brief introduction is needed. The Talmud provides a source for Raban Gamliel's law. We are obligated to offer a Pesach sacrifice each year. We cannot perform this commandment in our age. However, during the

Temple Period, this commandment was performed. The Torah tells us that our children will ask for an explanation of this sacrifice. We are to respond by providing an account of the offering of the first Pesach sacrifice in Egypt. Through the merit of offering that sacrifice, the families of Bnai Yisrael were spared from the final plague – the plague of the Death of the Firstborn. In other words, the Torah clearly states that the Pesach sacrifice must be accompanied by discussion.

Tosefot ask an interesting question. Raban Gamliel asserts that we must discuss the Pesach sacrifice, Matzah, and Marror. The Talmud provides a source for the obligation to discuss the Pesach sacrifice. However, Raban Gamliel insists that we must also discuss Matzah and Marror. What is the source for the obligation to discuss these two mitzvot?

Tosefot answer that the Torah does not explicitly state that we are obligated to discuss Matzah and Marror. However, the Torah does equate Matzah and Marror to the Pesach sacrifice. Tosefot apparently refer to the injunction to eat the Pesach with Matzah and Marror. Through the Torah's equation of the Pesach sacrifice, Matzah, and Marror, Raban Gamliel derives the obligation to discuss Matzah and Marror in addition to the Pesach sacrifice.[7]

Let us analyze Tosefot's reasoning more carefully. Tosefot explain that the Torah equates the mitzvot of the Pesach sacrifice, Matzah, and Marror. They reason that because of this equation a requirement that is fundamental to the Pesach sacrifice is also essential to the mitzvot of Matzah and Marror. We are required to discuss the Pesach sacrifice. Therefore, discussion is also essential to properly perform the mitzvot of Matzah and Marror. It is clear from Tosefot's reasoning that they regard the requirement for discussion as fundamental to the proper performance of the mitzvah of the Pesach sacrifice. The mitzvot of Matzah and Marror are associated with the commandment of the Pesach. Therefore, discussion of these mitzvot is also essential for their proper performance.

This analysis indicates that Tosefot disagree with Maimonides. According to Maimonides, the discussion of the Pesach sacrifice, Matzah, and Marror is part of the commandment of Sipur. Tosefot seem to regard the discussion of the Pesach sacrifice as an aspect of the commandment to offer the Pesach. They associate the obligation to discuss the mitzvot of Matzah and Marror to these mitzvot. In other words, these three commandments – the Pesach sacrifice, Matzah, and Marror – are only performed in their entirety when they are accompanied by discussion of their significance.

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The Dual Symbolism of Matzah

You shall not eat leaven with it; for seven days you shall eat with it matzot, the bread of affliction, for in haste you went out of the land of Egypt, so that you shall remember the day when you went out of the land of Egypt all the days of your life. (Devarim 16:3)

One of the mitzvot of Pesach is the prohibition against eating leavened bread. We eat matzah in place of leavened bread. The first night of Pesach we are obligated to eat matzah. The remaining days of the festival, we are not obligated to eat matzah, but we are prohibited from eating chametz – leavened products.

In the above passage, the Torah explains that the matzah recalls the bread eaten during bondage. How does the matzah recall the bread eaten during bondage? Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno explains that while in bondage, the Jews were forced to constantly labor for their Egyptian masters. The Egyptians would not provide their Jewish slaves with the time required to mix the dough for their bread and then allow it to rise. Instead, once the dough was mixed, the Jews were forced to immediately bake the bread. The resulting loaves had the unleavened form of matzah.[8]

And one takes the middle matzah and breaks into two parts ... and he lifts the Seder plate and recites, "This is the bread of affliction," until "How is this night different." (Shulchan Aruch 473:6)

Another fundamental commandment performed on Pesach is Sipur Yetziat Mitzrayim – the recounting of our redemption from Egypt. This mitzvah is fulfilled through the Pesach Seder. One of the early steps in the Seder is Yachatz – breaking the middle matzah from among the three matzot that are before the person leading the Seder. Shulchan Aruch explains this process. The middle matzah is broken and half is

returned to the Seder plate. The plate is then lifted and the reader recites: "This is the bread of affliction which our fathers ate in Egypt." In other words, the reader explains that the broken matzah recalls the bread that the Jews ate during their bondage in Egypt. The identification of matzah with the affliction in Egypt is based upon our passage in which the Torah refers to the matzah as "bread of affliction."

They baked the dough that they had taken out of Egypt as unleavened cakes, for it had not leavened, for they were driven out of Egypt, and they could not tarry, and also, they had not made provisions for themselves. (Shemot 12:39)

In the above passage, the Torah explains that Bnai Yisrael left Egypt in tremendous haste. They did not have the opportunity to prepare adequately for their journey. They could not allow their dough to mix. Instead, they mixed the dough and immediately baked it. The product was unleavened cakes.

Based on this passage, the Talmud explains the significance of the matzah. Raban Gamliel explains that the matzah recalls our redemption. He explains that at the Seder we are required to explain that the matzah we will eat is intended to remind us of the haste with which our ancestors left Egypt.[9] His comments are based upon our passage in the Torah. The comments of Raban Gamliel are incorporated into the Seder and read prior to fulfilling the commandment to eat matzah.

In short, the Torah suggests two alternative explanations for matzah. In Sefer Devarim, the Torah explains that matzah recalls our affliction in Egypt. In Sefer Shemot, the Torah suggests that matzah recalls that haste of our redemption from Egypt.

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Paradoxically, both of these messages are associated with matzah during the course of the Seder. At the opening of the Seder, we declare that the matzah recalls our bondage. Later, before eating the matzah, we read Raban Gamliel's interpretation of the significance of matzah. In this interpretation, the matzah is associated with the redemption from bondage. In other words, the process of sipur requires that we recall both our bondage and our redemption. Both of these phenomena are symbolized by the matzah.

We can easily understand the importance of recalling our bondage and our redemption. The full meaning and significance of our redemption can be fully appreciated when we remember the bondage from which we were redeemed. However, it is odd and paradoxical that the same object – matzah – is used to symbolize both of these elements of our experience in Egypt. Why did the Torah not create two separate objects – each designed to recall one of the two elements?

Sforno's comments also address this issue. He explains that the Torah intends to communicate a message. During their bondage in Egypt, the Jews were oppressed by their masters. The oppression of Bnai Yisrael was epitomized by the bread they were forced to eat. The Egyptians would not even afford their Jewish slaves the time to bake their bread properly. They pressured the Jews to hurriedly prepare and bake their bread. The result was unleavened matzah. At the moment of redemption, the demoralized Egyptians urged the Jews to hurry. Again, the bread that the Jews baked epitomized the urgency of the Egyptians. But this urgency was not motivated by their desire to oppress the Jews. Instead, their urgency was motivated by panic. They could not endure another moment of suffering![10]

Sforno is explaining that the Egyptians demonstrated urgency in two situations. In both instances, their urgency was expressed in a similar behavior. They hastened Bnai Yisrael to prepare their bread without allowing their dough to rise. But in the first instance – during their oppression of the Jews – this urgency was an expression of oppression. In the second instance – at the moment of redemption – this urgency expressed the complete humiliation and defeat of the Egyptians.

Sforno's comments indicate that the urgency of the Egyptians in these two different situations in some manner communicates a fundamental message regarding the redemption. What is this message?

Apparently, the miracle of the redemption from Egypt is not merely that a nation of slaves was liberated from the oppression of the most powerful nation in the civilized world. The miracle can only be fully appreciated if we recognize the total and sudden reversal that Bnai Yisrael and the Egyptians experienced. Bnai Yisrael did not gradually achieve liberation from oppression and freedom through a prolonged struggle, or as the result of the gradual decline of power and authority of their masters. Instead, in a few months, the

Jewish people emerged from a condition of abject subjugation and tyranny into a state of total freedom. Their masters – who once would not allow them a few moments to properly prepare their bread – were reduced to trembling petitioners. They begged their former slaves to spare them and to leave posthaste to end their suffering! It is this total and abrupt reversal that captures the gravity and magnitude of the miracle of the redemption.

Still, why is matzah used to symbolize both the severity of the oppression and the totality of the Egyptians' demise? Sforno is answering this question. An illustration will help explain this point. It is difficult to appreciate the speed of a fastball thrown by an accomplished pitcher. We lack a basis for comparison. But if we want to truly appreciate the talent and skills of this pitcher, we must create a contrast. We can do this by placing on a single-viewing screen a video of two pitches being thrown. One is the fastball of the professional and the other is the best effort of an accomplished amateur. On the split screen, we can see the rate of speed both pitches progress towards the batter. Now, we can more fully comprehend the remarkable speed of the professional's pitch.

According to Sforno, the full miracle of the redemption can only be appreciated by recognizing the totality and abruptness of the reversal experienced by Bnai Yisrael and the Egyptians. The reversal only becomes clear when the severity of the oppression is contrasted with the panic of the Egyptians at the moment of redemption. But, like the two pitches in our illustration, the contrast between the oppression and the redemption can only be fully appreciated when they are viewed side-by-side, on a "split screen." The matzah provides this "split screen." A single object – the matzah – captures and communicates the degree of oppression and the total demise of the Egyptians. In matzah, the two experiences are communicated side-by-side. This dual symbolism within a single object eloquently communicates to us the totality and suddenness of the redemption, and thereby, the extent of the miracle of the redemption. ■

[1] Sefer Tehillim, Chapters 78 and 105.

[2] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on the Hagaddah of Pesach.

[3] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on the Hagaddah of Pesach.

[4] Midrash Tanchuma, Parsaht Bo, Chapter 4.

[5] Rabbaynu Shemuel ben Meir (Rashbam), Commentary on the Hagaddah.

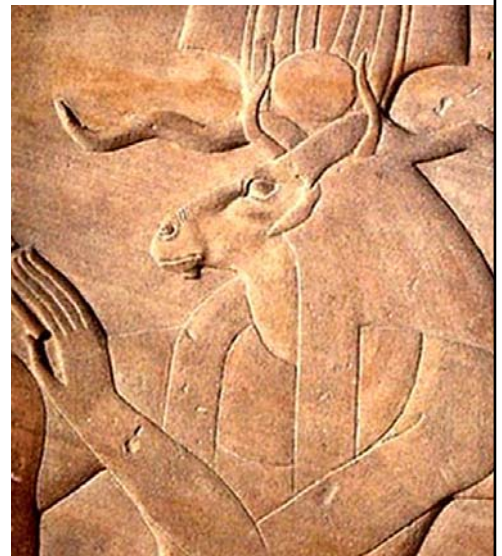
[6] Sefer Shemot, 9:15-16.

[7] Tosefot, Mesechet Pesachim 116a.

[8] Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno, Commentary on Sefer Devarim, 16:3.

[9] Mesechet Pesachim 116:a.

[10] Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno, Commen-





Gratitude

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim



Each year we study Passover, its laws and philosophy. Each year we discover new, major principles.

Take for example, Charoses. Talmud Pesachim 114a contains a debate whether it requires a blessing, as does the Matzah and Maror. But we immediately note that the Torah does not say we must eat the Paschal lamb over Matzah, Maror “and Charoses”. Charoses is not mentioned in that verse. So why does Rav Elazar bar Tzadok say we do in fact bless over it? Let’s keep this in mind as we ask a few more questions.

We learn that the retelling of the Exodus must follow a dialogue format. The Mah Nishtanah expresses this. But we wonder why this must be. Our obligation to teach our students and children Torah all year need not follow a dialogue format. What is it about the retelling of the Exodus – the Haggadah – that requires dialogue? And what more does dialogue accomplish, than monologues or lectures?

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Why must this dialogue be accomplished through a discussion starting with our degraded state (as idolaters and slaves) and concluding with our praise as a freed people following God? As long as all information is imparted to the child, what would be lost of we arrange the order as we wish?

We also note a unique statement, “For all who increase in retelling the Exodus are praiseworthy”. Why aren’t those who increase in Torah study also considered “praiseworthy”? It is also strange that this statement actually forms part of the Haggadah’s text. But there is a hint: that Haggadic section says, “Even if we were all wise, all of us understanding, all of us elders, all of us knowing the Torah...it is a Mitzvah upon us to retell the Exodus. For all who increase in retelling the Exodus are praiseworthy.” What do these “even ifs” come to add to our Haggadah?

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The obligation to retell the Exodus is derived from this verse: “And you shall tell your son saying, ‘Because of this did God perform for me, when I left Egypt’”. (Exod. 13:8) Also derived from this verse is the obligation for each of us to view ourselves as if we exited Egypt.” (Tal. Pesachim 116b) This is derived from, “Because of this did God perform for “me”, when “I” left Egypt.” The verse speaks in the first person. What aspect of Haggadah demands we view ourselves as having personally left Egypt? And is it a coincidence that this obligation is derived from the very same verse that teaches our obligation to teach our sons?

Lastly, why does the Haggadah conclude with Hallel?

Answers:

What is significant about Charoses – mortar?

“And they embittered (vayi’Maroru) their lives with harsh labor, with mortar and with brick making...” (Exod. 1:14) We see how in this verse, God joined embittered (Maror) with mortar. Charoses embodies the real phenomenon we experienced; the mortar pits. We didn’t eat bitter herbs in Egypt during our stay, nor were such herbs the cause of our bitterness. But we are commanded in the bitter herbs since “imagining” the pain of our forefathers is not experiential and does not impact us, as much as real sensations. So Maror is necessary to experience some pain. Perhaps Rav Elazar bar Tzadok taught that the mortar (Charoses) requires a blessing, as it was the true, historical phenomenon experienced back then. He felt mortar must be raised to the level of Maror through its own blessing. The fact is, the verse quoted above teaching how Egypt embittered us, also refers to mortar. Mortar and Maror are integrally tied. “And they embittered their lives with harsh labor, with mortar and with brick making...” The mention of mortar in a verse is license to require a blessing. However, greater gratitude is evoked when we can contrast the suffering to the redemption: the greater our sensation now (eating bitter herbs) the greater will be our gratitude. Perhaps this explains why the Torah law requires Maror, and not mortar, Charoses.

But both Maror and Charoses serve to offer us today an “experience”. We must literally sense the bitterness by eating Maror, and we must view the Charoses in memory of the mortar.

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Retelling the Exodus is not a matter of “learning”. That is not the goal. For if it was, then if we were all wise, we might dispense with this law. However, as acquisition of wisdom is NOT the objective, the obligation to retell the Exodus is incumbent upon everyone. What is the obligation?

Gratitude

This is the theme of Passover night. We recount the story of the Exodus to evoke feelings of gratitude for the Creator. This is the main concept on Passover...the holiday of God's redemption. It matters none that we know the story inside out. For Haggadah is not to engage us in an act of “Torah study”. Rather, it is as we said: we are to perform many actions to engender feelings of gratitude. Therefore a dialogue format is unnecessary when teaching Torah, but required when reciting the Haggadah. Torah study and teaching deal with intellectual truths, whereas Haggadah deals with evoking gratitude.

“And you shall tell your son saying, ‘Because of this did God perform for me, when I left Egypt’”. This verse requires we act upon matters, but with a singular objective: 1) the father must teach the son, and 2) he also must view himself as having left Egypt. But both are subsumed under the objective of “Gratitude”.

As my friend Shalom said, by teaching the son, the father offers the child the best chance of sensing gratitude for God, as children follow their parents more than anyone else. Furthermore, the dialogue format engages the child to a far greater degree than lecturing or a monologue. The child is personally involved in the discussion. This is why we remove the Seder Plate and dip twice...to evoke curiosity in the children. Secondly, the father must also view himself as having been freed, thereby evoking his own gratitude. It is perfect that both requirements are found in this single verse, as they share the same objective: father and son must feel gratitude towards God for the Exodus. And many other Torah commands function to do this as well. Think about how often we read “Zecher l'Yitzias Mitzrayim”, “A remembrance to the Exodus”. It is insufficient that such a great act as the Exodus is recalled only one time yearly. Sabbath too is a remembrance of the Exodus, as our ability to rest when we wish is a direct result of our having been freed. (Maimonides' Guide, book ii, chap. xxxi) We observe Sabbath each week. And many other laws too recall the Exodus.

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Acknowledging the Exodus is of paramount status. For this reason, the very next verse (Exod. 13:9) requires us to don Tefillin daily. Tefillin encase these two sections concluding Parshas Bo: the redeeming of firstborns in memory of the final plague that freed us, as all Egypt chased us out, fearing that they too might die. The “Yad Chazakah” mentioned in this verse refers to God’s “mighty hand” in delivering such an amazing and completely inexplicable plague. Yad Chazakah – “mighty hand” – refers to the idea that God is strong, while “others” are not. Death of the firstborns revealed God as the only power in the universe. This plague rejected the notion of idolatry, as Egypt’s lifeless gods could not defend themselves or the Egyptians. This is why we also include the Shema in Tefillin. Shema describes God as “One”, while redeeming firstborn recounts when God “judged the Egyptian gods”, reducing them to dust. (Rashi, Exod. 12:12) Tefillin embody a single idea that God is one, and all other deities as seen in Egypt, are imposters. They could not save the firstborns, nor could the idols prevent God’s destruction of their forms.

Regarding Yad Chazakah, “strength” is a relative term, and here, it is stated in stark contrast to the Egyptian fallacy that idols were powerful. What an awesome and mighty plague Firstborns was. How do only those who were born first, suddenly fall dead, and simultaneously? No biological law explains this.

It is quite fitting that the Exodus is brought about through the destruction of the firstborns and the Egyptian gods. For the 10 Plagues had as one of its core objectives the establishment of monotheism and the rejection of idolatry. And when Moses commands the Jews in Tefillin, he is informing them of another fundamental: “you are freed so as to accept God”. Tefillin must be immediately commanded at the freedom of the Jews. They must understand for what they were freed.

“For all who increase in retelling the Exodus are praiseworthy.”

The expression of gratitude for some good we receive is greatly reduced, if we can describe this gratitude one moment, and then in another, switch topics of conversation. But a sustained discussion on God’s deliverance from Egypt enhances the very gratitude. We are more impressed with the “person” unable to stop describing the goodness he received via the Exodus. The sincerity and feelings of thanks expressed by such an individual imbues all listeners with a higher evaluation of the Exodus. It is to this, I believe, what the accolade “praiseworthy” refers. One is “praiseworthy” when his retelling of the Exodus results in listeners becoming awed by God’s miracles and redemption. And this is accomplished by one who goes on and on about that extraordinary history.

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Additionally, since the theme of the night is gratitude, one's continue description of the Exodus is an act of gratitude, explaining why such a person is praiseworthy.

We now also understand why we commence with our degradation as slaves. For when we end with our status as a freed nation, our gratitude is greater due to this contrast. We then recite Hallel as an expression of this gratitude.

What is the necessity for our gratitude?

Why don't we have many mitzvahs that are "remembrances of creation", just as many are "remembrances of the Exodus"? The reason is that man might increase his allegiance to God and His commands. God wants the best for man, so God offers us a chance to realign ourselves with His Torah by causing us to reflect on His kindness. This same God who freed us, also gave us a Torah 50 days later. Both acts must be for man's well-being. "I am God, I do not change". (Malachi 3:6)

So as we recount all those amazing miracles this Passover, we are recalling God's kindness, which should imbue us with the realization that His Torah too is for our good. Through the laws of Passover, God helps generate in each of us a sense of gratitude, in order that we might find following Torah – what is best – all that easier when we first start down that path. Eventually, we need no incentives to study and practice Torah, as the study itself and the Mitzvahs become things difficult to part with due to the amazing insights included in all areas.

God needs nothing, and nothing from man. All He does, all His commands and the deep ideas conveyed through them, is in order that man might enjoy the best life here, and grant his soul eternal life in that most happiest, ultimate state. But the only way to attain an eternal existence where we enjoy that purely spiritual state is if while here on Earth, we learn to enjoy wisdom through continued Torah study. ■



Rabbi Chait commenced citing the Ran (in the Rif's pages, 25b): the Ran states that the correct manner of reading the Haggadah is that a "reader" recites it, while all others listen. The implication is that all present fulfill their obligation to 'read' the Haggadah, through the halachik mechanism of "Shomaya K'Oneh", "One who listens is as one who answers (recited)."

In his Mishneh Torah, "Laws of Chametz and Matza" 7:4, Maimonides states, "And these matters are all called Haggadah." The question is; to what does he refer - what is subsumed under "these matters"? Maimonides had already stated numerous ideas from the beginning of this chapter. Is he referring to all that he stated, or a smaller portion? Rabbi Chait first stated that "these matters" (are Haggadah) refers only to his fourth and fifth laws in this chapter, and not to anything mentioned earlier. Let us review Maimonides' laws:

Law 1: Maimonides records the obligation to transmit the miracles to our sons, when we must recite, and that no one is exempt regardless of age. Law 2: He continues to discuss 'how' we must relate the information, based on our sons' understanding. Law 3: Maimonides discusses the obligation to act in a manner that will evoke interest and questions from the child. A "question" format is required, and questions are so vital, that were someone alone, he must verbally ask himself questions.

But in law 4, Maimonides describes the obligation that one must commence with the degraded state of the Jews, and conclude with our elevated status. Maimonides gives examples: we were first idolaters in Abraham's day, but God eventually drew us close to

[CONT. NEXT PAGE]

His worship, teaching us his Unity, that he alone is the exclusive Creator. (One must say, “God brought us to the correct idea of God’s oneness”. Starting with our degraded state and concluding with our ‘elevated status’ refers to our realization of the ultimate truth: God is One.) He continues that we must also describe our Egyptian bondage under Pharaoh, and our freedom delivered by God’s miracles and wonders, provided that one explains the entire section commencing with Laban’s desire to annihilate Jacob and the tribes. In law 5, Maimonides discusses the obligation to discuss the Paschal Lamb, Matza, and Bitter Herbs, and their significances, as essential to fulfilling the command retelling the Exodus (Haggadah). He concludes as we mentioned at the outset, “And these matters are all called Haggadah.” So what is it to which Maimonides refers when he makes this conclusion, “And these matters are all called Haggadah”? What matters?

Two Forms of Haggadah

Rabbi Chait suggested that there are two forms of Haggadah. There is an informal retelling, and a formal retelling. This latter, formal retelling of the Exodus is what Maimonides refers to as “Haggadah.” The first 3 laws describe an informal guideline as to what “elements” must be incorporated, however, there is no set format. We simply must insure that the miracles are discussed, and done so on a level where our sons may comprehend. But in laws 4 and 5, Maimonides clearly describes texts, which must be read. And it is only in regards to a text, that the concept of listening and fulfilling makes sense. This complies with the Ran, that one reads for all others present. If one merely retells the story in his own words, he lacks in a complete retell of the Exodus. This is called an “Incomplete Mitzvah”. Therefore, one must also refer to texts to fulfill his “formal retell” of the Exodus. Thus, only in a formalized text may one achieve “listening is as if reciting”. This is because there is a discreet and precise “entity” - a formal text - there is a “prescribed vehicle” of fulfillment. But regarding an informal retelling of the Exodus, where one uses his own words, the concept of “listening is as if reciting”, or “Shomaya K’Oneh” cannot apply. For in this case, there is no universal “entity” of text prescribed by the Torah to fulfill one’s obligation. By definition, a subjective recital cannot function universally: that which is subjective is not universal.

This idea of a formal text, expresses the philosophy of the Torah; it is not a loose, subjective system, but a system that is well formulated with precision. A fixed text comprises the retelling of the Exodus for this reason.

What are the ingredients in the formal text?

It includes the following: 1) commencing with degradation and conclusion with praise; 2) explaining from Laban’s attempt to annihilate us; and 3) Mitzvah’s of the night, i.e., Paschal lamb, Matza and Bitter Herbs.

There are two forms of “commencing with degradation and conclusion with praise”: A) discussion of the elements, and B) studying at text. Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik said that the very study of the commands is found in the Haggadah, as they contribute to the retelling of the Exodus. The command of retelling, itself, has its nature tied to the ‘reasons’ of the command. Thus, the laws of retelling actually form part of the command.

Why must we commence with our degradation? It is because if it is omitted, our retelling lacks in praise for God. The contrast created by discussing man’s lowly nature unveils greater praise, as God is that much more praiseworthy. This is the first “commencing with degra-

dation and conclusion with praise”. However, we must note that we cannot praise God, that is a foolish idea, as man has no concept of God. This is why our praise surrounds “our” change in status, and not God.

The Mah Nishtanah

Rabbi Chait now asked on Maimonides’ formulation in law 3: “And it is required that one make (behavioral) changes in this night, in order that sons may see, and ask, and say, ‘why is this night different than all other nights?’” Rabbi Chait asked why Maimonides added the phrase “and say”. Isn’t it sufficient that Maimonides writes, “and ask”? Why does Maimonides add the phrase “and ask, and say”? Additionally, if the child “says” the Mah Nishtanah, why must the reader recite it as well?

Rabbi Chait said that the night must commence with an idea: “this night is different”. Now, if there were a fixed answer, then one may simply state it. But here, there is no fixed answer; it is an “infinite” answer. Some questions have a single answer...but not so here. Here, the question about the difference of this night opens new worlds of answers of how different Passover is. The child must reach the point that he ‘says’... “How different is this night?!” This is not a question, but an exclamation. It is as if a child attends a circus for the first time, and says, “How great is this?!” The child is overawed. Here too during our retelling of the Exodus, the miracles, and God’s mercy in elevating us from idolatry and slavery to true monotheism and freedom, the child senses there is something different on Passover, something so grand that the child realizes it is incomparable. “Mah Nishtanah!”, “How Different?!” Similarly, Jacob said the word “mah”: “Mah norah hamakome hazeh”, “How great is this place?!” when he awoke from the famous dream of the ladder and the angels. This must be the opening statement of the Haggadah – both the informal and formal retelling. This explains why the reader also states “Mah Nishtanah”...as he too is about to enter the infinite answer of how different this night is.

A child commences life with an attachment to pleasure. What we desire in relation to the Haggadah is to attract and allow expression of the child’s pleasure seeking nature – his pleasure should find expression and increase in the Haggadah. We desire this “What a difference” response. In general, we must not dissuade a child from enjoying pleasures, as this will retard his ability to experience pleasure in connection with Torah. ■



the 10 Plagues

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim

Exodus, 8:12, Ibn Ezra directs our attention to the performers of the Ten Plagues:

“Know, that by the hand of Aaron were the first three plagues and these signs were in the lower matter as I explained earlier, because two (of them) were in water, and the third was in the dust of the earth. And the plagues performed by Moses with the staff were in the higher elements, just as his (Moses) status was higher than Aaron’s status. For example, the plague of hail and locusts were brought by the wind, and (so too) the darkness, it was in the air; also the plague of boils was through him (Moses). Only three (plagues) were without the staff; the wild animals, the disease of the animals, and the death of the firstborns. And one (plague) with no staff was through Moses, with a little connection with Aaron, and it was the plague of boils.”

Ibn Ezra focuses our attention on his first word, “Know”, which urges the reader to think into this specific commentary. He intimates that there is more here than meets the eye. He does not simply list each plague with its performer, or describe the involvement of the staff. We are not interested in dry statistics when studying God’s wisdom. Here, Ibn Ezra is teaching important principles. Beginning with the word “Know”, Ibn Ezra is teaching an important lesson.

Each of the Ten Plagues was used as a tool to teach Egypt and the world the following: 1) Aaron and Moses were each assigned specific plagues, in the lower and higher realms respectively, and they performed a similar number of plagues independently, 2) The staff was present in only certain miracles, 3) Moses joined with Aaron in a single plague of boils, 4) God distinguished between Egypt and the Jews through two plagues, in which no staff was used, and which was placed in the center of the series of plagues.

In his Laws of Idolatry, 1:1, Maimonides teaches that early man already began projecting greatness onto the heavenly bodies. Man thought, since the planets, stars and spheres minister before God, they too are worthy of man’s honor. Eventually, man’s sin increased as he replaced simple honor of stars with his worship of them as deities, until God was no longer recognized. Star worship reveals man’s false estimation that the heavens deserve to be worshipped. Man feared not only the spheres, but also the heavens. Jeremiah 10:2-3 reads, “So says God, “To the ways of the nations do not learn, and from the signs of the heavens do not fear, because from them the nations fear. Because the statutes of the peoples are false, because a tree from the forest they cut, fashioned by an artisan with an adze.” Jeremiah teaches that man did in fact fear the heavens. But their fear stemmed from a false projection - not based in reality. Jeremiah’s lesson is

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בְּמִצְוֹת אֱלֹהֵינוּ
 רַם יִסְרְדֵיךְ בָּנִים
 עֲדֹב רַם שְׂרֹחַ
 מִרְרָה אֲרַבָּה רוֹשֶׁה
 מִשֶּׁת בְּבוֹרוֹת
 הַיְּהוּדָה הַיְּהוּדָה בָּנִים סִימָנוֹ
 רִיבֵי עֲדָשׁ בְּאַרְבֶּה
 וְסִי חֲלִילִי אֲדֹמִי
 מִשֶּׁת אֲדֹמִי אֲדֹמִי





insightful: he equates the fear of heavens with the idolatrous practice of prostrating to wooden idols. He wished to teach that the heavens do not hold any greater powers than wooden sculptures. Man's idolatrous emotions project the same imagined authority onto both, the heaven and the trees.

The primitive view of the heavens determining man's fate, was not alien to the Egyptians. God corrected this error with one aspect of His plagues. Commanding Aaron to perform the plagues limited to the earthly realm, and for Moses to perform those of the "higher", heavenly realm, God discounted the dangerous esteem man held towards the heavens. God showed that the only difference between the heavens and Earth is the level of understanding required to comprehend their natures, as the wiser man - Moses - addressed the heavenly plagues, and Aaron addressed the earthly plagues. Laws controlled both realms, and both could be understood. Understanding a phenomenon removes one's false, mystical estimations. Realizing they are 'guided' means they are subordinate to something greater. These realms did not "control", but were "controlled", teaching the Egyptians that their views were false. The Egyptians erred by assuming that the heavens were a governing and mystical realm. Earth, to Egypt, was not divine. God corrected this disproportionately high, heavenly grandeur. God did so in two ways: 1) by showing the heavens' subordination to a Higher will, God demoted heaven's status from the divine to the mundane, and, 2) by aligning the plagues with Moses' and Aaron's participation, Egypt would understand that not only are the heavens not divine, but they are in equal realms, just as Moses and Aaron are of somewhat equal status. Additionally, Moses and Aaron each performed three miracles independently to equate heaven and earth, dispelling a false supremacy of heaven and meteorological phenomena. Hopefully, the Egyptians would comprehend that both heaven and Earth are equally under God's control, and that neither one is significantly greater. Egypt would then realize that Something higher was responsible for all creation. God wanted the good for the Egyptians. The 'good' means knowledge of what is true. As it says in the Torah (Exod. 9:16) with regards to these plagues, "...in order that they tell of My name in the whole world."

Interestingly, the three plagues designed in the heavens were hail, locusts and darkness. Why these three? Perhaps to address three errors of the Egyptians. Egypt assumed meteorological phenomena to be divine, so God responded with a hail/fire plague to display His exclusive control in this area. Wind was also a heavenly phenomena, but now they experienced an unnatural wind blowing the entire day, the entire night, until the next morning when it delivered the terror of locusts destroying all vegetation remaining of the hail's previous destruction (Exod 10:13). Finally, with the plague of darkness,

God displayed control over the primary focus in heaven - the sun. Weather, the atmosphere and outer space were all shown as false deities and under the exclusive control of Israel's God. Additionally, the plague of "darkness" had one other facet - it was palpable, perhaps to show that it was not a simple solar eclipse.

Ibn Ezra also made specific note of two plagues where no staff was used. These two also included the lesson of national distinction: Exod. 8:18, "And I will distinguish on that day the land of Goshen that My people stand on it, to prevent from being there the wild beasts..." Exod. 9:4, "And God will distinguish between the cattle of Israel and the cattle of Egypt, and nothing will die of the Israelites." Why were both of these plagues designed to distinguish Egypt from Israel? I believe the answer is that by designing not just one plague - which could be viewed as a freak incident, but two plagues which differentiated "Egyptians" and "Jews" - the goal was to teach that God works differently than Egypt's view of the 'divine'. The Egyptians thought that to please their gods was man's correct obligation, and precisely how gods operated - a natural outgrowth of a child/parent relationship. How would such an infantile idea be corrected in order to teach God's true system? By Egypt witnessing punitive measures only on their 'side of the river', they were awakened to a new idea: objective morality. They were held accountable. They also realized something even more essential: their relationship to their gods was one where their gods benefited from man's actions. Egypt felt that their gods need man to serve their needs, which were projections of man's own needs. But Judaism teaches that relating to God is not for God, but really only for man. God does not need man. Man must do that which is proper for himself, and if he does not, he will not only be punished, but he will lose the true good for himself. The Egyptian's exclusive receipt of these two plagues - a system of "reward and punishment" - awoke them to a realization that service of God means not catering to a god's needs, but rather, an alignment with proper ideals and morality. This is a drastic difference from Egypt's primitive notion of worship.

Simultaneously, these two plagues attacked the very core of Egyptian gods; animals. Their own animals died, and then, wild animals attacked them. It was a devastating blow to their esteemed deities. Their deification of animal gods was destroyed. Pharaoh's response (Exod. 8:21), "sacrifice to your God" confirms his lowered estimation of animals, to the point that he encourages Moses to slaughter them, and to do so to his God. In other cases, Pharaoh does gesture to free the Jews, but only here in connection with the animal plagues does Pharaoh say "sacrifice to your God." I believe the Torah includes these words of Pharaoh to inform us that the plague had the desired effect on Pharaoh. God

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understands what will affect man, and so it does. The Egyptians were all the more confused when they saw that Israel was not affected, even though they did not serve animals. In Exod. 9:7, Pharaoh himself sends messengers to see if Israel was harmed. This plague of the animal's death concerned him greatly.

Why were these two animal plagues bereft of the staff? Perhaps the staff carried with it some element of cause and effect; man would hit something, and only then would the plague commence. Perhaps, God wished to teach that He is in no way bound by the physical. A plague may occur with no prior cause. Removing the staff might effectively teach this lesson, as nothing was smitten to bring on the plague.

I heard another explanation for the use of the staff: Although God did not need it (He needs nothing) for Moses and Aaron to initiate the plagues, it's presence was to remove any divinity projected by Egypt onto Moses and Aaron, lest onlookers falsely believe these two mortals possessed some powers. By seeing the staff incorporated into the miracles, Moses' and Aaron's significance was diluted in Egypt's eyes. But wouldn't people then believe the staff to have those powers? I believe for fear of this erroneous notion, God created a miracle where the staff itself turned into a snake. This was to show that it too was under the control of God.

Why did the plague of boils require Moses and Aaron to work together? My friend Jessie made a sharp observation. She said that just as Moses and Aaron addressed both the higher and lower forms of matter in their respective plagues, the plague of boils executed by both Moses and Aaron included the higher and lower matter - ashes are from Earth, and they were commanded to be thrown towards the heavens (Exod. 9:8). Her parallel revealed another facet of the boils, as God's plagues contain many strata of insights. I believe the boils' combination of realms was to teach that heaven and Earth do not operate in two separate, encapsulated systems. The very act of throwing ashes towards the heavens teaches that both Earth and heaven work together. This was a necessary lesson in the reduction of the heaven's exaggerated status. By showing this further idea that the heavens participate in earthly phenomena, the heavens' false, divine status was stripped that much further. Just as his subjects will view a king who spends time with commoners in a less regal light, so too the heavens now lost their reputation by participating in Earthly matters. Moses could have collected the ashes himself, but by working with Aaron, together, they underlined this point.

One question remains: Why are the two animal-related plagues placed in the middle of the series of the Ten Plagues? ■

The Wisdom of the Plagues

Did God select all Ten Plagues as an absolute plan...or were the plagues selected and administered based on Pharaoh's actions? Interesting question.

We must appreciate that each Torah verse has great meaning. For example, after Pharaoh's astrologers mimicked the plague of blood, Exod. 7:23 says, "And Pharaoh turned and came to his house...". Why must this necessarily be taught? Do I really need to know Pharaoh "turned" and "came to his house"? The answer must be 'yes', since it's in the Torah. But what is the vital lesson of this seemingly unnecessary verse?

Why did the plague of frogs follow the plague of blood? We also learn that the frogs infested every square inch of Egypt, not mentioned by the other plagues. I believe our first verse teaches why frogs had to be sent next.

Rabbi Reuven Mann once taught that Pharaoh's turning aside after the blood plague was an act of denial. Based on this, we can suggest that Pharaoh found enough justification in his astrologer's sleight of hand to reject Moses' miracle of blood. But Pharaoh sensed some truth in Moses, that is why he went home...a place of escape. Therefore, the next plague did not allow Pharaoh any escape, for the Torah teaches that the frogs infested every room of every home. This was in direct response to Pharaoh's action, not necessarily planned from the outset. The frogs emerged from the very location that Pharaoh initially rejected - the Nile - forcing Pharaoh to reconsider his original dismissal of the plague of blood. The frogs also croaked, and I am sure quite loud. Again, offering Pharaoh no psychological escape from the reality of God's miracles.

If the astrologers were able to duplicate the frogs, why does Pharaoh call Moses to remove them? Ask the astrologers to do so! We must say that Pharaoh realized a difference in Moses, that only he could remove the frogs. God was teaching Pharaoh that his astrologers were frauds. Eventually, God sent boils to completely eliminate all credibility of the astrologers. But God takes small steps, not deploying a death blow until necessary. God originally desired Pharaoh to use his mind to discern the difference between his fraudulent magicians, and Moses.

This was God's plan: to force Pharaoh - a mystic - to start engaging his mind. For only if Pharaoh would switch gears and "think", would he be able to see the true God, and the nature of Moses' miracles as supreme to his astrologers. Yes, God could have made any miracle He desired that would have been undeniably clear...but that would not engage Pharaoh's mind. Pharaoh would - in such a case - be forced by his emotions to release the Jews, but not to any credit of his intelligence. God wants man to use his mind.

If we allow our ears to become sensitive to every nuance and distinction of the plagues' descriptions, we will continue to uncover more hints like these, and a greater appreciation for God's ways. ■



I

The foundation of the system of Judaism is the Exodus, which emancipated the Jews from the enslavement of Pharaoh. It is a Mitzvah to remember the Exodus twice a day which is accomplished in reciting the third paragraph of the Shema. However on the night of Pesach we must do more than merely make reference to the fact that G-d redeemed us from Egypt. We must engage in extensive recitation of the entire narrative pertaining to the Exodus story. The Rambam says in Laws of Chametz and Matza, Chapter 7, Halacha 1: "It is a positive commandment of the Torah to tell stories of the miracles and wonders that were done for our forefathers in Egypt, on the night of the fifteenth of Nissan-as it says: "Remember this day that you exited from Egypt." (Exodus 13,3)

We must pay careful attention to the words of the Rambam. Why does he emphasize that one must discuss the miracles and wonders which were done for us in Egypt? He should simply have said that we should recite the story of the Exodus. Of course in doing so we would make mention of the miracles because they are part of the story. The Rambam is conveying that the essence of the story is the super-natural phenomena which occurred. The whole objective of the recounting is to cause us to focus on the miracles that G-d wrought. The question arises: Why is the miraculous element of the story of such paramount importance?

II

We read in the Ten Commandments: Exodus 20:2 "I Am the L-d your G-d who took you out of the land of Egypt from the house of slavery."

the foundation of Jewish

This Pasuk incorporates two commands. 1) to believe in the existence of the Creator and 2) to accept Him as our G-d. The historical event which forms the basis of our obligation to serve G-d is the Exodus. Many commentators have pointed to the fact that, great as the Exodus was, the creation of the universe seems to be even more consequential to our relationship to G-d. Thus they ask, why doesn't it say "I am the L-d your G-d who created Heaven and Earth."?

In his commentary on the Ten Commandments, the Ramban states: (Ramban's Commentary on the Torah-Exodus 20:2)

"I AM THE ETERNAL THY G-D. This Divine utterance constitutes a positive commandment. He said, I am the Eternal, thus teaching and commanding them that they should know and believe that the Eternal exist and that He is G-d to them. That is to say, there exist an Eternal Being through Whom everything has come into existence by His will and power, and He is G-d to them, who are obligated to worship him. He said, Who brought thee out of the land of Egypt, because his taking them out from there was evidence establishing the existence and will of G-d, for it was with his knowledge and providence that we came out from there. The exodus is also evidence for the creation of the world, for assuming the eternity of the universe [which precludes a Master of the universe Who is in control of it], it would follow that nothing could be changed from its nature. And it is also evidence for G-d's infinite power, and His infinite power is an indication of the Unity". as He said, that thou [i.e. Pharaoh] mayest know that there is none like Me on the earth".

According to Nachmanides there is something unique about the Exodus which renders it more instructive than creation. From time immemorial people have asked: What is the ultimate cause of the world in which we live or, put another way; What is the ultimate reality? There were many philosophers who believed in the eternity of the universe. This essentially means that the world has no cause. It exists because it has to exist. According to this view there is nothing beyond the laws of nature and the notion of miracles must be dismissed. Historically most philosophers denied this idea and maintained that the Universe did not come into being by itself but had to have a cause. They held that the natural order with its infinite wisdom owes its existence to a Supreme Being who is the cause of all that exists. Judaism of course agrees with the philosophers who maintain that the Universe owes its existence to G-d. However the

key area in which we differ is the question of the relationship of G-d to the Universe. Thinkers such as Aristotle and Einstein believed in G-d but denied that He intervenes in human affairs or retains a relationship with man. They maintained that the Universe is a necessary result of G-d's very existence and as G-d is unchangeable so is the world. They also rejected the idea of miracles. The foundation of Judaism is our belief that G-d is eternal and nothing exists beside Him. (He is our L-d there is none else). His relationship to the world is that of the Creator to the created. He brought the world into existence from nothingness (ex nihilo) not because of any extraneous compulsion but purely because of His inscrutable Will. He established the Universe, and the laws of nature by which it operates in accordance with His will. He retains complete control over the Universe and can alter the natural order, and perform miracles in order to achieve His objective in creation. All of the beliefs and practices of Judaism, such as free will, reward and punishment, the efficacy of prayer, etc. are based on this understanding of G-d's absolute power and mastery of His creation. We can now understand the significance of the events surrounding the Exodus. The miracles which completely overturned the natural order demonstrated that there is a Supreme Being who created the world and can make any alterations at Will.

III

Let us review the basic lessons which are contained in the words: "I am the L-d thy G-d who took you out of the land of Egypt from the house of slavery"

People



Rabbi Reuven Mann

A) The Universe is not eternal. B) G-d alone is eternal and created the world control over the entire course of human history. D) G-d created the world for a i.e. idolatry and the affirmation of the true creator of heaven and earth.

(ex nihilo-from nothing). C) G-d retains total moral purpose which is rooted in the rejection of evil.

Equally important is the point that He intervened in the course of human history to rescue a particular people who were to become His nation. This demonstrates that G-d created mankind for a moral purpose which can only be achieved through adherence to the mitzvos, moral imperatives and truths that are contained in His Torah.

It is therefore important to remember that the Jews have a special place in G-d's scheme of things. The Exodus is not just an abstract historical event. It happened to us and gave us our national character and mission. As the Ramban says (ibid.): "This is the intent of the expression, Who brought thee out, since they are the ones who know and are witnesses to all these things".

He further states in his Commentary on the Torah-Exodus 13:16: "...And because the Holy One, blessed be He, will not make signs and wonders in every generation for the eyes of some wicked man or heretic, He therefore commanded us that we should always make a memorial or sign of that which we have seen with our eyes, and that we should transmit the matter to our children, and their children to their children, to the generations to come. And He placed great emphasis on it, as is indicated by the fact that one is liable to extinction for eating leavened bread on the Passover, and for abandoning the Passover offering, [i.e., not taking part in the slaughtering thereof]. He has further required of us that we inscribe upon our arms and between our eyes all that we have seen in the way of signs and wonders, and to inscribe it yet upon the doorposts of the houses, and that we remember it by recital in the morning and the evening...[He further required] that we make a sukkah every year and many other commandments like them which are a memorial to the exodus from Egypt. All these commandments are designed for the purpose that in all generations we should have testimonies to the wonders so that they should not be forgotten and so that the heretic should not be able to open his lips to deny the belief in the existence of G-d. He who buys a Mezuzah for one zuz [a silver coin] and affixes it to his doorpost and has the proper intent of heart on its content, has already admitted the creation of the world, the Creators knowledge and His providence, and also his belief in prophecy as well as in fundamental principals of the Torah, besides admitting that the mercy of the Creator is very great upon them that do His will, since He brought us forth from that bondage to freedom and to great honor on the account of the merit of our fathers who delighted in the fear of His name".

In conclusion, we can now understand why the Rambam places such emphasis on recounting the miracles which took place in Egypt. They contain profound teachings about creation, G-d's ongoing relationship to the world and the special role that the Jewish people play in His plan for mankind. May this Passover be a time of reflection on the foundations of Jewish existence and renewed aspiration to achieve the purpose for which we were created. ■

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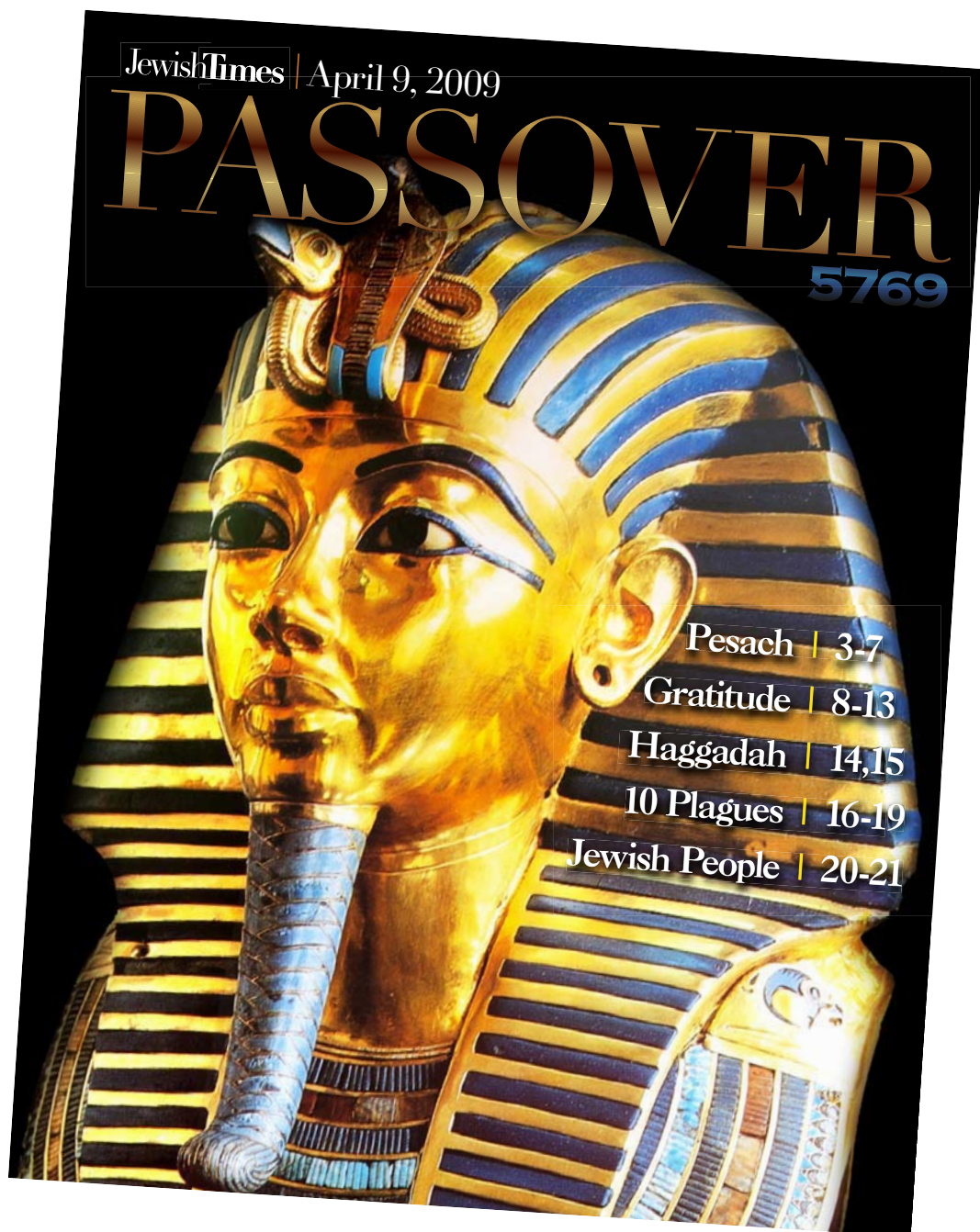
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