



So the children will ask.

וְהָיָה כִּי יִשְׁאַלְךָ בְּנֶךָ ... (שְׁמוֹת יג:יד)

Hashgacha Pratis

The history and plight of the Jewish people have long been wondrous and thought-provoking phenomena, and have startled observers to this very day. One of the most outstanding features of that history, one that has raised many an eyebrow, is the meticulous and unyielding exactness with which the Jewish people have observed Pesach for millennia. The image of a mother or grandmother on her hands and knees scrubbing an obscure corner of the house has been indelibly inscribed in many of our hearts and has inspired Jews throughout the ages.

To understand Pesach's pivotal role in our hearts and minds, we have to delve into its ultimate meaning and message. The Ramban comments that before the Jews were witness to the miracles that occurred in Mitzrayim, the human race had never directly seen G-d's all-encompassing creative powers. There were many men who, through their intellect and awareness, came to recognize Hashem and even His Divine involvement in the details of man's existence. However, never was it so clear, on such a large scale, that Hashem was in total control of the entire universe.

Yetzias Mitzrayim is the foundation of our faith that Hashem is deeply involved in our lives. Chazal tell us that this redemption took place in four stages: "And I will take you out, and I will save you, and I will redeem you, and I will take you to me as a people."

The Seforno elaborates on these four phases: first, the slave work ceased, then the Jews left Mitzrayim, then they crossed through the Yam Suf, and last, they received the Torah and became the nation of Hashem. Each step involved a major set of miracles that revealed both Hashem's powers, and His concern and love for His people. To enhance our appreciation for every aspect of the Geulah, Chazal instituted four cups of wine, one representing each stage.

When we remember each development individually and lift our cup of wine in praise for each, our gratitude and Simcha are deeply expanded. This is the idea behind the often misunderstood "Dayenu." In "Dayenu," we recite a list of miraculous events that occurred over the period of Yetzias Mitzrayim, and we seem to say that even if only one of them had occurred, it would have been sufficient. Many have asked: would it truly have been enough if we had only been redeemed from Egypt and not passed through the Yam Suf, or not received the Torah? Would that really suffice?

But in actuality, “Dayenu” means that every miracle in itself would have been reason enough to utter great praises to Hashem. How much more is this the case for the totality of the miraculous events that occurred!

The intricate details and amazing precision with which the Makkos were meted out are another great inspiration. A glass of blood in the hands of an Egyptian became water when touched by a Jew. Darkness, so thick it was paralyzing, was non-existent for the Jews, who walked about in sunlight. These events clearly illustrate Hashem’s constant control over nature. They serve to remind us that every occurrence is a direct result of Hashem’s will, and when we need help, there is but one direction to turn. This is the message that Pesach carries, and we are obligated to internalize it properly.

YAD HASHEM IN RECENT HISTORY

We need not look far to see that Hashem is still very much concerned with the welfare of the Jewish people. On a universal level, after the Holocaust, in a short 75 years, we have found a renaissance of Yeshivos, Kollelim, and Chessed organizations being built by committed Shomrei Torah and Mitzvos throughout the world. This is a clear manifestation of the Yad Hashem. The miracles of the Six-Day War and the fact that we can now go and visit Eretz Yisroel are an awesome display of Hashem’s intimate involvement in the Jewish community at large.

TO SUMMARIZE:

- Pesach has been at the foundation of Jewish faith throughout the ages because it demonstrates Hashem’s control of the universe.
- The various stages and components of Yetzias Mitzrayim—expressed in the Arba Leshonos Geulah and in “Dayenu”—show Hashem’s great concern and love for His people.
- The details of the makos reveal Hashem’s Hashgachah Pratis, as do events in recent history.

Mesorah

The Emunah we have must be constantly reinforced. The Ralbag explains that the purpose for which the Jewish people sang the Shira after Krias Yam Suf was to reinforce and enhance their faith in Hashem. Even after seeing miracles of such magnitude, there still remained an aspect of their faith that needed to be strengthened. This strengthening could only come from ideas as spiritually uplifting as those expressed in the Shira.

Just like the Jews who were led out of Mitzrayim by Hashem needed to sing the Shira so they could embed even deeper in their hearts what was already so clear in their minds, so too, it is incumbent upon us to do the same. It is in this respect that Pesach serves as a present-day song of praise. By recalling the Geulah in all of its splendor, from the power that was displayed during Makas Bechoros to the love that was expressed through the Ananei Hakavod in the Midbar, the Jewish people reawaken and rejuvenate their faith and trust in Hashem. This faith and trust have no doubt given them the strength to survive this long exile, with all of its horrors.

The Torah commands us, “And you should tell your child on that day...” It is apparent from the Rambam that the purpose of telling is not only for the child’s sake, but also for the father’s. When a man, whether he is thirty or eighty, relates this story to his child, he becomes linked to a heritage that goes straight back to that glorious day, 3,335 years ago. The recital of the Haggadah and the remembrance that this is the same story his father told him, which he heard from his father, and so on through the ages, fills him with a confidence that cannot help but spur him on to greater spiritual heights.

It is a staggering thought that not just one person can boast of this uninterrupted transmission through the centuries. Rather it extends to all corners of the world — from America to Ethiopia, from Russia to Australia. Millions of Jews from all walks of life, who have nothing in common other than their cherished heritage, gather in their homes on one special night. Generation after generation, they tell a story they have heard so many times before, as it was told by the original generation of millions of eye-witnesses. This is, without a doubt, the greatest living testimony to the truth and relevance of our age-old Haggadah. Many of us saw our grandparents lead Sedarim and, iy”H, many of us will lead our grandchildren in the Seder. These five generations consist of about 4% of the history of Sedarim. This can help us feel that it is a real Mesorah of Emunah that we are living with this Pesach.

We can also discuss with our children who our Rabbeim are and who their Rabbeim were to give them a sense of appreciation of the Mesorah we are passing on.

What an awesome responsibility the Torah entrusts us with when it asks us to keep up this heritage!

TO SUMMARIZE:

- We need to praise Hashem to reinforce our trust in Him, just like Bnei Yisroel did when they sang Shira at the Yam Suf. This is what we do on Pesach.
- Telling the Pesach story to one's children connects both parent and child to an uninterrupted chain of Mesorah, spanning millennia.
- To further communicate our Mesorah, we can discuss with our children who our Rabbeim were.

Asking Questions

Benjamin Franklin famously said, “Tell me, and I forget; show me, and I remember; involve me, and I will understand.” The more interactive a discussion is, the better the participants understand and retain the material. The Haggadah is posed in question-and-answer form because wisdom is best transmitted when given over in this format, instead of just being a lecture. The questions go both ways—from parents to children and from children to parents—and they are both integral to the productivity of the Seder.

When your child asks a question, make him or her feel good about it. It should be apparent to them that you value their insights. Encourage them to probe and explore as much as they want. The feeling that our children (and we!) have when our questions are taken seriously is such a feeling of respect. They also will focus on the response, since they want to hear the answer to their inquiry. When the one the question is posed to is honest and open, it creates so much stronger a relationship and comfortability to truly understand the concepts of our Mesorah, instead of just nodding and smiling. If answers to a child’s questions are not clear, then you should not feel challenged, but rather go together to someone who can answer. This search for truth is one of the most bonding experiences a family can have.

When you ask a question to your children, instead of just feeding them information, it gets them to think. This will help them retain the concepts you are discussing past the Seder. When you ask your children for their thoughts, it challenges them and motivates them to think about the source material. Don’t say the answer right away. Stop and ask for the thoughts of everyone at the table. They will feel appreciated when you acknowledge their thought process, and they will enjoy the stimulation that comes from an engaging dialogue.

TO SUMMARIZE:

- Show your children that you value their questions, because this will help them better internalize the answers. If you do not know the answer to a question, ask someone else together.
- When you ask your children questions, you get them to think and retain the knowledge.

Making Some Sense of Suffering

The world is full of suffering, and although we cannot definitively understand why it happens, it is psychologically helpful to extract ideas from Chazal as to why suffering may occur in general. A ma'amin might think, "If I believe that everything comes from Hashem, then this pain, too, comes from Hashem. Why would He torture me?"

It is important to preempt this train of thought by teaching our children all about the goodness of Hashem, how He watches over us with Hashgachah Pratis and is constantly looking out for us and doing Chesed for us. If we inculcate this belief in our children when they are still young, then this will be their focus and they will recognize Hashem's involvement in their day-to-day life. With this recognition of Hashem's Chesed, when yissurim do occur, they will know that there is an explanation for them. Even if they cannot understand the reason, they will already have a solid, deeply-rooted belief in Hashem and His chesed, as well as a relationship with Him, making it much easier to accept the difficulties.

Regarding the mitzvah of "V'ahavta eis Hashem Elokecha—And you shall love Hashem, your G-d," the Rambam says that ahavah is "misbonen b'peulosav"—noticing and thinking about His actions, looking at the magnificence of creation, gazing up at the heavens and thinking about Who created everything in this complex and beautiful world. And yet He takes care of each of us individually, to provide us with all our needs.

There is a beautiful mashal told to illustrate this point: There was an almanah who used to support her family by making bagels and selling them in the market every day. One day, she stood in the shuk the whole day, but she could not sell even one bagel. It was getting dark; it was time to go home to her kids, yet she had no money. On the way home, somebody stopped her and asked, "What do you have in the basket?" When she answered that she had bagels, he asked her how many she had, and told her that he needed to buy them all. As she continued walking home, she said, "Ribbono Shel Olam, bist dach azoi farnumen mit dein gantze velt—You are so busy with Your whole world. Where do You find the time to look and see what is going on in this little almanah's basket?"

However, finding answers amidst suffering is no simple task and cannot be taken lightly. In the Haggadah of the Tosfos Rid he offers an optimistic perspective on suffering that can help us during difficult times. The Haggadah states, "From the beginning, our ancestors

were idol worshippers. And now, Hashem has brought us close to His worship, as it is stated (Yehoshua 24:2-4), ‘Yehoshua said to the whole people, so said Hashem, over the river did your ancestors dwell from always, Terach the father of Avraham and the father of Nachor, and they worshiped other gods.’” Tosfos Rid addresses the question of why the Haggadah mentions our blemished past as descendants of idol worshippers. He explains that in truth we can ask: why are we praising Hashem for taking us out of the suffering of Mitzrayim? And why are we thanking Hashem for granting us freedom? If He wouldn’t have put us in Mitzrayim in the first place, He wouldn’t have had to free us.

It is this question that the Haggadah is answering by mentioning our blemished past. Hashem wanted to give us Shabbos, the Torah, and the Beis Hamikdash. However, even with all of His mercy and compassion, our descent from idol worshippers left a genetic imperfection that made us undeserving of these gifts. Therefore, Hashem had to subject us to the suffering of Mitzrayim, so that He would be able to have compassion on us, and entitle us to the greatest gifts ever given to mankind.

We can glean from this Tosfos Rid a powerful insight in regards to suffering. Suffering should cause us to ask: what good does Hashem have in store for us? Often Hashem wants to give us unimaginable good; however, we are undeserving, possibly through no fault of our own. He then sends suffering upon us as a means to entitle us to this good. The Pesukim tell us that the miracles of the final Geulah will completely overshadow those of Yetzias Mitzrayim. Perhaps it is these miracles that He is preparing us for.

TO SUMMARIZE:

- When we teach our children about Hashem’s chesed and Hashgacha Pratis, they will develop a strong foundation of Emunah that will allow them to accept yissurim.
- Because Bnei Yisroel descended from idol worshippers, they needed to go through the suffering of Mitzrayim to make them worthy of receiving the Torah. So too, suffering often helps us deserve the good Hashem wants to give us.