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The Young Community  
of the  
Young Israel of Staten Island  
Presents:

# DIVREI TORAH

ON THE HAGGADAH

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Wishing you and your family a *Chag Kasher V'Sameach!*

# Table of Contents

***Ha Lachma Anya: We Are Here ...***4  
Rav Yaakov Lehrfield

***Hallel Hagadol: Hiding in Plain Sight***.....5  
Rabbi Josh Sturm

***One is Hashem***.....7  
Rabbi Yosef Oppenheimer

***The Seder Plate Arrangement***.....10  
Dovid Jankelovits

***The Importance of the Arba Kosos***.....11  
David Farkas

***Ha Lachma Anya***.....12  
Jonathan Burack & Joey Spierer

***Mah Nishtana: Why “On All Other Nights”?***.....15  
David Kahana

***The Power of One Second***.....16  
Jeffrey Goldgrab

***Avadim Hayinu***.....18  
Rabbi Yehuda Segal

***Maase B'Rebbe Eliezer***.....19  
Daniel Rosenblatt

***The Four Sons or the Cycle of Life?***.....20  
Yehuda Loewenstein

***Numbers and Words***.....22  
Daniel Slomnicki

***Tzei U'Lamud: Lessons From a Homicidal Grandfather***.....25  
Binyamin Miller

***Why Egypt & Why So Many Open Miracles?***.....27  
Moshe Zola

***Korban Pesach***.....29  
DJ Arfe

***Who Knows One? OK, But Who Knows Why?***.....30  
Shlomo Snyder

***Shabbos Hagadol***.....32  
Avi Mozorosky

***Second Chance at Pesach***.....33  
Eli Neiman

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## *Ha Lachma Anya: We Are Here*

Rav Yaakov Lehrfield

The *Haggadah* opens with the words “*Ha Lachma Anya*.” We point to the *Matzah*, as we break it in half, and we proclaim “this is the poor man’s bread that we ate in *Mitzrayim*.”

At the end of the paragraph we recite a beautiful blessing, “This year we are here (in *Galus*), but next year in *Yerushalayim, Israel*.”

Many ask, what do we mean when we say “this year we are here” – it is obvious where we are! What do we mean to accomplish with these words?

In the long history of the Jewish people, we have been persecuted and tortured. We have wandered and been expelled from country after country. The moment that we finally felt secure in our new “home,” the pogroms began again. No other nation has survived the long and arduous journey that we have been subjected to. But yet, we have persevered and thrived. Mighty nations have come, have conquered, and yet vanished. The Jew is eternal.

Rav Yaakov Emden, in his preface to his commentary on the *Siddur*, writes that the Exodus from *Mitzrayim* was replete with wondrous miracles. And at the *Seder* night, we recount all of G-d’s manifestations and might.

However, the biggest miracle of all is that the Jewish people have survived two thousand years of exile. So many powerful nations have tried to absorb us, or convert us. So many have tried to exterminate us. But through it all, we have survived intact.

This is the meaning of the words in the opening of the *Seder* “we are here.” We are still in *Galus*, we are still here, and this is the most powerful testament to *Hashem*. Our persecution and freedom from *Mitzrayim* were not in vain. God’s chosen people are alive and serving Him, just as we did when we became a nation over three thousand years ago. For this, we give thanks and gratitude to *Hashem*, and it is a most fitting way to begin the *Seder*.

## ***Hallel Hagadol: Hiding in Plain Sight***

Rabbi Josh Sturm

After we complete the *Hallel*, we say the paragraph of *Hodu L'Hashem Ki Tov*, where we outline different events that occurred from *Yetzias Mitzrayim* through our journey in the desert. Each stanza ends off *Ki L'olam Chasdo*. The *Gemara* in *Pesachim* 118a tells us that this part of the *Hallel* is called *Hallel Hagadol*, as opposed to what we generally call *Hallel*, which is really called *Hallel HaMitzri* because it references the story of *Yetzias Mitzrayim*. The *Gemara* asks why is this called *Hallel Hagadol*, the Great *Hallel*? The *Gemara* cryptically answers that it speaks about God sitting at the pinnacle of the universe and providing sustenance for the world. What does this mean, and why does that make it this Great *Hallel*?

The *Aruch Hashulchan* explains that the regular *Hallel* speaks of the amazing miracles and wonders that occurred during *Yetzias Mitzrayim*. These signs served as a reminder for us of the clear existence of God, and His involvement in this world. But this is not how the world normally runs. Usually God acts behind the scenes, making sure everything runs exactly the way He wants it to run. But sometimes we forget that He is there. The greatness of this second *Hallel* is that it starts out by telling of the miracles that He brought and how those deserve our praise of “His kindness is forever”. It then proceeds to end off with a few key phrases. It says *She'bishvileinu Zachar Lanu*, He remembers the downtrodden ones. *Vayifrikeinu Mitzareinu*, he saves us from our troubles, *V'nosen Lechem Lchol Basar*, He provides sustenance for all. This second *Hallel* makes mention of both the amazing miraculous miracles as well as the everyday miracles.

When the *Gemara* answers that it is called the Great *Hallel* because He sits at the pinnacle of the universe and provides for all of our needs, it is explaining that this is really the greatness of God. The open miracles are nice, but if we really believe in Him, we will see the same open miracles hiding in plain sight. The ability to earn a living, our health, our families. All of these are no less miraculous than *Kriyas Yam Suf* and *Yetzias Mitzrayim*; it's just a matter of perspective. God sits at the pinnacle of the world and sustains all mankind. This is what this *Hallel Hagadol* is about.

It's the idea that what we take for granted like sustenance is a miracle on par with the *Makkos* and the Splitting of the Sea.

*Pesach* is the holiday of *Emunah*, faith. It is a time when we transmit our faith and belief to the next generation. It is important to not just talk about the faith which we get from all of these miracles. It is also important to discuss the faith we have in the everyday events as well. We recognize that though we don't often see Him clearly, He is very much there and in control. This is precisely the message of the *Seder* night.

## *One is Hashem*

Rabbi Yosef Oppenheimer

I imagine that many families can relate to the following experience. After eating the very tasty potato dipped in salt water, relishing in an inspiring *Maggid*, listening to ALL the children say the *Ma Nishtana*, tasting Aunt Mollies delicious *Charoses*, stuffing ourselves with the *Matzah* that somehow tastes different than the year before, and eating a scrumptious meal we are all tired and worn out by the time we reach the third cup. During *Hallel*, forget about it and attendees drop like flies. But something miraculous occurs after the fourth cup and the house suddenly becomes alive at 12:30 am with the rendition of the timeless classics that conclude the *Seder*.

Although often classified as childrens' songs and a chance for the children to make animal noises during *Chad Gadya*, the songs at the end of the *Seder* are some of the most inspiring and beautiful songs of the year. Furthermore, our sages tell us that the *Seder* is one of the most spiritually uplifting ceremonies of the year and the end of the *Seder* is the crescendo. It seems like a very anti-climactic ending. Perhaps something a little more spiritual would be in order. Furthermore, one of the most famous songs is Who Knows One, a song that appears to be an attempt to arbitrarily match numbers to certain symbols, lifecycles, and people within Judaism. Yes, it is true that we have three patriarchs and four matriarchs, but do adults really need to sing a song about this well known fact? Is this the most appropriate usage of time at one of the holiest points of the year?

The esoteric nature of *Chad Gadya* has been expounded upon in many *Hagaddahs* that I have seen. In fact, the *Gaon of Vilna* has ten different interpretations of the song, ranging from a simple understanding to very *Kabbalistic* in nature. But I would like to share a thought that I found in the *Hagaddah* of the *Chasan Sofer*, son of the *Chassam Sofer* regarding the song "Who Knows One."

First, a short introduction: A Jew sitting in Staten Island, finishes his *Seder* and looks out the window. In his soul he bemoans the fact that even after

leaving Egypt during the *Seder*, he is still living in exile. He longingly looks out the window hoping that maybe this year he will see *Eliyahu* coming to signal the coming of *Moshiach*. Many of our ancestors lived in fear the night of *Pesach*, scared of a blood liable or other pogroms. Persecuted and downtrodden, as much as a Jew could try to uplift himself during the *Seder* and imagine leaving his troubles behind, the reality appears to be a different one. On a personal level, a Jew may still envision himself in exile. He still feels constricted and trapped in his old lifestyle and hasn't been able to shake the internal bondage and shackles that prevent him from growing stronger in his service to *Hashem*. He sings, "*Chasal Siddur Pesach*" and prays for the times of *Moshiach* and to be in Jerusalem.....but what about right now, sitting in a physical and spiritual exile.

The *Chassan Sofer* says that to counter this sentiment and to invigorate us with the correct approach, we sing, "Who Knows One." One of the greatest revolutions of Judaism has been that no matter where we are, regardless of the situation, we can always find *Hashem* and connect. He has never left us and in every opportunity, there is a great potential for spiritual growth and connection. In fact, it is often in those moments, when we have exhausted all natural means, that we can truly place our faith in the One Above.

There is a story told of a man that survived the war and always walked around saying "ay-ay-ay." Even as he got remarried after the war, had a son, and rebuilt his life, the words "ay-ay-ay" were always emanating from his mouth. He came known as the *kvetcher*, people passing him thought he was delirious, and they felt sorry for him and the trauma that he experienced. His son, growing up with the "ay-ay-ay" father never questioned him and genuinely felt sorry for his father. On the day of his wedding, he respectfully went to his father and asked if for the duration of the *Chuppah* he could refrain from "ay-ay-ay" and to stop the moaning just for a few minutes to appreciate the *Simcha*. The father turned to the son and said that now was the time to explain. He said that during the war, on the first morning in the concentration camp, the men tried to *Daven* as they worked. Seeing the prayers, the Nazis beat them mercilessly. The next day they attempted to say *Mishnayos* by heart and were again beaten. That evening, they brainstormed in the barracks and



came up with an acronym “ay-ay-ay,” each one of the letters representing one of the six constant *Mitzvoth* that can be done at any time. When the Nazi’s heard this “moan” coming from the Jews they were satisfied that they were demoralizing them, while in fact the Jews had developed a code of inspiration to invigorate and remind them of *Hashem’s* constant presence. The father turned to the son and said that he was the only survivor of this group of friends and that he vowed to carry on with *Emunah* and always remember the “ay-ay-ay.” In a moment that could have led to utter despair, a Jew found *Hashem* and the inspiration necessary to move forward.

As Jews, we have an inner strength to find the inspiration wherever we are and whatever the circumstance. When we end the *Seder*, and perhaps look outside and see the long exile and the suffering, we “count our blessings,” the tenants of our religion that are unshakable and can never be altered, no matter what the circumstance. We will always have *Shabbos*, a day to connect with *Hashem*. We will always have the merit of our matriarchs and patriarchs. We will always have lifecycle events to bring us joy, *Torah* to learn, and Talmud to broaden our minds.

“Who Knows One” is a simple song, one that even a young child can sing....but that is the point. These foundations are cemented in the hearts of our people from a young age and travel with us through life. At the end of the *Seder* we reaffirm within ourselves the constant truths of our religion that have kept us together for thousands of years. At the end of the day, even if we are stripped of everything else, “One is *Hashem*.”

## *The Seder Plate Arrangement*

Dovid Jankelovits

One of the popular arrangements of the items on the *Seder* plate consists of two groups. The first contains the זרוע (shank bone) in the upper right, the ביצה (egg) in the upper left and the מרור (bitter herb) below the two. The second group contains the חרוסת (walnuts and fruits) on the same level on the left side is the כרפס (vegetable) and the חזרת (diced bitter herb) below the two. See diagram below:



The arrangement represents two ways of life. In the first group, the זרוע represents might. If we approach life with a mighty hand, we must understand there is a cyclical pattern to this behavior represented by the ביצה which is round. There are times where one may be on top and other times one may be at the bottom. The net result of this approach is מרור - bitterness.

However, if we approach in a soft and sweet manner like the חרוסת along with a humble low-key attitude like the low growing vegetable (כרפס), the net result of this approach is חזרת which is like the Hebrew word חזור meaning returns. Your sweet and humble deed will be returned by others.

## *The Importance of the Arba Kosos*

David Farkas

The *Shulchan Aruch* (*Siman Tuf Ayin Beis*), in regards to fulfilling the *Mitzvah* of *Arba Kosos*, writes, “*Afilu Ani Hamiparnes Min Hatzadakah, Yimkor Malbushoh, O’ Yimkor Atzmoh.*” Even a poor person who must take charity, must sell his jacket, or must sell himself (must hire himself out).” Why are the *Arba Kosos* so important? Why must we go through such lengths in order to fulfill this *Mitzvah*?

One explanation given is that the *Seder* night is supposed to be an experience. One is supposed to experience as if he or she is leaving *Mitzrayim* and have the feeling of *Chairus*, freedom. “*Chayav adam liros es atzmoh k’eelu yatzah m’mitzrayim.*” Therefore, wine is necessary for that experience, to get that heavy feeling in order to feel the emancipation of *Mitzrayim*.

Harav Mosher Meir Weiss quoting the *Sfas Emes* gives a different explanation. The *Sfas Emes* writes that the Jews were saved from *Mitzrayim* because they did not assimilate with the *Mitzrim*. *Rashi* in *Parshas Shemos* writes that the Jews continued to give their children Hebrew names in order to distinguish themselves from the Egyptians. The *Sfas Emes* explains that not one Jewish woman was ever with an Egyptian in order to buy favor, and it is for this reason that the Jews were worthy of being saved. Wine testifies more than anything else, the *Havdalah* (the separation) between *Klal Yisroel* and the other nations. The *Rabbonim* amongst other reasons, decreed against the use of wine from a non-Jew because of the fear that if we drank their wine, we would attend their parties and associate with them. But any instance or act in which we show a separation between *Klal Yisroel* and the other nations, wine is used. E.g. by *Kiddush*, bringing in the *Shabbos* (*Zochreihu al hayayin mikadesh HaShabbos*) we use wine because *Shabbos* is something only given and observed by Jews. Additionally, we use wine at a *Bris* as a *Bris* commemorates the covenant between *Klal Yisroel* and *Hashem*. Therefore, it is the *Arba Kosos* and the use of wine which highlights the very reason as to why the Jews were ultimately redeemed from Egypt.

## *Ha Lachma Anya*

Jonathan Burack & Joey Spierer

This Dvar Torah comes from our *Rebbe*, Rav Zvi Herman.

On *Pesach* night, we start off the most important section of the *Seder* with the famous paragraph of **הא לחמא עניא**:

הא לחמנא עניא דאכלו אבהתנא בארעא דמצרים.  
כל דכפין ייתי ויכל, כל דצריך ייתי ויפסח.  
השתא עבדי לשנה הבאה בארעא דישראל  
השתא עבדי לשנה הבאה בני חורין

This is the bread of affliction which our fathers ate in the land of Egypt  
Let all who are hungry come and eat, let all who are in need come and  
observe the *Pesach*.

This year we are here, next year – in the land of Israel!

This year we are slaves; next year – free men!

A few questions come up when reading this part of the *Haggadah*:

1. Obviously, we are not inviting anyone to our table at this point in the *Seder*, so why then do we start *Maggid* off with this?
2. *Matza* wasn't eaten in Egypt, rather when they left Egypt. Why do we say, "This is the bread that our forefathers ate in Egypt?"
3. Why do we double up the language? "Whoever is hungry, come and eat. Whoever needs the *Korban Pesach*, come and join." Isn't that kind of the same thing?
4. Likewise: "This year we are in exile, next year in the Holy Land. This year we are slaves, next year we will be free." What's with the repetition? And if it's not, what are they referring to exactly?

The *Malbim* answers these questions by correcting a common misconception: **הא לחמא עניא** is not one statement that the Jews always said before starting their *Seder*. Rather, it is multiple statements taken from different times over the many years. In other words: we are not actually inviting people in nowadays. If we were, we would've said **הא לחמא עניא** in *Shul*. Rather, we're remembering how the Jews used to invite people back

in the day. The *Korban Pesach* could only be eaten in a group. A Jew could only partake of the *Korban Pesach* if he was part of a predetermined group. So, when the *Beis HaMikdash* was standing, Jews would go into the streets, before they *Shechted* the *Korban Pesach*, and announce that they had open spots at their table. If there were any poor people, they would join up with them at that point, because if they waited until later, it would be too late. Therefore, "Whoever needs the *Korban Pesach*, come and join." Additionally, the *Korban Pesach* had to be eaten after a person was full. So that was the purpose of the statement, "Anyone who is hungry, come and eat." The two statements went hand in hand.

What about the last two statements? Well, the *Malbim* explains that they were added later on in our history. After the Jews were exiled, they said, "Now we are here, next year may we return to the Holy Land." After they returned to the Holy Land but were henceforth subjugated by the Greeks, Romans, etc., they added, "Now we are slaves, next year we will be free." Finally, to answer question #2: Why do we say that this is the poor man's bread that the Jews ate in Egypt? Didn't they eat it when they left Egypt, as the *Torah* tells us? The *Avudraham* gives a fascinating answer, based on the experiences of the *Ibn Ezra*. The *Avudraham* writes that the *Ibn Ezra* somehow ended up in jail in India, and the food that they fed to the prisoners there was *Matza*. After all, it's easy to produce, and fill a person up with very little consumption. So the *Avudraham* surmises: if that was the food of the jails in India, it's logical that the Egyptians might've fed the Jews a similar diet all those years ago. But the *Maharal* points out that there is no source for the fact that the Jews ate *Matza* in Egypt proper.

Based on this, the *Lubavitcher Rebbe* concludes the following: The prose of *הא לחמא עניא* is not to be taken literally. It's meant to be taken satirically. In other words, *הא לחמא עניא* comes to answer the following question; a question that is so basic that it must be answered before we start the *Seder* night. How can we celebrate freedom if we're still in exile? The effects of *Yetzias Mitzrayim* seem not to have lasted. Today, we are strangers in a strange land, and even though we may feel comfortable, we are not even close to being truly redeemed. Even in *Eretz Yisrael*, the *Galus* is strong. How can we celebrate redemption when we are still not free?

The opening line almost mocks us and says: Do you think this is really bread of redemption? It's Bread of Affliction! Now we are here in *Galus*, now we are slaves! How can we celebrate the redemption? The *Lubavitcher Rebbe* explains that the answer is right there in front of us. Yes, now we are here. Yes, now we are slaves. But... next year in the Holy Land, next year we will be free. There is always redemption available to us. *Hashem* is always ready to redeem us. We just have to want it. We just have to opt in to it.

בכל דור ודור חייב אדם לראות את עצמו כאילו הוא יצא ממצרים. Every year we are supposed to view ourselves as if we left Egypt: And we can leave Egypt! We can leave our own, personal Egypt. We are able to have a redemption, and that is something we should keep in mind as we move through the *Seder* night. We can change and redeem ourselves from our own personal prisons. If we only put the effort in, *הא לחמא עניא* teaches us that *Hashem* will surely give us *סייעתא דשמיא*.

## *Mah Nishtana – Why “On All Other Nights”?*

David Kahana

One of the most anticipated parts of the *Pesach Seder* is the recitation of *Mah Nishtana*, the four questions asked by the youngest child at the table. Why do we use the formulation for each of the four questions, “On all other nights” instead of simply asking, “Why are we doing such-and-such tonight?” Why do we recite an introduction which mentions the differences between the *Pesach Seder* and every other night? What does this add that would otherwise be missing?

*Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik zt”l* offers an answer based on the *Rambam’s* explanation of the *Mitzvah* of *Sippur Yetziat Mitzrayim*, the requirement to relate the story of the Exodus on the first night of *Pesach*. The *Rambam* writes: “It is a positive *Mitzvah* to tell the story of the miracles and wonders that were done for our ancestors in Egypt on the night of the fifteenth of *Nissan*, as it says [in the *Torah*], ‘Remember this day that you left Egypt,’ just as it says [in the *Torah*], ‘Remember the Sabbath day.’” This second verse – quoted regarding the Sabbath – is the Biblical source for making *Kiddush* on *Shabbat*. What is the connection between the mitzvot of *Sippur Yetziat Mitzrayim* and *Kiddush*?

The *Rambam* maintains that part of the *Mitzvah* of *Kiddush* is mentioning how *Shabbat* is different from other days. According to *Rav Soloveitchik*, the *Rambam’s* reference to *Kiddush* refers specifically to the requirement in regard to the *Mitzvah* of *Sippur Yetziat Mitzrayim* and, must include, not only the recitation of the story itself, but also the fundamental differences between the *Seder* night and every other night before and after. This is accomplished during the recital of *Mah Nishtana*, when these differences are outlined through the formula, “On all other nights”.

## *The Power of One Second*

Jeffrey Goldgrab

One second may seem inconsequential to many; however, to *Hashem*, it can be all the difference in the world.

The concept of *Matzah* is a fascinating one if you think about it. This same food item takes on a completely different and diametrically opposed status depending on how long it is baked for. When *Matzah* is baked for 18 minutes or less and you eat it at the *Seder*, you fulfill the only *Mitzvah D'arysa* that we eat *Bzman Haze*h and this helps you acquire *Olam Haba*. However, if that piece of *Matzah* had been baked for 18 minutes and one second, even though it looks exactly the same as the *Matzah* baked for 18 minutes, you would be *Chayiv Kares* for eating it on *Pesach*.

Furthermore, *Rebbeinu Ephraim* explains that when *Moshe* asked for a second sign to prove to the elders that he was the messenger of God, *Hashem* told him to place his left hand inside his coat and to take it out. *Moshe* did as he was told and as he took it out, his hand turned white as snow, fully covered with *Tzoraas*. *Hashem* then told *Moshe* to put his hand back inside and when he did, it immediately reverted back to its original state. Aside for this incident serving as *Moshe's* second sign, it also provides insight into *Hashem's* kindness. When *Moshe's* hand was afflicted with *Tzoraas*, it happened at the latest possible moment, as he was taking it out. When his hand returned back to normal, it happened at the earliest possible moment, as soon as he was putting it back in.

Through this incident, *Hashem* is instilling in us a very powerful message and one that we need to take with us throughout our lives. When we are in the midst of our personal struggles, we must know that *Hashem* is with us and waiting to redeem us. As soon as *Moshe* received his sign, *Hashem* didn't let him suffer with the *Tzoraas* even one second longer than he needed to.

When we look down at the *Matzah* on our *Seder* table, the same *Matzah* that couldn't be baked for even one second longer than 18 minutes, it is a



reminder to us to always remember this lesson of the power of time and more specifically, the power and impact of one second. Just like *Hashem* didn't wait even one second longer than necessary before curing the *Tzoraas* from *Moshe's* hand, we must be extra careful when baking the *Matzah* because one second can literally be the difference between life and death.

I saw in the name of Rav Elimelech Biderman that before the *Mah Nishtana*, many *Haggadahs* have the following words in the instructions: "*Kan, HaBen Shoel* - Here, the child asks." Aside for the simple instructions, these words are telling us, "Here, at this point in the *Seder*, the child should pause and ask." The *Seder* night is an extremely opportune time for us to *Daven* to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* to redeem us from our personal *Mitzrayim*. Every child of *Hashem* should take a moment before the *Mah Nishtana* and ask *Hashem* for assistance and redemption both personally and for *Klal Yisroel* as a whole from any of our current problems.

Through the *Tzoraas* incident with *Moshe* and the baking of the *Matzah*, *Hashem* is teaching us a very valuable lesson. Every second in our lives is extremely powerful and important to *Hashem*. To *Hashem*, one second can make all the difference in the world.

*Chag Kasher V'Sameach!*

## *Avadim Hayinu*

Rabbi Yehuda Segal

A question many people ask while discussing the great compassion *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* had for us by liberating us from the extreme pains of being slaves in Egypt is, “If *Hashem* was so compassionate, why did He bring us there in the first place? And if He did bring us there, how does it show such compassion by Him taking us out?

One of the *Baalei Tosfos* explains that in reality, the fact that *Hashem* brought us into Egypt in the first place is also because of His tremendous love for us. This is because *Hashem* knew that the only way for us to merit receiving the *Torah* and all of the amazing things it has to offer us is to first go into Egypt and then come out.

A lesson for us from this is that in life it pays to take a step back every now and then and think of the troubles you or others may be facing and ask yourself in a sincere way, “How can *Hashem* who is a compassionate G-d allow this to happen to me?” Perhaps at times the answer might be that in order for the ultimate result of His compassion to become a reality, He may have needed to put a situation in place in order for you to pull through it and reach the level you need to get to.

## ***Maase B'Rebbi Eliezer***

Daniel Rosenblatt

During the *Maggid* portion of the *Haggadah*, in the paragraph of “*Maase B'rebbi Eliezer*” we read the story of the 5 Rabbis in *Bnei Brak*, who stayed up all night telling over the story of the exodus from Egypt. In the morning, the *Talmiddim* come and tell them it's time to recite *Kriyat Shema*. A couple of questions on this incident.

1. Where were the *Talmiddim* till now?
2. Did the *Talmiddim* interrupt the *Seder* of their *Rabbeim*? Isn't it inappropriate to disturb the *Gedolei Hador*?

Rabbi Faskowitz suggests a different take on this famous story we learned as children. The *Talmiddim* completed the *Seder* much earlier as they felt they had satisfied their obligation for the *Seder* night. They felt they did everything they needed for the *Seder* and became tired and ultimately went to bed. The *Talmiddim* didn't appreciate the unique opportunity to grow on this night, and failed to recognize that the *Seder* night can be a catalyst to becoming closer to G-d.

The *Rabbeim* however realized the power of this night and wanted to take advantage of every second of it. The *Talmiddim*, realizing they missed out on this tremendous opportunity, came rushing to these Rabbi's to tell them, “come teach us, we want to learn. We know we missed out but maybe there is still time.” However, the Rabbi's respond to them, “The time for *Kriyat Shema* arrived.” We often think that the *Talmiddim* told the *Rabbeim* it was time for *Kriyat Shema*, but if we rearrange where we put the comma, we can see that it was the Rabbis telling this to the *Talmiddim*.

The message the Rabbis are giving to the *Talmiddim* is that you missed out the opportunity to gain the full potential of this night. May we all make the most of the *Pesach Seder* this year, and be *Zoché* to be in *Yerushalayim* next year with the coming of *Mashiach*.

## *The Four Sons or the Cycle of Life?*

Yehuda Loewenstein

*Maggid* is an integral part of the *Seder*, which recounts the story of our affliction and of *Yitziyat Mitzrayim*. *Maggid* leads into the rest of the *Seder*, which speaks of our ultimate redemption. As exciting as the entire *Seder* can be, the time we have on the *Seder* night, in order to expound the many teachings/meanings, is never sufficient.

One of the many interesting pieces we read is the passage regarding the four sons. This passage has many esoteric explanations. On the surface, the passage reveals a guide of how to communicate with each type of child so that they can participate, appreciate and understand what is going on. No two children are alike regarding their understanding of situations and their ability to interpret the concepts that they are experiencing and hearing.

If we delve deeper into the meaning of this passage, we find the cycle of life, starting with the baby stage and leading into adulthood. As a baby, leading into the toddler stage, we find the *She'eno Yodeah Lish'ol* or the child *Who Does Not Know to Ask*. At this stage, a child is just beginning the learning process in life. Everything is new and exciting. To this child, they are constantly learning, but the child may not understand what is going on. For this level in life, we have to show the child everything and for this reason, we open the conversation for them so that they can learn the basics.

The next stage in life is when the toddler transforms in to the young child child/*Chinnuch* stage of life. This *Tam* or *Simple Child* is now at the point in life where they know the basics, but are beginning to learn more, in depth, about the laws and way of life. This includes learning how to perform *Mitzvot*, what the *Halachot* are, learning *Torah* and so on. The child is so overwhelmed that the most common question the child asks at this point in life is *Ma Zot?* or *What is this?* That is why we mention that *G-D took us out with a strong hand*. At this stage the child is only beginning to

understand what happened to us in *Mitzrayim* or in the cycle of their lives, how everything interconnects.

As the *Chinnuch* stage continues, the child enters their teenage years. Some children will continue their lives with expanding their *Middot* and becoming more righteous children, while other children may veer off the path and enter a rebellious stage. This is called the *Rasha* or *Wicked* stage of life. The child begins a type of independence in life, where sometimes they will shun authority and believe they know better. Every child experiences this stage in their own way, whether for good, bad or in between. This is why the *Rasha* asks *Ma Ha'avodah Hazot Lachem?* or *What is this worship to you?* At this stage the child feels a disassociation from everything. That is why we respond that G-D did all of these wonders for *Us* and not *You*. Since the child is not interested, we give them their space, for now, since they need this time in life to "figure it out on their own".

As the teenage years wind down, the child enters, what we hope is, the *Chacham* or *Wise* stage. The child has developed throughout each stage in their childhood and has reached the stage where they can not only be a productive part of society, if they have not already done so, but also contribute even more to their communities and the world. At this stage, the *Chacham* asks *Ma Ha'edut V'Hachukim Asher Tzivah Hashem Elokeinu Etchem?* or *What are these testimonies, statutes and judgments that Hashem, our Lord, commanded you?* The child is now an adult and ready to contribute, take on life and be a part of everything that life has to offer.

These stages constantly occur within our lifetimes. The childhood stage is just the beginning. As we go through life, we constantly fluctuate between the four son stages. We must give thanks to all those in our lives, whether parents, *Rabbeim*, mentors and others who help mold us and lead us to the correct paths. May we be *Zoche* to continue to learn from these experiences and finish off in the *Chacham* stage.

*Chag Sameach!*

## Numbers and Words

Daniel Slomnicki

I present a few examples where *Gematria* and play on words help shed light on the beauty of the *Haggadah*, and help bring us to the realization as to all that that *Hashem* does for us.

- In the *Hegryonei Halacha Haggadah* written by Rabbi Yitzchak Mirsky, he notes during the discussion of the different passages describing the plagues that befell the *Mitzrim* that if we calculate all the numbers of plagues, we find an interesting fact:

- The *Haggadah* first mentions the ten plagues = 10;
- Then it provides *R' Yehuda's* three-word mnemonic = 3;
- *R' Yose Haglili* speaks of ten plagues in Egypt and fifty on the sea = 60;
- *R' Eliezer* refers to forty in Egypt and 200 at the sea = 240;
- *R' Akiva* has fifty in Egypt and 250 at the sea = 300;

The total of all these plagues is 613, the exact number of commandments found in the *Torah*! By observing all of the 613 *Mitzvos*, *Hashem* guarantees that we will be protected from the 613 various forms of punishments inflicted upon the Egyptians.

- Rabbi Mirsky comments on the phrase "*Ani vilo Malach, Ani vilo Seraph, Ani vilo HaShaliach*" in describing how *Hashem* passed through *Eretz Mitzrayim* on that night and struck every firstborn. There is a hidden allusion to *Moshe* – the initials of the words *Malach, Seraph, and HaShaliach-Mem, Shin (Sin), Hey-* spells *Moshe*. The *Haggadah* implies that *Moshe* too was not involved in *Makas Bichoros*, as he was in most of the other plagues. The desire to imply this idea would account for the unusual use of the word "the" in connection with the word *Shaliach* but not the other two words (*Malach* and *Seraph*) – it is in order to supply the *Hey* of *Moshe*. The allusion was to show that this was *Hashem*, and only *Hashem*, who did this, and no one else.

- Rabbi Mirsky addresses the following question asked by the *Rasha*: “*Ma haavodah hazos lachem? Lachem vilo lo. Ulifi shehotzi es atzmo min hakahal kafar bikur.*” (What is this service to you? Implying to you, but not to him! Because he excludes himself from the rest of the community he has denied a fundamental principle.)

The expression “denying a fundamental principle” refers to someone who denies the existence of *Hashem*. This is quite a serious indictment against the *Rasha*. Is it not possible to exclude oneself from the community without being accused of being a heretic? The answer to this question is that in fact the events that *Pesach* commemorates form one of the basic tenets of our faith. The belief in the events of *Yitziyas Mitzrayim* is as basic to Judaism as the belief in God itself. As the *Rosh* puts it in his *Orchos Chaim*: “You must trust in God with all your heart and believe in His personal providence... for whoever does not believe in... ‘Who took you out of *Mitzrayim*’ also does not believe in ‘*am Hashem* your God...’ for this represents the uniqueness of *Yisrael* over the other nations, and is the basis of entire *Torah*.”

Giving numerical expression to this philosophical concept, the *Roke'ach* points out that the numerical value of the words *Pesach*, using the “full *gematria*” system, in which each letter of a word is spelled out in full) is 613. *Pey* = 85 (*Pey* (80), *Hey* (5); *Samech* = (*Samech* (60), *Mem* (40), *Chaf* (20); *Ches* = 408 (*Ches* (8), *Tes* (400)).

One who uproots the belief in *Pesach* uproots the entire basis of the 613 commandments.

- Rabbi Mirsky points out the following as to the phrase “*viaf ata hakey es shinav*” (You should set his (*Rasha*’s) teeth on edge) that the *Haggadah* does not tell us to “strike him (*hakeh*) in the teeth,” i.e., to use physical force against the *Rasha*, but only to “set his teeth on edge (*hakey*),” to cause him dismay.” We do not want to drive away the wicked son altogether, but only to persuade him through words – vigorously, if necessary – to change his evil ways, and join forces with the righteous. *Hakey* can also mean “loosen” or “lessen.” A numerical allusion to this idea can be found in the fact that the value of *Rasha* (570), minus the value of *Shinav* (266), equals 204, the value of *Tzadik*.

- In the *Haggadah* of the *Talelei Oros*, Rabbi Yissachar Dov Rubin comments on the passage of “*viavadum viunu osam arba meos shana.*” (And they will work them and oppress them for four hundred years.) We find three different “ends” with respect to *Yetzias Mitzrayim*. 1) *Hashem* said to *Avraham Avinu* that we will be slaves for 400 years; 2) In *Parshas Bo*, it says after 430 years all of the hosts of *Hashem* went out of *Mitzrayim*; 3) In *Pirkei d'Rebbe Eliezer*, from the birth of *Menashe* until *Yetzias Mitzrayim* was 215 years.

The *Zera Berech* explains that these three different “ends” by referring to the words of his father, author of *Migaleh Amukos*, speaks to the many trials each of our *Avos* had to overcome in their lives, and the purpose of these trials was to rectify *Adam's* sin – eating from the *Etz Hadas*. *Adam* had blemished three different components of his soul – *Nefesh*, *Ruach*, and *Neshama*. *Avraham* was thrown into the fiery furnace, and this helped to rectify *Nefesh*. *Yitzchak* had to endure the *Akeida*, and his soul temporarily departed, which helped to rectify *Ruach*. *Yaakov* suffered more than both, which helped to rectify *Neshama*.

In light of these words, we can understand the three different “ends” connected to *Yetzias Mitzrayim*, for *Klal Yisrael* was an extension of the *Avos*, and they too had to suffer to rectify the effects of *Adam's* sin.

In order to rectify *Adam's Nefesh*, they had to be in exile for 430 years. *Nefesh* = 430 – *nun* (50), *fei* (80), *shin* (300).

In order to rectify *ruach*, they had to be in *Mitzrayim* for 215 years. *Ruach* = 215 – *reish* (200), *vav* (6), *ches* (8) and one for the word itself.

In order to rectify *Neshama*, they needed 400 years. *Neshama* = *Haneshama* – 400 – *Hey* (5), *Nun* (50), *Shin* (300), *Mem* (40), *Hey* (5).

In this way, they helped to rectify all three parts of *Adam's* soul.



## *Tzei U'Lamud: Lessons from a Homicidal Grandfather*

Binyamin Miller

We kick off the historical portion of the *Maggid* portion of the *Haggadah* with *Tzei U'Lmad*. Go out and learn what *Lavan* wanted to do to the Jewish People. The *Haggadah* is quick to point out, that our matrilineal Grandfather and Uncle was worse than Pharaoh because he just wanted to outright uproot our beliefs completely. At least Pharaoh only wanted to kill the newborn males, subjugate the nation, and assimilate the Jews within his kingdom. *Lavan* in his self-righteous fury wanted to simply wipe us off the map, something that as a nation we have almost become anesthetized to due to our long history of persecution.

The *Vilna Gaon* asks a simple yet profound question. While we can understand that *Lavan* is a viable part of the story of *Yetzias Mitzraim*, why does the *Ba'al Haggadah* say “*Tzei U'Lmad!*” Go out and learn? The paragraph should start with look at what happened, or “In the beginning...”. Or you thought Pharaoh was so bad? Look at *Lavan* first. What is the unique lesson that the *Ba'al Haggadah* wants us to learn from *Lavan's* homicidal intentions?

The *Vilna Gaon* states that the lesson we must learn in life, is that even though we cannot see it, *Hashem* is doing miracles on our behalf every day, every hour, every second. Even though a person does not recognize that a miracle is happening to him, *Hashem* still does the miracles for him every second. We can learn this lesson from the *Pasuk* common to *Simchas Torah Hakafos* and *Hallel Hagadol*: *L'Oseih Niflaos Gedolos L'Vado*.

The *Ba'al Haggadah* is pointing this lesson out from the anecdote of *Lavan* the Aramean. Go out and learn what *Lavan* wanted to do. *Yaakov* and his family had no idea what their Grandfather wanted to do to them. They had no idea that behind a complaining idolatrous façade was a genocidal gentile. But *Hashem* performs miracles even to those who are unaware of the miracles themselves. The *Pasuk* says *Arami Oved Avi*, *Lavan* wanted to kill my father. However, *Hashem* came and stopped his rampage before it even affected us, and we never even knew that it happened.

We must always take this lesson to heart by being more aware of our surroundings. *Hashem* is doing miraculous things for us, even though we don't see them.

## Why Egypt and Why So Many Open Miracles?

Moshe Zola

The *Yom Tov* of *Pesach* celebrates *Hashem* taking us out of our slavery in Egypt. It also reflects the largest period of Jewish history with the grandest and most public miracles. How are these two facts related?

**Why Egypt?** The *Shaarei Orah*<sup>1</sup> asks why did *Hashem* choose to enslave us in Egypt so that we could be saved from there? What makes Egypt more special than any of the other nations?

**Why so many open Miracles?** We must first understand the nature of a Miracle. The *Maharal*<sup>2</sup> teaches when *Hashem* wants to do a miracle, He makes nature line up so the miracle can be performed. *Hashem* wanted to split the sea; therefore He made the Jews become trapped between the Egyptians and the sea. *Hashem* could have very easily just made them not chase us rather than have to split the sea for us. This shows that the miracle itself is important and not just a means to an end. So now to our second question, Why the need for open Miracles?

The *Ramban*<sup>3</sup> teaches us that there are 70 unique nations in the world and each one has assigned land and an appointed angel. The only land and nation that does not have an angel is *Eretz Yisroel* and *Klal Yisroel* because *Hashem* looks over them directly. The *Tzafnes Paneach* on the *Haggadah* teaches that Egypt is second to *Eretz Yisroel* among the nations. He explains when we say Egypt is second, we mean the angel of Egypt is first and the closest to the *Shechina*. This is why the angel of Egypt is known as the *Bechor* and this is why the final plague attacked the Egyptian firstborn. Additionally, the Egyptians themselves were granted superiority over the other nations due to their status. Furthermore, the *Zohar*<sup>4</sup> writes that the Egyptians worshipped sheep and being that the constellation of sheep is

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<sup>1</sup> *Tzafnas Paneach on the Haggadah, on the Ten Plagues*

<sup>2</sup> *Gevuros, Hashem, Hakdamah Shniah*

<sup>3</sup> 18:25

<sup>4</sup> *Zohar, Pinchas 250b*

the *Mazel Teleh* (Aries)<sup>5</sup> and that it is the first constellation of the year, being in the month of *Nissan*, it is the strongest of all constellations<sup>6</sup> for the strongest nation.

Now we can begin to understand “Why Egypt” and “Why so many open Miracles.”

The *Ramban*<sup>7</sup> writes that all the miracles that *Hashem* wrought in Egypt were intended to demonstrate *Hashem's* control over everything that exists. The *Steipler Goan*<sup>8</sup> writes that each plague demonstrated a different aspect of *Hashem's* control over the universe. The Plague of Blood showed His control over water. The Plague of Wild Animals showed His power of creatures. The Plague of Boils showed His power over the Arcane Arts. The Plague of Darkness showed His power over the constellations, and so on. Indeed the *Ramban*<sup>9</sup> writes that the Godly concepts that can be learned from *Pesach* are so fundamental that they are the underlying causes of numerous *Mitzvos*. Some examples he gives are putting on *Tefilin*, placing a *Mezuzah* in one's home, and saying *Shema* twice a day.

Only the Strongest country in the world, Egypt, in their most powerful month, *Nissan* in the middle of the month (when the constellation of *Teleh* peaks) would suffice for *Hashem* to show His mastery over all others and make it absolutely clear that His will is above all else. This is why we had to be brought out from Egypt and not any other nation, and also why *Hashem* chose not only to perform so many miracles so openly but chose the exact Miracles that He did<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> *Sefer Yetzirah* 5:3

<sup>6</sup> *Ramban, Shemos* 12:3

<sup>7</sup> *Ramban, Shemos* 13:16

<sup>8</sup> *Chayei Olam* 1:15

<sup>9</sup> *Ramban, Shemos* 13:16

<sup>10</sup> *Sefer Otzoros Hanelamim, R Zeo Trenk* 89:90

## ***Korban Pesach***

DJ Arfe

Why does *Hashem* command the *Bnei Yisrael* that when they prepare the *Korban Pesach* that its proper mode of cooking is to ONLY be “roasted” (צלי) and no other method? In addition, when they ate the *Korban*, they were not permitted to break any bone in the animal. What does *Hashem* “care” how it is prepared and how it was to be eaten?

Roasting is the one method of cooking that is unique to others in regards to the state of the meat after it is cooked. In all other methods, the meat partially falls away from the rest of the piece or, in some cases, falls off the bone completely. Only when roasting meat does the meat not only stay on the bone but the meat “shrinks” and comes “closer together.” This symbolically gave the Jewish people a “visual” message of *Achdut*/solidarity/unity. If we want to be free to serve *Hashem*; if we want to not be subjugated, then we need to be united. This is also why the bones could not be broken. Even once the meat is roasted and the meat “comes together” symbolizing our unity, that needs to not only be a “surface” message! We cannot pretend on the outside to be united when on the inside we do not want to be united or we are fractious. Not breaking bones was to symbolize that both on the OUTSIDE and on the INSIDE, our unity as a people is critical for our survival and for serving *Hashem*.

## ***Who Knows One? OK, But Who Knows Why?***

Shlomo Snyder

Since I wrote about the song *Chad Gadyah* last year, I thought it made sense to examine another song at the end of the *Seder*, "*Echad Mi Yodeya*". While it's a fun song, why sing it at the end of the *Seder*? The song could be sung at any time of the year, what significance does it have to *Pesach* and the *Seder*?

Reb Yissachar Dov of Belz explains why the end of the *Seder* is the perfect place for this song. He compares it to a rich man who is usually very private and quiet about his wealth. Only on the rare instance when he has had too much to eat and drink, and is in an especially happy mood, does he reveal and boast about his great wealth and possessions. So too with *Klal Yisroel*, after we have had our 4 cups of wine and enjoyed a good meal do we count the many treasures *Hashem* has given us!

Taking this idea further, the *Hagadas "Atteres Yeshuah"* explains how the song lists all the various *Zechusim* that allowed us to be taken out of *Mitzrayim*.

- "**One** is *Hashem*" – in the *Zechus* of our belief in *Hashem* we were redeemed, as it says ([\*Shemos\* 4, 31](#)): "And the people believed."
- "The **two** *Luchos*" – The Jews were taken out of *Mitzrayim* in order to accept the *Torah*, as it says ([\*Shemos\* 3, 12](#)): "When you take the people out of Egypt, you will worship G-d on this mountain."
- "The **three** *Avos*" – In the *Zechus* of our *Avos* we were taken out of *Mitzrayim*, as it says ([\*Shemos\* 2, 24](#)): "And God remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Yitzchok, and with Yaakov." The *Midrash (Shemos Rabbah 1:40)* writes that the Jews did not deserve to be redeemed, and it was only in the merit of the forefathers that *Hashem* took us out.
- "The **four** *Imahos*" – the *Gemora (Rosh Hashana 11a)* writes that it was in the *Zechus* of the *Avos* and *Imahos* we were taken out of *Mitzrayim*.

- "The **five** books of the *Torah*" – the *Zechus* of accepting the *Torah*, as explained above by the *Luchos*.
- "The **six** orders of the *Mishna*" – The *Zechus* of *Torah She Baal Pe*. The *Gemora* writes (*Gitin* 60b): "*Hashem* made a covenant with Israel only for the sake of that which was transmitted orally."
- "The **seven** days of the week" – according to the *Midrash* (*Shemos Rabba* 5:21), the Jews were taken out of *Mitzrayim* because they rested on *Shabbos* (the seventh day)
- "The **eight** days before the bris" – *Pirkey Derebi Elazar* (Chapter 29) "In the *Zechus* of the blood of circumcision and the blood of the *Korbon Pesach*, I redeemed you from Egypt."
- "**Nine** months of pregnancy" – an allusion to the "*Nashim Tzidkaniyus*" (righteous women) in *Mitzrayim* who defied *Pharoah* to continue to have children.
- "The **ten** commandments" – Again, the *Zechus* of the *Torah*.
- "The **eleven** stars in Yaakov's dream" – the *Zechus* that the Jews did not change their names while in *Mitzrayim*.
- "The **twelve** *Shevatim*" – the *Zechus* that the Jews did not assimilate and intermarry with the *Mitzrim*.
- "The **thirteen** *Middot HaRachamim*" – the future *Moshiach* will *iy"H* come in the merit of the Thirteen Divine Attributes of Mercy.

With these explanations it makes perfect sense why we sing "*Echad Mi Yodeya*" at the end of the *Pesach Seder*. May we sing it this *Pesach* with a better understanding and may *Moshiach* come soon so we can all spend next *Pesach* in *Yerushalayim*!

## ***Shabbos Hagadol***

Avi Mozorosky

It's brought down in the *Nesivos Shalom* that *Shabbos Hagadol* is "*Gadol sh'begdolim*". But why is this particular *Shabbos* called "*gadol*" and what is so special about this particular *Shabbos*?

In *Hashem's* commanding of the *Mitzva* of *Shabbos*, we are told, "*Shamor V'zachor*". *Zachor* is used to teach us *Ahavas Hashem*, while *Shamor* is used to teach *Yiras Hashem*. Additionally, *Shabbos Shuva* is used to teach us *Yirah*, while *Shabbos Hagadol* is used to teach us *Ahava*. Despite needing both components in our *Avodah* in *Yidishkait*, it appears the name *Gadol*, referencing *Ahava*, holds more weight than the word *Shuva*, referencing *Yirah*. This, the *Nesivos Shalom* says is to teach us that the *Madregah* of achieving *Ahavas Hashem* is a greater *Madregah* than that of achieving *Yiras Hashem*, and that's why *Shabbos Hagadol* is called "*Gadol*".

*Ahava* is specific to *Pesach* because of the abundant *Ahava* and *Chesed Hashem* displayed in our *Geulah* from *Mitzrayim*. May we all carry *Hashem's* display of *Ahava* and *Chesed* throughout *Yetzias Mitzrayim* with us all year round. *Chag Sameach!*



## Second Chance at Pesach

Eli Neiman

In *Parshas Bo*, Chapter 12, the *Perek* talks about the *Mitzvah* of the *Korban Pesach* among other *Mitzvos*. As such the *Sefer Hachinuch*, based on the *Rambam* codifies *Mitzvos* 5-8 having to do with the *Korban Pesach*. The *Sefer Hachinuch* explains the reason for these *Mitzvos* is to remember *Yetzias Mitzrayim*.

Later on, in *Parshas Bahalosecha*, some people come to *Moshe* saying they are ritually impure (*Tamei*) and they can't bring the first *Korban Pesach*. They don't know what to do. *Moshe* says he will ask *Hashem*. *Hashem* responds that on the 14th of *Iyar*, the Jews will get a second chance at the *Korban Pesach*. The *Gemara* in *Sukkah Daf* 25 says they were involved in *Meis Mitzvah*. The Jews involved the *Meis Mitzvah* could have missed out on the *Korban Pesach*. (Some may object saying they were involved in a *Mitzvah* and therefore exempt from the *Korban Pesach*. Even still, it's hard to believe and understand a *mitzvah* that is *Chayav Kares* was pushed off. Some may object again and say the punishment of *Kares* came after the *Mitzvah* of *Pesach Sheni*. This objection is faulty again because besides for it not being very clear when the punishment of *Kares* came, it's still hard to believe the Jews that left Egypt could miss such a fundamental *Mitzvah*.)

Imagine being one of the Jews who was involved in the *Meis Mitzvah* coming out of Egypt and missing out on a fundamental *Mitzvah* such as *Korban Pesach*. Imagine the frustration and sadness. What would you do? How would you react? The Jews who were involved in *Meis Mitzvah* decided to ask *Moshe* to see if they could have a second chance. As a result, *Pesach Sheni* came and the merit came through them specifically instead of from *Hashem* directly. They didn't give up. Instead, they tried. (Some *Rishonim* say *Kares* is being cut off from the next world.)

Indeed, in "The Wisdom of Rabbi Nachman", R' Nachman from Breslov hints to the enormous strain they were probably feeling: "There are times when a person imagines that he will never merit the life of the world to come because he is so distant from God. Still, he should be strong and determined. He should long for God, pine for Him, and do everything he

can to serve Him in joy. Show willingness in your service. Show that you will serve God every moment, every day of your life, even without the reward of the World to Come.....And God will do what is good in His eyes."

It could be very easy to believe one lost their *Olam Haba*. Still, one should try to keep *Mitzvos* anyway. In *Chassidus*, *Pesach Sheni* is all about second chances. The Jews who almost missed the *Korban Pesach* seemed absolutely doomed spiritually. Still, they tried and a *Mitzvah* came through their merit of trying. Too often, we could believe we lost everything physically and spiritually. We should try anyway. It's possible we mention the *Korban Pesach* as one of our 3 obligations (in addition to *Matzah* and *Marror*) because we are showing we are trying our best in completing the *Mitzvah* of *Korban Pesach*.

In the merit of trying to keep *Torah* and *Mitzvos*, may we see good news.