

ESSENTIALS ON HAGADA

By Rabbi Menachem Rokeach

Last two communications listed 1 to 3 items (first essay), numbers 4-10 second, this, the third, begins with #11.

- 11) Many reasons are given why the Shabos before Pesach is called Shabos Hagadol. One reason may be the basic Pesach principle, ולמען תספר ...באזני בנק, the loving harmonious heart beating of parents and children. That achievement of Elijah makes it a great day, שבת הגדול. And it is a perfect introduction to the seder celebration.
- 12) Just as there is emphasis on the questions (מה נשתנה) that it be asked by the child, (or youngest at the seder table) so is it imperative that the answers be given by the father.

Even though the answers are clearly pronounced and explained in the Hagada, which is read together by all participants, the father should lead that reading. Additionally the father may, or should, finish (repeat) the last few words of every paragraph, as the shliach tzibur (chazzan) in synagogue prayer, to keep the recitals participants together.

- 13) The Hagadah relates about the five sages spending the seder night in Bnei Brak discussing the Exodus all night, until their disciples came and said, "Our masters, time has already arrived for the recitation of the morning SHEMA.

It is obvious that this paragraph seeks to teach us an important principle about the seder celebration. Surely it is not the novelty of these sages staying up all night discussing the Exodus. Many Torah scholars managed to delve in Torah depth with little sleep. The Vilner Gaon, it is related, slept only two hours a night. My Rebbi, Reb R.G.z.tz.l. often asked a student to recite morning Birchas Hatorah loud, having in mind to fulfill the obligation by listening (after a sleepless night).

The paramount teaching in this paragraph may be the emphasis upon accepting the yoke of Heaven, which is the central principle in the recital of SHEMA. The Shulchan Aruch quotes the Ohel Moed (10:1) obligating women to recite the SHEMA daily, even though it is time-related, *זמן גרמא*, because by the Shema one fulfills the requirement of *קבלת עול מלכות שמים* (Heavenly yoke) which is not *זמן גרמא*.

The disciples' mention to their teachers of the arrival of morning for the recital of Shema is meant to emphasize that the Seder observation, as the Shema, can, and did, raise them to the level of a newly received yoke of Heaven.

- 14) The Seder celebration is unique in many ways. One salient point is the Hallel at Maariv (by Nusach Sfarad, and in Eretz Yisroel also Nusach Ashkenaz). The Hallel is repeated at the Seder table with the fourth cup of wine. The Mishna teaches about repeating specific passages of Hallel (Sucah 38b) that it depends on the Minhag (custom) to do so. The reason of the repetition is the special emphasis of these passages (from Tehilim 118:21-29). This concept may logically apply to the complete Hallel as well. On Pesach we feel an inner need, overwhelmingly, to pronounce our appreciation to Hashem. The repetition of Hallel, (over a cup of wine, *Kos Yeshuos* (Tehilim 116:213)), accords us the opportunity to express our thanks with heart and soul.
- 15) The daily Amida includes the chapter MODIM, giving thanks to Hashem for our very lives and its blessings. When the Chazan repeats the Shemon Esrai, the congregants say different phrases of Modim, called MODIM d'Rabonon. The reason can be explained with a parable: Yankel swimming in the ocean suddenly felt he is about to drown. Berl on the boardwalk, hearing his screaming for help, ran fully clothed and saved him. As Berl speeds home to don dry clothing, Yankel asks his friend to go after him to say "thank you". Yankel is told, "You run after him yourself, kiss his hands, you owe your life to him. The same is felt during the recital of Modim. The Chazan is a shliach, a messenger. When he recites the Modim, we feel we must recite this ourselves, for the very breath of life Hashem gives us.

Additionally, we thank Hashem for the very permission to thank Him. For Hashem does not need our thanks. He allows it only for our sake, to attain closeness to Hashem. It is a Modim (deRabonon) for the opportunity to say Modim (the original).

A passage in Malachi reads "The lips of the kohain shall keep knowledge, and Torah should be sought from his mouth, for he is the messenger מלאך of Hashem" (2:7). The Talmud teaches that if a teacher possesses the quality of an angel, he is qualified to be your teacher (Moed Koton 17a). This seems a rather unusual and supernatural trait to expect it in a teacher.

The Ponevezher Rosh Yeshiva, Rav Kahaneman explained: while listening to a Torah lecture, students would often excitedly shake bodily as during Matan Torah on Sinai "וינערו" (Shemos 20:18). The angels also move about excitedly when engaged in Torah learning. However, he moves upward and down "רצוא ושוב" (Yechezkel 1:14). The teacher, concluded the Ponivezher, should clearly explain Torah on the young students' level, yet for himself move upward on the higher level.

The same applies to the Seder procedures. תספר באזני בן ובן בן relating the Exodus to your son, and grandson (Shemos 10:2), the son also an adult, the grandson usually a child; each one on his level.

- 16) The Matza (minimum size KZAYIS, olive, eaten within a limited time, 9 minutes) on Seder night is the only time in the year observing a mitzvah min Hatorah by eating. Obviously, it is saturated with much spiritual significance: a) Rabon Gamliel in the Mishna, quoted in the Hagadah, why eat Matza? It was the only לחם available on the original journey out of Mitzraim. b) Michla d'Hemnura (Zohar 2:183) food of faith. Other than this dough was not prepared for the long journey relying with complete faith on Hashem Who will provide, as He did with Manna for forty years in the midbar. c) The Bnei Yisoschor (Nisan 4:1) expounds the connection to faith observing the difference: chometz rises and grows in size by itself, whereas matza is continually worked on by human hands and immediately baked in the oven. Like Matza

the human being is continually worked at from Above for his life and breath. Those few minutes, eating the KEZAYIS Matza strengthens the Jew's faith for the whole year.

17) Hagada Mathematics:

The Seder Hagadah contains several fundamentals in which counting numbers plays an important role:

1. Ma Nishtana, four questions.
2. Four cups of wine, to parallel the four expressions of redemption והוצאתי, והצלתי, וגאלתי, ולקחתי.
3. There are seven Brochos especially recited at the Seder. This resembles the seven benedictions שבע ברכות at a wedding.
4. The Kaara contains three matzohs, two for לחם משנה and one split half for לחם עני and half for the afikoman.

18) Toward the end of the celebration numbers 1 to 13 are enumerated entitled אחד מי יודע. It should be pondered: What's the significance of the number 10, the Ten Commandments. This was already alluded to in number 2, two tablets of the covenant. The answer is that the Ten Commandments are divided into two columns, one dealing with the laws between man and Hashem, one dealing with the laws between man and man.

19) "Who knows 9" is itself a mighty lesson. Who knows nine? Nine are the months of birth. How does that number, the length of pregnancy, fit into the other 13 mathematical categories of religious content? One suggests: just as the nine months of pregnancy is the requisite for the normal life after birth, similarly the other mathematical formulae dealing with spiritual matters are essential for the normalcy of a Jew.

