

# THE BENJAMIN AND ROSE BERGER TORAH TO-GO<sup>®</sup>

Established by Rabbi Hyman and Ann Arbesfeld

March 2013 • Pesach-Yom Haatzmaut 5773

Dedicated by Ron and Cheryl Nagel in honor of our parents  
Jack and Gitta Nagel and Arnold and Althea Goldstein.



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Special Edition Marking  
the 20th Yahrtzeit of  
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# *The Benjamin and Rose Berger* Torah To-Go® Series

Rabbi Hyman '49YUHS, '53YC, '56RE and Ann Arbesfeld, longtime YU parents, grandparents and generous supporters, dedicate the Torah To-Go publications in memory of Ann's parents, Benjamin and Rose Berger *a"h*.

Benjamin and Rose immigrated to America from Poland before World War II. After a few years on the Lower East Side, they settled in the Bronx. Although it was difficult for a Jew to find a job that didn't require work on Shabbos, Benjamin refused to give up, determined to remain Shabbos observant. He and his younger brother worked as peddlers until they formed a real estate company together.

Benjamin and Rose were *baalei chesed* who always gave *tzedaka* and maintained an "open door" policy, welcoming guests every Shabbos and whenever anyone needed a place to stay or a meal to eat. Benjamin, who never missed a *minyan*, learned Torah every night and made sure to learn with his children, Ann, Sol and Helen (Laufer). Rose dedicated her life to doing *chesed* and was very active in the Bikur Holim Hospital in Israel.

"My parents, who were wonderful people, are very much deserving of having their names associated with the spread of Torah and increased Torah learning," said Ann. "The Torah To-Go is a perfect fit."

Previously, Hy and Ann established a Kollel Fellowship at YU's Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary (RIETS) in memory of Ann's parents. They have also endowed the Abraham Arbesfeld Kollel Yom Rishon and the Millie Arbesfeld Midreshet Yom Rishon in memory of Hy's parents.

We gratefully acknowledge their partnership and support, and may the *neshamot* of Benjamin and Rose Berger *a"h* be bound up in eternal glory.

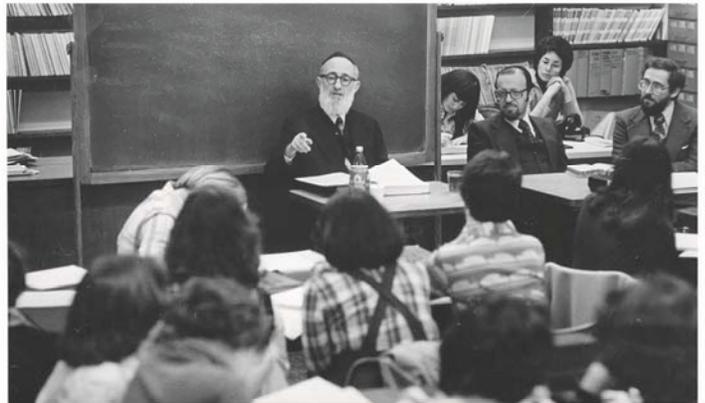


# Remembering Rabbi Yosef Dov Halevi Soloveitchik *zt”l*

R. YOSEF D. SOLOVEITCHIK (1903-1993) was born in Pruzhan, Poland, the son of Rabbi Moshe Soloveitchik and grandson of Rabbi Chaim HaLevi. In 1932, he moved to America and settled in Boston. He founded Yeshivat Rambam—the Maimonides School—and delivered weekly *shiurim* there for many years. In 1941, he succeeded his father, upon the latter’s passing, as rosh yeshiva at the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary (Yeshiva University), commuting from Boston to New York each week for over four decades. His *shiurim* in *halachah* and *aggadah*, which reached to the ends of the Jewish world, made a profound impact on Torah learning in our times. He was known by many as “the Rav” to connote that he was his generation’s quintessential teacher of Torah, ordaining more rabbis than any other in his generation.



(l-r) Rabbi Soloveitchik, Israeli Prime Minister David Ben Gurion, YU President Dr. Samuel Belkin



Rabbi Soloveitchik teaching Talmud at Stern College for Women



(l-r) Rabbi Soloveitchik, Rosh HaYeshiva Rabbi Norman Lamm, Mr. Joseph Gruss

# Rabbi Akiva's Seder

## Table: An Introduction

Rabbi Kenneth Brander

The David Mitzner Dean, Yeshiva University's Center for the Jewish Future

*Rabban Gamliel and the elders were reclining [at the seder] in the house of Baitos the son of Zonin in Lod and they were engaged in the halakhot of Passover all night until the call of the rooster.*

**Tosefta Pesachim 10:12**

*It is told of Rabbi Eliezer (lived in Lod, second generation Tanna), and Rabbi Yehoshua (lived in Peki'in, second generation Tanna) and Rabbi Elazar the son of Azarya (lived in Yavneh/Tzipori, third generation Tanna), and Rabbi Akiva (lived in Bnei Brak, third generation Tanna) and Rabbi Tarfon (lived in Lod, teacher of Rabbi Akiva, third generation Tanna) were reclining at the seder service in B'nei Berak, and had spent the whole night telling the story of the Exodus from Egypt, until their pupils came and said to them: "Our masters, it is time to recite the morning Shema!"*

**Passover Haggadah**

מעשה ברבן גמליאל וזקנים שהיו מסובין בבית ביתוס בן זונין בלוד והיו עסוקין בהלכות הפסח כל הלילה עד קרות הגבר.  
**תוספתא פסחים י"ב**

מעשה ברבי אליעזר ורבי יהושע ורבי אלעזר בן עזריה ור' עקיבא ור' טרפון שהיו מסובין בבני ברק והיו מספרין ביציאת מצרים כל אותו הלילה עד שבאו תלמידיהם ואמרו להם רבותינו הגיע זמן קריאת שמע של שחרית.  
**הגדה של פסח**

While there are several accounts of rabbinic Passover seder gatherings, the most famous of these is the account recorded in our Haggadah: the seder of Rabbi Eliezer, Rabbi Yehoshua, Rabbi Elazar the son of Azarya, Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Tarfon. This account appears in the Haggadot of Geonim, such as R. Amram Gaon, and the Haggadot of Rishonim, including that of the Rambam (*Hilchot Chametz u'Matza, Nusach Haggadah*), Tosafot (*Ketubot 105a, s.v. de-chashiv*), and the Ritva.

Several questions arise when analyzing this account:

1. Rabbi Akiva is one of the younger members of the rabbinic cohort present at the gathering, while Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Yehoshua are elder members. Rabbi Elazar the son of Azarya is the *nasi* (president of the high court and of the rabbinic community). Why does the seder take place in Rabbi Akiva's hometown of B'nei Berak and not in a city where one of the more prominent members of the group resides? Normally, the student is expected to visit the

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I wish to thank Yeshiva University Presidential Fellows Daniel Elefant and Anosh Zaghi for their assistance with this introduction.

teacher. It is not common for a teacher to visit a younger student.

2. Why do these particular Tannaim sit together around the seder table? Do they represent something unique or is this a random grouping of rabbinic figures?

To answer these questions, we must first note that the Pesach Haggadah is divided into two parts. The first is the pre-meal section of the Haggadah, where we recite maggid and consume ritual foodstuff —matza, wine, maror and charoset—and the post-meal section of the Haggadah. The pre-meal section of the Haggadah focuses on the Jewish people's servitude in and eventual redemption from Egypt. The post-meal section of the Haggadah focuses on the future redemption and destiny of our people and society.

The Talmud states (*Pesachim* 116b) that we bifurcate the recitation of Hallel. In the maggid section of the Haggadah, we recite the first two psalms of Hallel. This is due to the fact that these psalms focus on the Egyptian saga. The third psalm and the remaining psalms of Hallel are recited in the post-meal section of the Haggadah as they focus on the Messianic era (*Pesachim* 118a).

This division prompts disagreement between two of the rabbinic participants at the Passover seder we read about in our Haggadot, Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Tarfon. Rabbi Tarfon contends (*Pesachim* 116b) that the concluding blessing for maggid should focus solely on the theme expressed in maggid and the pre-meal section of the Haggadah, namely the redemption from Egypt. Rabbi Tarfon's version of this blessing reads, "*Blessed are you Lord our God Who has redeemed us and redeemed our fathers from Egypt.*"

Rabbi Akiva disagrees. He refuses to allow this blessing to focus only on the redemption of the past. He insists that the blessing of maggid also contain language that focuses on the future:

*Rabbi Akiva states: [the blessing should also include] likewise O Lord our God, God of our fathers, enable us to celebrate many other festivals and holy days which will come peacefully upon us; joyful in the rebuilding of Your city, and exalting in Your service: and may we eat there of the festive sacrifices ... Blessed are thou our God who has redeemed Israel.*

**Pesachim 116b**

רבי עקיבא אומר כן ה' אלקינו ואלקי אבותינו יגיענו למועדים ולרגלים אחרים הבאים לקראתנו לשלום שמחים בבנין עירך וששים בעבודתך ונאכל שם מן הזבחים ומן הפסחים ... ברוך אתה ה' גאל ישראל.  
**פסחים קטז:**

For Rabbi Akiva, it is never sufficient to focus on the past. We must always remember to look toward the future and its redemption.

This difference in perspective also enlightens a later account about the remaining participants of this rabbinic cohort:

*Again it happened that [Rabban Gamliel, Rabbi Elazar the son of Azarya (in some manuscripts the person is Rabbi Eliezer), Rabbi Yehoshua and Rabbi Akiva] went up to Jerusalem. When they reached Mt. Scopus, they tore their garments. When they reached the Temple Mount, they saw a fox emerging from the place of the Holy of Holies. The others started weeping; Rabbi Akiva laughed. Said they to him: "Why are you laughing?" Said he to them: "Why are you*

שוב פעם אחת היו עולין לירושלים כיון שהגיעו להר הצופים קרעו בגדיהם כיון שהגיעו להר הבית ראו שועל שיצא מבית קדשי הקדשים התחילו הן בוכין ור"ע מצחק אמרו לו מפני מה אתה מצחק אמר להם מפני מה אתם בוכים

weeping?" Said they to him: "A place [so holy] that it is said of it, 'the stranger that approaches it shall die' (Bamidbar 1:51), and now foxes traverse it, and we shouldn't weep?"

Said he to them: "That is why I laugh. For it is written, 'I shall have bear witness for Me faithful witnesses—Uriah the Priest and Zechariah the son of Jeberechiah' (Yeshayahu 8:1). Now what is the connection between Uriah and Zechariah? Uriah was [in the time of] the First Temple, and Zechariah was [in the time of] the Second Temple! But the Torah makes Zachariah's prophecy dependent upon Uriah's prophecy. With Uriah, it is written: 'Therefore, because of you, Zion shall be plowed as a field; [Jerusalem shall become heaps, and the Temple Mount like the high places of a forest]' (Micha 3:12). With Zachariah it is written, 'Old men and women shall yet sit in the streets of Jerusalem' (Zechariah 8:4). As long as Uriah's prophecy had not been fulfilled, I feared that Zechariah's prophecy may not be fulfilled either. But now that Uriah's prophecy has been fulfilled, it is certain that Zechariah's prophecy will be fulfilled." With these words they replied to him: "Akiva, you have consoled us! Akiva, you have consoled us!"

#### **Makkot 24b**

אמרו לו מקום שכתוב בו והזר הקרב יומת ועכשיו שועלים הלכו בו ולא נבכה אמר להן לכך אני מצחק דכתיב ואעידה לי עדים נאמנים את אוריה הכהן ואת זכריה בן יברכיהו וכי מה ענין אוריה אצל זכריה אוריה במקדש ראשון וזכריה במקדש שני אלא תלה הכתוב נבואתו של זכריה בנבואתו של אוריה באוריה כתיב לכן בגללכם ציון שדה תחרש [וגו'] בזכריה כתיב עוד ישבו זקנים וזקנות ברחובות ירושלם עד שלא נתקיימה נבואתו של אוריה הייתי מתיירא שלא תתקיים נבואתו של זכריה עכשיו שנתקיימה נבואתו של אוריה בידוע שנבואתו של זכריה מתקיימת בלשון הזה אמרו לו עקיבא ניהמתנו עקיבא ניהמתנו:

**מכות כד:**

Rabbi Akiva's focus is fixed on the future redemption, even in the most difficult and trying of times. It is not coincidental that these rabbinic figures gather around Rabbi Akiva's seder table. They are individuals who were influenced by the weltanschauung of Rabbi Akiva. Rabbi Akiva has the courage to be an optimist and focus on the future even in the darkest of moments. Even when there is a bounty on his head by the Romans, even when he is martyred and the future of his people seems bleak, Rabbi Akiva knows that it is tenacity of spirit that guarantees the immortality of our people.

It is significant that these personalities gather around Rabbi Akiva's table to discuss the redemption during the darkness of night. They realize that it is Rabbi Akiva's charismatic spirit that enables hope and paves the Jewish nation's path toward the morning *kriyat shema*—a credo with God that is recited when there is clarity, when one can discern between the colors of covenantal tapestry, the blue and white fringes of the tallit (*B'rachot* 9b).

It is the ability to discuss redemption during the darkness of the Hadrianic persecutions and the Bar Kochba revolt that enables students to live and thrive in the phenomenological framework of morning, a time at which the Jewish nation can be a people of destiny instead of a people of fate. It is in B'nei Berak, the city of Rabbi Akiva, the city in which we are told the descendants of our darkest enemies become sources of light, (for it is in the city of B'nei Berak that the descendants of Haman study Torah [*Sanhedrin* 96b]), that such a Passover seder must take place.

How appropriate that we inaugurate the Benjamin and Rose Berger To-Go Series with an edition celebrating the holiday of Pesach. For the lives of Benjamin and Rose Berger represent

the credo of Rabbi Akiva. The couple immigrated to America during difficult times yet recognized that the redemption and the immortality of our people is only guaranteed by Jews who are not willing to sacrifice their eternal heritage. Benjamin and Rose always saw the morning light, even in times of great peril and darkness. They sat at the seder table of Rabbi Akiva, and when the morning star arose in their lives, they created a home of *kol dichfin yeitei v'yeichol* (Let all who hunger come and eat).

We are indebted to Rabbi Hy and Ann Arbesfeld, longtime supporters of RIETS and CJF, for continuing to support Torah education by establishing the Benjamin and Rose Berger Torah To-Go series.

As we commemorate the twentieth Yahrzeit of Moreinu V'Rabbeinu Harav Yosef Dov Halevi Soloveitchik zt"l, we are reminded of the fact that it was through his teachings and communal activity that spiritual daybreak rose for the North American Jewish community. It was his partnership with gedolim such as Rav Aharon Kotler that inspired the building of yeshivot around North America. It was his blend of Torah and philosophy that inspired a generation unsure if Torah had the sophistication to speak to a post-war generation of American Jews. The Rav spent his life training the next generation of pastors, pedagogues and *poskim* to ensure a bright future for our people. May we continue to learn from his Torah and integrate his gestalt in our personal and communal lives. May his memory always be a blessing.

# Growing up in Boston: An Interview with Meira Davis

Rebbetzin Meira Davis

Coordinator, Personal and Professional Enhancement Program for Rebbetzins  
Yeshiva University Center for the Jewish Future  
'69SCW

*The Torah-To-Go editorial staff presented a series of questions to Rebbetzin Meira Davis about her experiences growing up in Brookline, MA, where the Rav served as the mara d'atra (spiritual leader of the community).<sup>1</sup>*

## **What are some of your earliest memories of the Rav?**

My first awareness of the existence of the Rav developed when I began attending Maimonides School in Dorchester, Massachusetts in the fourth grade. Two of my classmates were Judy Meiselman and Lewis Gerber, a niece and a nephew of Rabbi Soloveitchik, the founder of the school. I spent occasional Shabbatot in Onset, Massachusetts (near Cape Cod), with Judy and her parents, her sister and brother, now Rav Moshe Meiselman. In those years, the Rav would spend the summers learning in Onset. Years later, my parents bought a cottage there, which is still used every summer by their children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. The presence of the Rav still proudly lingers in the shul, Congregation Beth Israel of Onset.

When my family moved from Malden, Massachusetts to Brookline in 1960, my father, Mr. Erwin Katz, became very involved in various aspects of our shul, the Young Israel of Brookline, as well as Maimonides School. As a prime mover in fundraising for both of these institutions and as chairman of the school's tuition scholarship committee for many years, my father had numerous opportunities to meet with the Rav and to enlist his help in fundraising. The Rav readily acquiesced to any request to help strengthen the greater community. My cousin, Ronny Wachtel, recalls the *chanukat habayit* (building dedication) of the Young Israel of Brookline with the Rav affixing the mezuzah on the front door of the shul. My sister, Yonina, remembers hearing of the occasion when my father invited some prospective donors for the Young Israel to a breakfast and promised them a surprise speaker. While the guests were eating their bagels, my father left the



The Rav and Mr. Erwin Katz

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<sup>1</sup> To respond to the questions for this interview, Rebbetzin Davis connected with her siblings, Yonina Langer, Debbie Cohen and Naty Katz, and her cousin Ronny Wachtel, to share and compare their recollections of the Rav from their youth in Brookline.

shul to pick up the Rav, who addressed the group about the importance of supporting a community synagogue.

We perceived the Rav as the chief rabbi of Boston. In deference to the Rav, the *eruv* in Boston was not built while he was alive. In his earlier years, he was involved with local kashrut issues.

As we grew older, we realized that the Rav's presence and his Torah dominated the Maimonides School, particularly through the teaching of Rabbi Isaiah Wohlgemuth and Rabbi Isaac Simon. The Rav's wife, Dr. Tonya Soloveitchik, was the chairman of the School Committee all the years I was at Maimonides and was succeeded by her daughter, Mrs. Atara Twersky. Our classes were all coed, including Gemara, which both girls and boys studied. Some mornings the Rav would daven with the students' minyan.

Ronny adds: I remember, in the Rav's later years, that whenever I was home in Brookline and would daven at Maimonides on Sunday morning, I would always receive a warm handshake when I approached him after davening.

The connection to the Rav continues in our family. The Rav was the scheduled *mesader kidushin* (officiating rabbi) at all of the Katz children's weddings. (Unfortunately, he was ill the day of our wedding and Rabbi Shlomo Riskin officiated with Rabbi Saul Berman who was the rabbi of the Young Israel of Brookline at that time.) My husband, Eddie Davis, learned in the Rav's *shiur* at Yeshiva University, and received *semicha* from the Rav. My sister-in-law, Amy Katz, spent several years as the Executive Director of the Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik Institute, which was housed at Maimonides School. Her husband, my brother, Naty Katz, who spent his share of time as a student in the office of the principal, Rabbi Moses J. Cohn, is now the Head of School of Maimonides School, very dedicated to preserving and passing on the Torah, philosophy, and teachings of the Rav.

### **How did the Rav's Torah scholarship influence the community?**

There are two things that come to mind. First, the Motza'ei Shabbat *shiur* that the Rav gave for many years was a highlight of the week for many Boston *baalebatim* (lay people) and the students of local colleges who came to hear him. The Boston *baalebatim* were very loyal and very dear to the Rav and the Rav's *shiur* was the place to be on Motza'ei Shabbat.

Second, for a number of years, the Rav held a Yeshiva University Summer Kollel at the Young Israel of Brookline. Young men would come from New York to spend several weeks studying with the Rav. My mother, Mrs. Lotte Katz, arranged all the housing for every participant. My father single-handedly raised the money to cover the costs of the kollel and made arrangements with Mrs. Irene Loketch to cater all the meals. At my grandson's recent Bar Mitzvah in January, I met a fellow who told me how much he enjoyed the privilege of being part of that kollel and the opportunity to learn with the Rav for few weeks while staying at the home of my sister, Debbie Cohen.

### **Do you, who grew up in Boston, and your husband, Rabbi Eddie Davis, who was a student of the Rav at Yeshiva, have different perceptions of the Rav?**

The question reminds me of the following story. One weekend, when my husband Eddie and I were visiting my parents, Eddie went to his rebbe's Saturday night *shiur* at Maimonides. He saw

how the Rav answered the people's questions gently and with great patience— differently from what he experienced in his YU *shiur*. At YU the Rav demanded that his *talmidim* present well-researched, precise questions that he would not hesitate to challenge. Sitting among the Boston baalebatim, Eddie asked the Rav a question, not even sure the Rav would realize who he was. The Rav's immediate response: "No, no, no, Davis, no, no!" The Rav clearly recognized him as a *talmid*, not one of the Boston congregants.

My cousin, Ronny, shared with me that he would travel from Malden to Dorchester on Motza'ai Shabbat to attend the Rav's *shiur*, which in those days was delivered in Yiddish. He recalls numerous instances where the Rav was extremely demanding of some of his former *talmidim* when they asked questions during the *shiur*. His responses were not in the least bit "gentle."

The Rav was very close with Dr. Maish and Mrs. Hannah Lightman and their family from out-of-town Lowell, Massachusetts, truly befriending them and bringing them closer to Yiddishkeit. He took them under his wing, making sure that the children's educational and general needs would be met. As a close friend of some of the Lightman children, I was very impressed and in awe of the Rav's personal involvement with their family.

### **What personal anecdotes can you share that give us further insights into the Rav's personality?**

- The Rav's sense of humor was evident in two incidents at my brother's wedding in 1978. A few years earlier, my husband Eddie had asked the Rav for permission to switch his Hebrew pronunciation from *Ashkenazit* to *Sefaradit* to eliminate the confusion between *Ashkenazit* in our home and *Sefaradit* in the school that our children were attending in Richmond, Virginia, where we were living. The Rav agreed. At the wedding, Eddie, recited the final *bracha* of the *Sheva Brachot* in *Sefaradit*. After the chuppah, the Rav remarked to Eddie, "So you moved down South and you developed a southern accent?"
- The photographer then set up a photo-op with, the Rav, Rabbi Shimon Romm, the chatan (my brother Naty), our father, and Naty's brand-new father-in-law, Rabbi William Herskowitz, who was a *talmid* of the Rav and had a warm personal relationship with him for many years. Rabbi Herskowitz turned to the Rav and said, "Rebbe, I have a great picture of you from last Tuesday night's *shiur*." Without missing a beat, the Rav responded, "It's okay Billy, I don't need the picture. I have the original."
- My sister Debbie remembers that when the Rav would come to our home to meet with our father about tuition scholarships for Maimonides students, our mother would offer him a plate of homemade cookies. A photograph of one of these meetings hangs next to my husband's *semicha* on our wall. Debbie also recalls that the Rav would pay a surprise



Wedding of Naty Katz and Amy Herskowitz, September 3, 1978 Left to right: Rabbi Shimon Romm, (Naty's rebbe), Rabbi William Herskowitz, (Naty's father-in-law), Naty, the Rav, Erwin Katz (Naty's father)

visit to her *limudei kodesh* (Jewish studies) classroom and sit in the back and observe. He was probably the only comfortable person in the room.

- On Sunday mornings, my father made Naty leave his friends at the ice-skating rink early so he could attend the Rav's Talmud shiur at Maimonides, under duress. Naty, who was in high school at the time, was amazed at how the Rav would patiently explain each concept several times in different ways, and present complex, big ideas in tiny, bite-sized pieces so that people on every level, from beginner to Talmid Chacham, could understand it at their own personal level -- what educators today call differentiated instruction for diverse learners. Naty enjoyed the shiur as a seventeen-year-old Maimonides student, but when he would later hear two adults discussing the shiur, he could not follow -- their conversation was on a different, much higher plane.
- The Rav's wife was very protective of her husband's time and space. My sister Yonina recalls our father telling her about the time he went to the Rav's house to speak with him, knocked on the door, and Mrs. Soloveitchik said that the Rav could not see him. From behind, the Rav asked, "Who is at the door?" She responded, "Mr. Katz." The Rav said, "Please show Mr. Katz in." The Rav's moral support, physical assistance, words of encouragement and *brachot* were very helpful in allowing my father to forge ahead, very successfully, with the help of Hashem, in his *avodat hakodesh* (Jewish communal service) for the benefit of the *klal* and to help build the Brookline community.

### **What experiences/qualities of growing up in Boston have you incorporated into your work as a rebbetzin?**

Growing up in Boston afforded me several life-enriching experiences for which I am very grateful and which have enhanced my ability to serve the community as a rebbetzin. I was privileged to attend Maimonides School where I received a superior education in Judaic studies and secular studies—and the basis for a deep appreciation of the synthesis of Torah Umadda. Thanks to seven years of Hebrew language studies with Mar Yaakov Lamdan, I became proficient enough in Hebrew to communicate well with Hebrew speakers.

Boston is a college town—Harvard, M.I.T., Boston University and many more. The fact that the Rav was giving *shiurim* every Saturday night must have been an added attraction for some of the serious students who wanted to attend a regular *shiur* from a *gadol hador*, while pursuing their secular education at elite universities in Boston. Many frum students appeared at the Young Israel of Brookline on Friday nights and Shabbat mornings. Prior to our arrival in Brookline, Mr. Moses Feuerstein and his dear wife, Mrs. Shirley Feuerstein, had already hosted many students over the years. When our family moved to Brookline, my father also approached the students and made arrangements for those who wished to join a family for a Shabbat meal. Needless to say, our table always had numerous unexpected guests, enabling me to learn how to relate to all kinds of people and to appreciate the beauty of an open house and the mitzvah of *hachnasat orchim*—which have been invaluable assets to me as a rebbetzin. I am deeply grateful to my parents for being loving role models of the actions and contributions required to develop and maintain a growing community and to bring people closer to Hashem.

# On the Study of Haggadah: A Note on Arami Oved Avi and Biblical Intertextuality

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *zt"l*

Transcribed by Rabbi Aton Holzer, MD<sup>1</sup>

[The verse (Devarim 26:7) states] “And he saw our affliction.” This refers to abstinence from marital relations as it states, “And God saw the Jewish people and God knew.”

## Passover Haggadah

The essence of *perishus derech erez* (abstinence) is that the Egyptian oppressors disrupted Jewish family life. Because of the killing of their children, Jewish men couldn't live a normal life with their wives. The same happened under the Nazis just a number of years ago. But this basis of this passage in the Haggadah is cryptic. What did the *Ba'al Haggadah* feel the need to explain? How does he derive “this refers to abstinence from marital relations” from the Scriptural citation?

*And the Egyptians treated us harshly and they tortured us and imposed hard labor on us. And we called out to God the Lord of our forefathers and God heard our voices and saw our torture and our toil and our pressure.*

## Devarim 26:6-7

וַנִּצְעַק (and we called out)—what did they complain about? They complained that they were tortured, וַיַּעֲנוּנוּ —and their *tefillah* was accepted. (And God heard our voices)—God was aware of the *inui*. Why did the Torah then have to say וַיִּרְא אֶת עֲנֵינוּ (and

וַיִּרְא אֶת עֲנֵינוּ - זוֹ פְּרִישוּת דְּרָדָה  
אֲרַץ, כְּמָה שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: וַיִּרְא אֱלֹקִים  
אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּדַע אֱלֹקִים.  
הַגְּדָה שֶׁל פֶּסַח

וַיִּרְעוּ אֲתָנוּ הַמִּצְרִים וַיַּעֲנוּנוּ, וַיִּתְּנוּ  
עָלֵינוּ עֲבָדָה קָשָׁה. וַנִּצְעַק אֵל ה' אֱלֹקֵי  
אֲבוֹתֵינוּ, וַיִּשְׁמַע ה' אֶת קִלְנוּ, וַיִּרְא אֶת  
עֲנֵינוּ וְאֶת עֲמָלָנוּ וְאֶת לַחֲצֵנוּ.  
דְּבָרִים כו:ו-ז

<sup>1</sup> This article is a transcription of portions of an undated *shiur* at Yeshiva University in the late '70s or early '80s. English translations were added by the editorial staff. Rabbi Holzer ('99YC, '05BRGS, '06R) is a surgical dermatologist in private practice in Miami Beach, FL.

[He] saw our torture)? Apparently וַיִּרְא אֶת עֲנִינֵינוּ refers to a different *inui* than וַיַּעֲנֵנוּ. There are many kinds of *inuyim*, of torture.

*It came to pass many days later that the King of Egypt died and the Jewish people were despondent because of the labor and they cried out and their cries ascended to God from the labor. And God heard their cries and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. And God saw the Jewish people and God knew.*

**Shemos 2:23-25**

וַיְהִי בַיָּמִים הָרַבִּים הָהֵם וַיָּמָת מֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם  
וַיֵּאָנְחוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מִן הָעֲבֹדָה וַיִּזְעְקוּ וַתַּעַל  
שׁוֹעַתָם אֶל הָאֱלֹהִים מִן הָעֲבֹדָה. וַיִּשְׁמַע  
אֱלֹהִים אֶת נַאֲקָתָם וַיִּזְכֹּר אֱלֹהִים אֶת בְּרִיתוֹ  
אֶת אַבְרָהָם אֶת יִצְחָק וְאֶת יַעֲקֹב. וַיִּרְא  
אֱלֹהִים אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיֵּדַע אֱלֹהִים.  
שְׁמוֹת ב:כג-כה

The *za'akah* (prayer) concerned the *inui* that stemmed from the *avodah* (labor). וַיִּשְׁיִמוּ עָלָיו שְׁרֵי (They placed on them taxation officers in order to torture them with their load, Shemos 1:11)—*sivlosam* and this *inui* are the same. The Jews complained about the fact that their labor was backbreaking, torturous, subject to Egyptian chicanery; they needed to fill a quota every day, and the work was not productive. Slaves become accustomed to their overall way of life and don't resent it, but they do resent unproductive labor, physical pain, the misery of having to deliver a quota of bricks every day, of working without pay, of being beaten. Those were the experiences included in וַנִּצְעַק אֶל ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ אֲבֹתֵינוּ (And we called out to God the Lord of our forefathers). How do I know this? The Torah in Shemos records that וַתַּעַל שׁוֹעַתָם אֶל ה' (their cries ascended to God from the labor)—their cries rose *from the work*—they complained about all the aspects of cruel, unproductive physical *avodah*. The people complained about the *inui* from the *avodah*, and God accepted their prayer.

Since the Torah writes וַיִּשְׁמַע ה' אֶת קִלְנוּ (and God heard our voices), the statement וַיִּרְא אֶת עֲנִינֵינוּ (and saw our torture) is unnecessary. Therefore, וַיִּרְא refers to God “seeing” a different matter, one about which they didn't complain. This matter was not included in their prayers, it was unknown to them or, if known, it was a secondary concern, thought to be minor; but God saw that which they did not emphasize. One aspect of bondage worried the people most—work, מִן הָעֲבֹדָה—but there was a different experience of which the people were unaware, one that caused them to suffer, that inflicted pain upon them, even as this kind of suffering was not experienced as a major evil by the people themselves. When God came down to redeem them, וַיִּרְא אֱלֹהִים, He saw something that they did not see; וַיֵּדַע אֱלֹהִים—He knew something that they did not know—that it is not the physical slavery, but an aspect unknown to them that nonetheless, in time, would destroy *Knesses Yisrael*. That *anyenu* is פְּרִישׁוֹת דְּרָדָה אֶרֶץ—how the Egyptians attempted to dissolve the Jewish family.

God is omniscient; he felt the people's distress and pain about matters that they didn't mention. *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* liberated the Jewish people because they were slaves and oppressed, but he saw something they didn't see.

[The verse (Shemos 3:7) states] “And God said: I have surely seen,” it doesn't say, “I have seen” but rather, “I have surely seen” (using the same verb twice). God told Moshe: You see one perspective, but I see two.

**Shemos Rabbah 3:2**

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' רָאה רֵאיתִי, רֵאיתִי לֹא  
נֹאמַר אֲלֵא רָאה רֵאיתִי, אָמַר לוֹ  
הַקַּב"ה מִשֶּׁה אַתָּה רוֹאה רֵאיתִי אַחַת  
וְאֲנִי רוֹאה שְׁתֵּי רֵאיוֹת.  
שְׁמוֹת רַבָּה ג:ב

You see the most conspicuous afflictions, but I also see the torture and pain that is private, in your intimate life, that which you don't emphasize, that of which you are not aware. This interpretation is not a *derashah* (homiletic interpretation), but rather *peshat* (literal understanding) in the verse—for without this explanation, there is no need to mention Divine *yedi'ah* (knowledge) after His having heard, וַיִּשְׁמַע אֱלֹהִים אֶת נַאֲקָתָם (Shemos 2:24). The message is that those small matters that undermine human dignity are more responsible for Divine action and redemption than the slavery itself.

[The verse (Devarim 26:7) states] “And our toil.” This refers to the sons as is states (Shemos 1:22) “Every son who is born shall be thrown into the river and all daughters shall live.”

**Passover Haggadah**

וְאֵת עֲמַלְנוּ - אֱלֹהֵי הַבְּנִים. כָּמָה  
שָׁנָאָמַר: כָּל הַבֵּן הַיְלֹוֹד הַיְאֲרָה  
תִּשְׁלִיכֶהוּ וְכָל הַבִּת תַּחֲיֶינָה.  
הַגְּדָה שֶׁל פֶּסַח

וְאֵת עֲמַלְנוּ - אֱלֹהֵי הַבְּנִים (And our toil. This refers to the sons)—I understand this passage in the same spirit as the preceding. The edict concerning the sons was issued 80 years before Moshe's mission, when Moshe was a baby; the decree had long been abandoned, and the Jews of the Exodus were the third generation on. The Pharaoh who had issued that edict had died, and the Jews had forgotten about his decree; their cries concerned only the whip of the oppressor that cracked over them if they did not deliver their quota. The fact that 80 years before there had been a holocaust of children—this, they had forgotten. It is not yet 80 years since the Holocaust we witnessed, and how many have forgotten? Chazal raise the possibility that the Pharaoh of the Exodus killed children as well—regarding מֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם (The king of Egypt died), Chazal (*Shemos Rabbah* 1:34) understand that Pharaoh became a leper and killed children for his therapeutic baths. The Jews understood that edict very well, since it concerned their own children. But the Haggadah cites כָּל הַבֵּן הַיְלֹוֹד הַיְאֲרָה תִּשְׁלִיכֶהוּ (Every son who is born shall be thrown into the river)—those children were the ones killed 80 years ago! But God remembers אֵת עֲנִינֵינוּ וְאֵת עֲמַלְנוּ (our torture and our toil)—not those killed now, but even a decree which was abandoned, archaic by this time, even though the people didn't mention it. Who remembers the Holocaust now? Even people who lost close members of their own family don't remember; even those who themselves went through Treblinka or Auschwitz—many have told me that their feelings are dulled, that they don't remember, that they don't **want** to remember it.

So the people didn't mention this edict in וַנִּצְעַק (we cried out), but as for *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*—all those matters, He remembered. They complained about the wounds that the oppressor inflicted the day before, מִן הָעֲבוֹדָה (from the labor), but there were many items, cruel, tragic items that they forgot. One of them was the tragedy of the little children thrown into the Nile—80 years later, who is supposed to remember? But *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* remembers. That is *peshat* in אֵת עֲנִינֵינוּ וְאֵת עֲמַלְנוּ.

I want to tell you something else. Everything which is Torah is not simply to be read, but also understood. *Sippur yetzias Mitzrayim* (the recounting of the Exodus), in particular—*sippur* means not to be recited, but understood.

A story is told of R. Eliezer, R. Yehoshua, R. Elazar ben Azaryah, R. Akiva and R. Tarfon who were reclining in Bnei Brak and recounting (*mesaprim*) the Exodus the entire night.

### Passover Haggadah

מְעֹשֶׂה בְּרַבִּי אֱלִיעֶזֶר וְרַבִּי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ וְרַבִּי אֶלְעָזָר בֶּן  
עֲזַרְיָה וְרַבִּי עֲקִיבָא וְרַבִּי טַרְפוֹן שֶׁהָיוּ מְסַבִּין בְּבְנֵי  
בְּרַק, וְהָיוּ מְסַפְּרִים בִּיצִיאַת מִצְרָיִם כָּל אוֹתוֹ  
הַלַּיְלָה.

הגדה של פסח

What is the meaning of *mesaprim*? It means that they tried to understand, to study in depth. To understand the Haggadah well is a part of the *kiyum* (fulfillment) of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim*.

The backbone, the center of the Haggadah is the portion of *Arami Oved Avi* (Devarim 26:5-8); if you omit *Arami Oved Avi*, the Haggadah is merely a collection of introductions. All of the Haggadah leads up to *Arami Oved Avi*; the moment it is finished, we say *Rabban Gamliel Hayah Omer*, and proceed to Hallel.

We recite the parsha of *Arami Oved Avi* when bringing *bikkurim* (first fruits), but in *hava'as bikkurim* (bringing the first fruits), the obligation is limited to reading the parsha. Although the text is the same, the mitzvah of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim* has no *shiur* (fixed amount). Our job is not simply to read the text of *Arami Oved Avi*, but to supplement it with *Torah SheB'Al Peh* (oral tradition) whenever there is an interpretation.

In order for Hallel to be justified, every year one must detect something new in the Haggadah. One must understand *Arami Oved Avi* using the method of parallelism—to take the same word, and look it up in another story of *yetzias Mitzrayim* in the Torah. By studying both stories at the same time and creating cross-references from one story to another, we understand better the semantics, the words of *Arami Oved Avi*. In our example, we detected the superfluity in 'וַיִּשְׁמַע ה' וַיִּשְׁמַע אֱלֹהִים אֶת עֲנִינֵינוּ and אֶת קִלְנוּ in the context of *Arami Oved Avi*, but we needed to corroborate the difference between them by comparing them with parallel Pesukim in Shemos: וַיִּשְׁמַע אֱלֹהִים אֶת נַאֲקָתָם... וַיִּרְא אֱלֹהִים אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּדַע אֱלֹהִים with the story of *Yetzias Mitzrayim* in Shemos. By following these parallel *pesukim*, I gain better insight into *Arami Oved Avi*.

The mitzvah of Haggadah is to understand in depth the parsha of *Arami Oved Avi* by employing the comparative method, by interpreting *Arami Oved Avi* in the light of the *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim* in Shemos. Usually people don't try to study *Arami Oved Avi* in depth and get involved; it's very difficult. Sometimes we don't understand the relationship, or the concept behind [the verse linkages]. When I speak about the Haggadah, I try very hard to get to *Arami Oved Avi* and to clear up these points. I'm now at the end of *Arami Oved Avi*; it took me several years. There are some very difficult passages, and the matter requires a lot of study. I've spoiled you. You yourselves, in the manner that you work on a Ramban, you should work on the Haggadah, to understand what the relationship is between the *parshiyos* in Shemos and *Arami Oved Avi*.

# Use of the Term *Makom*, Omnipresent, in the Haggadah

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*Editor's note: This essay is adapted from Rabbi Adler's, Haggadah Shel Pesach Vayaged Yosef.*

The name *Makom* referring to God is used frequently in the Haggadah:

*Blessed is the Omnipresent, Blessed is He*

*And now the Omnipresent has brought us close to His service.*

*How many levels of greatness has the Omnipresent provided for us?*

ברוך המקום ברוך הוא.  
ועכשיו קרבנו המקום לעבודתו.  
כמה מעלות טובות למקום עלינו.

Why is God identified as *Makom* and why is this name referred to so prominently in the Haggadah? The Rav suggested that the answer can be understood with the perspective of a comment found in the Gemara:

*Rava said: Yechezkel and Yeshaya saw the same thing. What is Yechezkel comparable to? A villager who sees the king. What is Yeshaya comparable to? A city resident who sees the king.*

**Chagiga 13b**

אמר רבא כל שראה יחזקאל ראה ישעיה  
למה יחזקאל דומה לבן כפר שראה את המלך  
ולמה ישעיה דומה לבן כרך שראה את המלך.  
חגיגה יג:

Compare the initial revelations of Yechezkel and Yeshayahu. Yechezkel describes his initial vision throughout the first chapter of Sefer Yechezkel. That which he experiences is identified as *ma'aseh merakvah*. He is compared to the villager who is privileged to see the king on one special occasion and consequently is effusive in describing this sole encounter. Yeshayahu describes his initial encounter with God in the sixth chapter of Sefer Yeshayahu, and it occupies barely three verses. He is compared to a city resident who sees the king on a daily basis.

Yeshayahu offers prophecy during the time of the First Temple, when everyone could experience divine revelation. Anyone who entered the Beit ha-Mikdash encountered the Shechinah (Divine Presence). The Shechinah could be felt and seen everywhere. Therefore, when God appears to Yeshayahu, he does not elaborate and says:

*Holy, Holy, Holy, is God, the Lord of Hosts, His glory fills the land.*

**Yeshayahu 6:3**

קדוש קדוש קדוש ה' צבאות מלא כל  
הארץ כבודו.  
ישעיהו ו:ג

Yeshayahu, who lived during a time when one could see the king's palace every day, as it were, is described as the city boy who has access to the king at all times. There was no reason for him to elaborate upon his feelings and experience of divine revelation, since this was a common occurrence. On the other hand, Yechezkel offers prophecy at the time of the Temple's destruction, as the Jewish people are on the way to Bavel. When God appears to him it is a most unusual experience. Consequently, he describes that initial encounter in effusive detail. Yechezkel does not know whether he will have the privilege of a second encounter. As he feels the Shechinah leaving him he says:

*Blessed is the glory of God from his place (Makom).*

**Yechezkel 3:12**

ברוך כבוד ה' ממקומו.  
יחזקאל ג:יב

Yechezkel is referring to *mekomo hanistar*, His hidden place. He is saying, I am willing to acknowledge God even if I never have the privilege of seeing his Shechinah again. *Makom*, therefore, is the name selected for God to describe him in a state of *hester panim* (hiding). It is for this reason that on Monday and Thursday, after the Torah reading, we recite a moving prayer:

*Our brethren, members of the Jewish people, who are subject to persecution or captivity ... The Omnipresent should have compassion on them.*

אחינו כל בית ישראל הנתונים  
בצרה ובשביה ... המקום ירחם  
עליהם.

The Rav noted that this also explains why upon leaving a house of mourning, we say to the mourner: *ha-Makom yenachem etchem*, the Omnipresent should comfort you. The mourner has experienced some degree of *hester panim*. Many laws concerning behavior in a house of mourning, such as not extending the greeting of "*shalom aleichem*" and the omission of *birkat Kohanim* from *davening*, confirm the state of *hester panim* that the mourners have experienced.

Our Haggadah is designed primarily for the experience of exile. Rambam, at the conclusion of the "Laws of Chametz and Matzah," chapter 8, provides a text of his Haggadah. His introductory remark is:

*This is the text of the Haggadah that the Jewish people have used during the exile.*

נוסח ההגדה שנהגו בה ישראל בזמן הגלות כך הוא.

There are many indications to support the idea that our Haggadah is designed for the exile. For example, we are told:

*One must analyze the section (Devarim 26:5-9) beginning with "My father was a lost Aramean" until one completes the entire section.*

**Pesachim 116a**

ודורש מארמי אובד אבי עד  
שיגמור כל הפרשה כולה.  
פסחים קטז.

We have an obligation to read and interpret the entire *parsha* (section) of *Arami oved avi*. Yet, we omit the recitation and accompanying midrashic comment of the last verse of this unit thanking God for having brought us into the Land of Israel (Devarim 26:9). Indeed, this verse was recited during Temple times, and during periods of destruction and exile, it was omitted. Our Haggadah emphasizes that the obligation of *sippur yetziat Mitzrayim* (recounting the Exodus) applies equally to a generation living in Israel with an autonomous government and one during the Crusades, the pogroms, and in the midst of the Warsaw rebellion. In every generation, Jews must make the effort to recognize the miracles of *yetziat Mitzrayim* even if their own personal condition reflects *hester panim*. For this we say *Baruch ha-Makom*, with *Makom*, the Divine Name, associated with *hester panim*.

# What Is Judaism?<sup>1</sup>

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## What?

Questioning plays a central role in our seder experience; the concept of *she'ela uteshuva*— query and response—is essential to the Haggadah, as the Rambam describes:

*He should make changes on this night so that the children will see and will [be motivated to] ask: “What is different about this night from all other nights?” until he replies to them: “This and this occurred this and this took place.” ... When a person does not have a son, his wife should ask him. If he does not have a wife, [he and his colleague] should ask each other, “What is different about this night?” This applies even if they are all wise. A person who is alone should ask himself, “What is different about this night?”*

**Rambam, Hilchot Chametz Umatzah 7:3**

וצריך לעשות שינוי בלילה הזה כדי שיראו  
הבנים וישאלו ויאמרו מה נשתנה הלילה  
הזה מכל הלילות עד ששייב להם ויאמר  
להם כך וכך אירע וכך וכך היה. וכיצד  
משנה מחלק להם קליות ואגוזים ועוקרים  
השולחן מלפניהם קודם שיאכלו וחוטפין  
מצה זה מיד זה וכיוצא בדברים האלו, אין לו  
בן אשתו שואלתו, אין לו אשה שואלתו זה  
את זה מה נשתנה הלילה הזה, ואפילו היו  
כולן חכמים, היה לבדו שואל לעצמו מה  
נשתנה הלילה הזה.

**רמב"ם, הלכות חמץ ומצה ז:ג**

Interestingly, the questions of the seder share a specific approach. They center on the “what” rather than the “why.” For example, we meet four sons with their respective appellations and different approaches to Judaism; yet, what the four perspectives have in common is that they revolve around the question “mah”—what. *Mah nishtanah* is accurately translated as “what” is different about this night. We articulate Pesach, matzah and maror, “*al shum mah*”—“are about what” when we identify them. Rather than focusing on the rationale for our faith and the Jewish story, we focus on what happened to us, what was the response and what we are about.

Perhaps this approach reflects the unique role of Pesach as the launch-pad for the Jewish calendar year. The Torah (Shemot 12:1) teaches us that Nissan is the first month of the Jewish calendar, and the Talmud (*Rosh Hashana* 4b) explains further that Pesach is the first of the year’s cycle of Jewish festivals, the Moadim. The first evening of the year’s first holiday is the celebration of *Leil HaSeder*—the night of the seder, the anniversary of our birth as a Jewish nation. As we recline at our table, we relive and reflect upon our national beginning. In doing so,

<sup>1</sup> This essay is a tribute to our master and teacher, Maran Harav Joseph B. Soloveitchik zt”l, whose 20th yahrtzeit we observe on Chol Hamoed Pesach 5773. Many of the ideas presented here are culled from talks, teachings or writings of Rav Soloveitchik zt”l, whose greatness continues to inspire and enlighten. Many thanks to *Avi Mori*, Mr. Etzion Brand; Mrs. Ora Lee Kanner and Professor Leslie Newman for their helpful comments.

we consider the basic questions of what Judaism is about in the first place.<sup>2</sup> What is our religion and what does it mean to us? This process of questioning is similar to one of a potential convert, who approaches the Jewish community with a curiosity of what Judaism is about. A potential convert doesn't ask why be Jewish, for we have no response to such a person. In fact, we discourage potential converts when they approach. We do not seek converts, proselytizing why people should join the Jewish faith. We simply share answers to the "what" questions in response to those who ardently pursue our path. For example, we tell potential converts the specific details of gifts to the poor. It is fitting, then, that the Exodus is viewed by the Talmud as the first step in our collective conversion process to Judaism (*Yevamot* 46a).

This background to the seder places a challenge before us. For despite being one of Judaism's most widely observed rituals—one that has been practiced punctiliously within families for generations—many of us are stymied by the fundamental questions the seder raises. We repeat the words of its printed text but often lack true understanding of the answers it challenges us to provide. The basic question "what is this"—what is Judaism and for what did G-d take us out of Egypt—may still remain unresolved when we clear the last crumbs of matzah from the table. Perhaps with greater attention to the seder and the Haggadah we can each begin to formulate the contours of an answer for ourselves.

## What is Judaism?

This profound and complex question has a multi-faceted answer, perhaps reflected in the Torah itself. The Torah is multidimensional. It is a book that contains a range of mitzvot- specific, required actions that we are obligated to observe. It also contains a collection of narratives that teach us a framework of religious beliefs and a set of divine values. Finally, the Torah is also a story—the story of a people, a family and a nation. Perhaps we can suggest that the Torah is a mirror reflection of Judaism. Hence, Judaism is a set of practices, beliefs, values and a communal entity.<sup>3</sup>

As the seder night pours the foundation for our Jewish year, it can shed light on these four concepts. Let us examine how the Talmudic architects of the seder and the framers of the Haggadah created an experience that educates these four principles.

### 1. Mitzvot

The central element of the Pesach seder is the *korban Pesach*. We re-experience it on its anniversary—the night after the fourteenth of Nissan—in the form of matzah and maror in the absence of a Beit Hamikdash. This mitzvah of *korban Pesach* is replete with detailed specifications that govern the way it is purchased, slaughtered, prepared and eaten. We teach these provisos to the inquisitive, "wise" son, including even those restrictions that apply after the Pesach meal is over: "that we may not eat after the Pesach *afikoman*." The complexities and nuances of the laws of Pesach and its symbols, the matzah and maror, remind us of the responsibilities and focused

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<sup>2</sup> Much like *na'aseh venishma*, we will do and we will (then) listen, first we identify what it is before inquiring about its rationale.

<sup>3</sup> The four categories were developed through numerous discussions with students at Ida Crown Jewish Academy and Fasman Yeshiva High School during programs facilitated by the YU Torah Mitzion Kollel of Chicago.

actions that are part and parcel of the Jewish covenant. We understand that Judaism is comprised of commandments and boundaries within which we walk.<sup>4</sup>

A fundamental aspect of this system of actions and responsibilities, of halacha, is that it places limits upon human beings and challenges us to sacrifice when we encounter them. Much as one might like to share a slice of *korban Pesach* with a friend or neighbor who happens to visit during the seder meal, the guest must be turned away, for each *korban Pesach* is only eaten by those who were appointed prior to its slaughter. Similarly, one must constrain oneself to eating the *korban Pesach* in only one designated location, for it may not be eaten in multiple groups. These laws are reflective of the character of halacha and Judaism in general, as Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik explained:

*In a word, Halacha requires of man that he possess the capability of withdrawal. Of course, as we have made evident above, man is called, following the movement of withdrawal, to advance once again, toward full victory.*

"Catharsis" *Tradition* 17:2 (Spring 1978, p. 46)

Through our seder experience we understand that to leave Egypt and accept Judaism means that we embrace a binding set of mitzvot that guide our lives and often call for sacrifice to elevate ourselves.

## 2. Beliefs

At the same time, the seder (like the Torah) is much more than a series of laws and limits. It is also a series of truths we avow. Through the seder experience we reaffirm the fundamental beliefs of Judaism. The Haggadah makes a clear statement regarding the foundation of our monotheistic tradition in the Exodus, as it cites the Midrash:

*"And the Lord took us out of Egypt," not by an angel, not by seraph, nor by a messenger, rather the Holy One, blessed be He, Himself, in His glory! as is said: "For I will pass through the land of Egypt in this night, and I will smite all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast, and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments, I am the Lord." "For I will pass through the land of Egypt," I myself, not an angel; "And I will smite all the firstborn" I myself, not a seraph; "And against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments," I myself, not a messenger; "I am the Lord," —I am He, no other!*

### Passover Haggadah

ויוציאנו ה' ממצרים, לא על ידי מלאך ולא על ידי שרף ולא על ידי שליח, אלא הקב"ה בכבודו ובעצמו. שנאמר: "ועברתי בארץ מצרים בלילה הזה, והכיתי כל בכור בארץ מצרים מאדם עד בהמה. ובכל אלוהי מצרים אעשה שפטים, אני ה'!"  
ועברתי בארץ מצרים, אני ולא מלאך. והכיתי כל בכור, אני ולא שרף. ובכל אלוהי מצרים אעשה שפטים, אני ולא שליח. אני ה', אני ולא אחר!  
הגדה של פסח

In contrast to the multiplicity of Egyptian deities, Judaism has only one G-d.

We address many other core beliefs through our study of the Exodus. For example, we do not have a specific firsthand human account of the creation of the world by Hashem. Instead, we have the miraculous events of the Exodus to teach us about the existence of G-d and the basic

<sup>4</sup> Hence the word "mitzvah" means commandment, not good deed; and the word "issur" connotes a tether—a limit that constrains and connects. Halacha is a specific path along which we walk.

tenets of Judaism. Through a study of these events we learn about G-d, how He acts and directs the world. Hence, Ramban explains that we have so many allusions to the Exodus throughout many mitzvos, as the Exodus establishes much of our belief system:

*And now I shall declare to you a general principle in the reason of many commandments. Beginning with the days of Enosh when idol-worship came into existence, opinions in the matter of faith fell into error. Some people denied the root of faith by saying that the world is eternal; they denied Eternal and said: It is not He [Who called forth the world into existence]. Others denied His knowledge of individual matters, and they say, How doth G-d know? And is there knowledge in the Most High? Some admit His knowledge but deny the principle of providence and make men as the fishes of the sea, [believing] that G-d does not watch over them and that there is no punishment or reward for their deeds, for they say the Eternal hath forsaken the land. Now when G-d is pleased to bring about a change in the customary and natural order of the world for the sake of a people or an individual, then the voidance of all these [false beliefs] becomes clear to all people, since a wondrous miracle shows that the world has a G-d Who created it, and Who knows and supervises it, and Who has the power to change it. And when that wonder is previously prophesied by a prophet, another principle is further established, namely, that of the truth of prophecy, that G-d doth speak with man, and that He revealeth His counsel unto His servants the prophets, and thereby the whole Torah is confirmed. This is why Scripture says in connection with the wonders [in Egypt]: That thou [Pharoah] mayest know that I am the Eternal in the midst of the earth, which teaches us the principle of providence, i.e., that G-d has not abandoned the world to chance, as they [the heretics] would have it; That thou mayest know that the earth is the Eternal's, which informs us of the principle of creation, for everything is His since He created all out of nothing; That thou mayest know that there is nothing like Me in all the earth, which indicates His might, i.e., that He rules over everything and that there is nothing to withhold Him. The Egyptians either denied or doubted all of these [three] principles, [and the miracles confirmed their truth]. Accordingly, it follows that the great signs and wonders constitute faithful witness to the truth of the belief in the existence of the Creator and the truth of the whole Torah.*

**Ramban, Shemot 13:16**

ועתה אומר לך כלל  
 בטעם מצות רבות. הנה  
 מעת היות ע"ג בעולם  
 מימי אנוש החלו הדעות  
 להשתבש באמונה, מהם  
 כופרים בעיקר ואומרים  
 כי העולם קדמון, כחשו  
 בה' ויאמרו לא הוא,  
 ומהם מכחישים בידיעתו  
 הפרטית ואמרו איכה ידע  
 אל ויש דעה בעליון  
 (תהלים עג יא), ומהם  
 שיוודו בידיעה ומכחישים  
 בהשגחה ויעשו אדם  
 כדגי הים שלא ישגיה  
 האל בהם ואין עמהם  
 עונש או שכר, יאמרו  
 עזב ה' את הארץ. וכאשר  
 ירצה האלהים בעדה או  
 ביחיד ויעשה עמהם  
 מופת בשנוי מנהגו של  
 עולם וטבעו, יתברר לכל  
 בטול הדעות האלה כלם,  
 כי המופת הנפלא מורה  
 שיש לעולם אלוה  
 מחדשו, ויודע ומשגיה  
 ויכול. וכאשר יהיה  
 המופת ההוא נגזר תחלה  
 מפי נביא יתברר ממנו  
 עוד אמתת הנבואה, כי  
 ידבר האלהים את האדם  
 ויגלה סודו אל עבדיו  
 הנביאים, ותתקיים עם זה  
 התורה כלה.  
 רמב"ן, שמות יג:טז

We understand that the most sensory and experiential event in the Jewish calendar is focused on identifying, strengthening and transmitting core Jewish beliefs.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> A careful study of the ten plagues reveals that the three tiers taught in Rabbi Yehuda's acronym דצ"ך עד"ש באח"ב, respectively, relate to a specific lesson in *emunah*, faith, that we are supposed to learn. Each of the first plagues of the sets is introduced with a warning to Paroh that contains the message we are supposed to learn: 'כי אני ה'—for I am G-d, 'כי אין כמוני בכל הארץ, כי אני ה' בקרב הארץ—for there is none like Me in all

### 3. Values

As Divine agents in this world, Judaism calls us to the ideal of *imitatio Dei*—to imitate the values of our Creator, as the Rambam teaches:

*And we are commanded to walk in these ways that are good and straight paths—as Deuteronomy [28:9] states: “And you shall walk in His ways.” [Our Sages] taught [the following] explanation of the mitzvah: Just as He is called “Gracious,” you should be more gracious; Just as He is called “Merciful,” you shall be merciful; Just as He is called “Holy,” you shall be holy; In a similar manner, the prophets called God by other titles: “Slow to anger,” “Abundant in kindness,” “Righteous,” “Just,” “Perfect.”*

**Rambam, Hilchot Deot 1:5-6**

ומצווין אנו ללכת בדרכים האלו הבינונים והם הדרכים הטובים והישרים שנאמר והלכת בדרכיו. כך למדו בפירוש מצוה זו, מה הוא נקרא חנון אף אתה היה חנון, מה הוא נקרא רחום אף אתה היה רחום, מה הוא נקרא קדוש אף אתה היה קדוש, ועל דרך זו קראו הנביאים לאל בכל אותן הכנויין ארך אפים ורב חסד צדיק וישר תמים גבור וחזק וכיוצא בהן, להודיע שהן דרכים טובים וישרים וחייב אדם להנהיג עצמו בהן ולהדמות אליו כפי כחו.  
**רמב"ם, הל' דעות א:ה-ו**

Values, like the ones enumerated by the Rambam above, are principles that shape our attitudes and guide our actions. They are subtle and nearly impossible to convey in a direct command; rather, values must be conveyed by circumscription, through modeling. Hence, our seder becomes a laboratory for modeling Jewish values that are central to our faith.

For example, the value of truth must be learned and conveyed by seeking truth through the exercise of question and answer, never being satisfied with one's previous knowledge. We now appreciate the Haggadah's requirement of *afilu kulanu chachamim*—even the most learned individuals—must re-examine the story each year.

The value of gratitude is learned by actually expressing thanks, as we do in the lyrics of the Dayeinu poem and the subsequent passage *Al Achat Kama V'Chama*—“how much more so.”

Compassion and concern for others must be lived by inviting those less fortunate to share in our blessings. This, explained Rabbi Soloveitchik, is why we begin the seder with a preamble:

*No wonder our seder commences with the declaration, “Ha lahma anya, This is the bread of poverty.” Whatever we possess, even if it is just the bread of the poor, or poor bread, is too much for us and we invite all to come and share with us: “Let all who are hungry come and eat.” ... It is a proclamation that we are ready to help one another. Pesach night is a time of sharing... (Festival of Freedom, pp. 23, 46)*

### 4. Community

Finally, Judaism is unique in that it is not just a faith; it is a community. Judaism has been characterized by some as a race (usually in a pejorative sense) or a family (although unlike the Amish, we accept converts); but as a community it is something unique, as Rabbi Soloveitchik described:

*The community in Judaism is not a functional-utilitarian, but an ontological one. The community is not just an assembly of people who work together for their mutual benefit, but a*

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the land, respectively. For greater insight, see the Maharal's commentary on the Haggadah and *Haggadah Shirat Miriam* of Rav Yosef Zvi Rimon, pp. 205- 210.

*metaphysical entity, an individuality; I might say, a living whole. In particular, Judaism has stressed the wholeness and the unity of Knesset Israel, the Jewish community. The latter is not a conglomerate. It is an autonomous entity, endowed with a life of its own. We, for instance, lay claim to Eretz Israel. God granted the land to us as a gift. To whom did He pledge the land? Neither to an individual, nor to a partnership consisting of millions of people. He gave it to the Knesset Israel, to the community as an independent unity, as a distinct juridic metaphysical person. He did not promise the land to me, to you, to them; nor did He promise the land to all of us together. Abraham did not receive the land as an individual, but as the father of a future nation. The Owner of the Promised Land is the Knesset Israel, which is a community persona. However strange such a concept may appear to the empirical sociologist, it is not at all a strange experience for the Halachist and the mystic, to whom Knesset Israel is a living, loving, and suffering mother.*

("The Community," *Tradition* 17:2 [Spring 1978], pp. 9)

This sense of community is an essential aspect of the seder, whose roots can be traced back to the original Pesach evening in Egypt. When Hashem first instructs Moshe regarding the *korban*, He states that Moshe should speak not merely to the children of Israel, but rather to *kol kehal adat Yisrael* - the entire congregation of Israel—about the commandment. The communal nature of the event is stressed in the manner in which the *korban* is slaughtered:

*and you shall keep it unto the fourteenth day of the same month; and the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall slaughter it at dusk.*

**Shemot 12:6**

וְהָיָה לָכֶם לְמִשְׁמֶרֶת, עַד אַרְבָּעָה עָשָׂר יוֹם לַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה;  
וְשָׁחְטוּ אֹתוֹ, כָּל קְהַל עֵדֹת-יִשְׂרָאֵל--בֵּין הָעֶרְבָיִם.  
שְׁמוֹת יב:ו

The collective quality of the Pesach is underscored by the three different words used to describe the community: ישראל, קהל, עדת. Consequently, the Talmud (*Yoma* 51a) views this sacrifice as communal even though it is offered by individual Jews, since it is offered in the Beit Hamikdash in three large groups, paralleling the three Biblical terms. Pesach is the model for interconnectedness of community, which creates the legal concept of *shlichut*—agency (*Kiddushin* 41b). This sense of community is felt at seder tables throughout generations at which families and friends, young and old gather together and share the experience, strengthening the sense of community that transcends time and place. The Haggadah is the story of the Jewish people, beginning with the founding fathers and ending with the future redemption; this, too, is a definitional dimension of Judaism.<sup>6</sup> Judaism is a community.

## What for?

We conclude the seder with a monumental intellectual achievement, having grown in our awareness and understanding of Judaism. Yet there is something missing, if not deficient, if this is all we have achieved. Rabbi Soloveitchik, in a published letter, once noted this lacuna as a general educational challenge that faced the American Jewish community during his lifetime:

<sup>6</sup> We learn from our mystical traditions that ישראל ואורייתא וקרב"ה חד הוא — Israel, the Torah and G-d are one.

*I inadvertently touched on a grave educational philosophical problem that weighs on my mind for a long time. I said, that for the religious youth, the Torah is revealed in intellectual constructs of analysis, with cognitive clarity and cold logic. However, they have not merited to its revelation in a living experiential feeling that innervates and enlivens hearts. They understand the Torah as an idea, but they do not encounter it as a reality without any intermediary, one that is sensed with taste, sight and feel. Due to this lack of Torah feeling, the outlook of many of them on Judaism is truncated.*  
**(“Al Ahavat HaTorah Ugeulat Nefesh Hador,” B’sod Hayachid Vehayachad pp. 407-408)**

נגעתי שלא במתכוון בבעיה חינוכית פילוסופית חמורה המטרידה את מוחי זה עידן ועידנים. אמרתי, כי לצעירים החרדים נתגלה התורה בצורות מחשבה למדנית, בהכרה שכלית והיגיון צונן. אולם לא זכו לגילוייה בהרגשה ה"חושית" החיה, המרעידה והמרנינה לבבות. מכירים המה את התורה כאידיה אבל אינם נפגשים עמה כ"מציאות" בלתי אמצעית הנרגשת ב"טעם מראה ומישוש". מחמת העדר "התחושה" התורתית מסורסת היא השקפתם של רבים מהם על היהדות.  
**"על אהבת התורה וגאולת נפש הדור," בסוד היחיד והיחד, עמ' תז-תח**

Our Jewish life cannot simply be a sheaf of cognitive accomplishments. We learn this, too, from the seder, which is built in such an experiential manner. Our seder laws and lessons are illustrated by stories, punctuated by toasts and tastes and transformed by song.<sup>7</sup> The ultimate desired effect of the seder is the affect, much like all of Judaism, as Rav Soloveitchik explained in his letter<sup>8</sup>:

*It must exist in taste and sight. It is very important to us. The Halacha itself, which begins with pure intellectual effort of the greatness of mind, ends with taste and sight—Divine visions; there are within this experience, the particles of Divine inspiration. The verse stands and cries, “taste and see that Hashem is good.” The sublime goal is feeling the G-d of experience.*  
**(ibid, p. 412)**

צריכה להתקיים בטעם ובראייה, חשובה לנו מאד. ההלכה עצמה, שתחילתה התאמצות שכלית טהורה של גדול הדעת, סופה טעם וראייה, מראות א-להים, יש בחווייה זו משום נובלות רוח הקודש, הכתוב עומד ומצווה: "טעמו וראו כי טוב ה'". התכלית העליונה היא הרגשת ה' ה"מוחשת".

All of this is because Judaism, and its four components that we have touched upon, are not the goal in and of themselves. Rather, they are the means to the ultimate goal: the cultivation of a relationship with the Master of the world.

In this vein, Judaism is remarkably empowering: it enables each of us to bring G-d into our world and our life, elevating ourselves as we develop this relationship. The seder, in its form as a microcosm of Judaism, is an important gift to help us build this relationship. It is quite fitting,

<sup>7</sup> All of these are one integrated whole, a unified experienced. For its expression in Halacha, see *Mishnat Yaavetz Orach Chaim*, no. 18.

<sup>8</sup> In this deeply personal letter to the editor of the Israeli newspaper *HaDoar*, Rav Soloveitchik responds to criticism that he received from a published interview he gave to journalist Elie Wiesel. Rav Soloveitchik distinguished between the intellectual realm of Torah and the experiential aspect of Jewish life. He describes and decries the general lack of appreciation for the latter in the Torah world in his time; something that he claims is his inability to transmit to his students. His description of the Pesach seder experience is a prime example of this type of emotional and experiential Judaism (see preface to *The Seder Night: An Exalted Evening*). Rav Soloveitchik further expounds this theme of the complementary legal and living aspects of Torah in his tribute to the Rebbetzin of Talne, published in *Tradition* 17:2, Spring 1978.

then, that many editions of the Haggadah conclude with a coda—the book of Shir Hashirim.<sup>9</sup> The story of Shir Hashirim is the tale of a passionate relationship of a young couple—an allegory for our relationship with our beloved Creator. While the story is told in words, largely in prose, its key understanding lies in the feelings expressed by these words in its poetry.<sup>10</sup> The essence of any relationship is the feeling that exists between the two parties. It is the feeling of the poetry that connects us with Hashem on the deepest level and elevates our soul. It brings Hashem into our lives in such a real way that we can feel His presence. Hence, at the seder, our palates taste the bitterness of maror and the sweetness of wine; we relax on pillows and create an ambience to reach the emotional side of our existence to cultivate our feelings. We focus on a story, an imaginative and embellished tale, which becomes more praiseworthy as it grows and fills our hearts, more than our minds.<sup>11</sup> Having fulfilled the seder properly in both intellect and emotion, we feel the security of God's providence so palpably that we do not fear any external anxieties and do not recite the *bracha* of *HaMapil*, which asks G-d for protection when we sleep (Rama O.C. 481:2).

This level of relationship with G-d, who is transcendent beyond comprehension, the א-ל מסתתר, is ordinarily beyond our reach. However, perhaps we can use the seder and its experiential learning format as a means to help us invest emotionally in this relationship, to connect just a bit more deeply to Hashem through our Judaism. The cultivation of this sublime feeling is a paramount achievement of a Torah life, as Rabbi Soloveitchik shared:

*I learned from her [my mother] the most important thing in life—to feel the presence of the Almighty and the gentle pressure of His hand resting upon my frail shoulders.*  
("A Tribute to the Rebbitzin of Talne," *Tradition* 17:2 [Spring 1978])

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<sup>9</sup> A source for reciting Shir Hashirim at the conclusion of the seder can be found in the *Chayei Adam* 139:19:16 and *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch* 119:9.

<sup>10</sup> Perhaps this is why we conclude the seder with *Nirtzah*, songs of praise to Hashem, despite the Rambam's ruling cited in *Shulchan Aruch* 481:1, that we should follow the seder with the study of the laws of Pesach and a discussion of the miracles of the Exodus. Our practice focuses on the songs that reflect our relationship with G-d as the ultimate achievement of the seder.

<sup>11</sup> This is the meaning of *v'chol hamarbeh lesaper, harei zeh meshubach*—one who spends additional time discussing the Haggadah is praiseworthy—according to Rabbi Sender Gross zt"l. Not only does the one who engages in the discussion become greater; the story itself becomes more praiseworthy.

# Why Don't We Recite Shehecheyanu on Sefiras ha-Omer

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We recite the blessing of *Shehecheyanu* before performing most mitzvos that are applicable only at certain times during the year, thereby expressing our excitement and gratitude to God for allowing and helping us reach this moment. *Sefiras ha-omer* stands out as an exception to this rule in that we do not recite *Shehecheyanu*. *Ba'al ha-Ma'or* offers an explanation for this omission. Based on the Gemara's recording of Ameimar's custom:

*Ameimar counted the days but not the weeks. He said that [our counting] is a remembrance of the Temple.*

**Menachos 66a**

*Regarding sefiras ha-omer, there are those who ask: Why don't we recite Shehecheyanu? Furthermore, why don't we omit the beracha on sefiras ha-omer on the second day of Pesach [out of concern that in the Diaspora we are still observing the first day of Pesach]? ... Additionally, why don't we [in the Diaspora] count two days, similar to our observance of a second day of Yom Tov? The principle that answers these questions is that we don't need to be as stringent regarding sefiras ha-omer, which is only a remembrance. This is the conclusion of the Talmud—Ameimar counted the days but not the weeks. He said that [our counting] is a remembrance of the Temple. Although we count days and weeks, it is only out of tradition [and not an integral part of the mitzvah], and therefore we can't require the recitation of Shehecheyanu ... Sefiras ha-omer is not something which provides any benefit. Rather it is solely for the purpose of evoking emotional sorrow for the destruction of our Temple.*

**Ba'al ha-Maor, Pesachim 28a**

אמימר מני יומי ולא מני שבועי  
אמר זכר למקדש הוא.  
מנחות סו.

ובספירת העומר יש ששואלין  
מה טעם אין אנו אומרים בו זמן  
ועוד מה טעם אין אנו סופרים  
בלא ברכה ביו"ט שני של פסח  
... ועוד מה טעם אין אנו סופרים  
שתי ספירות מספק כמו שאנו  
עושין שני י"ט מספק וכללו של  
דבר אין לנו להחמיר בספירת  
העומר שאינו אלא לזכר בעלמא  
והכין אסיקנא בדוכתא במנחות  
דאמימר מני יומי ולא מני שבועי  
אמר זכר למקדש הוא ואע"פ  
שאנו מונין ימים ושבועות מנהג  
הוא בידינו אבל להטעינו זמן אין  
לנו ... ולספירת העומר אין בו  
זכר לשום הנאה אלא לעגמת  
נפשנו לחרבן בית מאויינו  
בעל המאור, פסחים כח.

According to *Ba'al ha-Ma'or*, *sefiras ha-omer*, as it is performed today, is *zecher la-Mikdash* (a remembrance for the Temple), but only a general remembrance of the original practice in the *Beis ha-Mikdash*, whose purpose is to evoke emotion, not one that is meant to remind us of the actual past practice. Since *sefirah* is a general remembrance, it does not rise to the level of a performance that requires a *Shehecheyanu*.

The Rav suggested that there are two types of such remembrances, one that recalls the glory of the *Beis ha-Mikdash* (such as taking the *lulav* for seven days, which reflects the ritual in the Temple when it was standing) and another that reminds us of its destruction (such as putting ashes on the head of a groom under the *chupah*). As *Ba'al ha-Ma'or* indicates, *sefiras ha-omer* is not of the first type, it is therefore meant to remind us of the destruction of the Temple. Tosafos write:

*After one recites the beracha on sefirah, one says, "may it be your will [that the Temple be speedily rebuilt]," which we don't do for the blowing of shofar or shaking the lulav because nowadays [sefirah] is only a recitation for [the purpose of remembering] the Temple, but lulav and shofar involve an action.*

**Tosafos, Megillah 20b**

ואחר שבירך על הספירה אומר י"ר  
שיבנה וכו' מה שאין כן בתקיעת  
שופר ולולב והיינו טעמא לפי שאין  
אלא הזכרה עתה לבנין ביהמ"ק אבל  
לשופר ולולב יש עשיה.  
:תוספות, מגילה כ:

The declaration that we make after *sefirah* is not made after shaking the *lulav*, which after the first day is also *zecher le-mikdash*. Tosafos differentiate between the two by saying that *sefirah* is **only** a *zecher le-mikdash* whereas *lulav* has a specific action associated with it. Both *lulav* and *sefirah* are remembrances, but they represent two kinds of *zecher le-mikdash*. *Lulav* was instituted as a remembrance, but it represents the fulfillment, the *kiyum*, of the mitzvah of *lulav*. On the other hand, both the institution and fulfillment of *sefirah* are *zecher le-mikdash* per se.

That is why we do not recite *Shehecheyanu*, which is an expression of joy. This may also serve as a source for the mourning nature of the *sefirah* period. It is not only a remembrance of the death of Rabbi Akiva's students but an expression of the intrinsic nature of the contemporary mitzvah. According to this rationale, mourning should extend throughout the entire *sefirah* period, which is in fact the opinion of the Ari (cited in *P'ri Eitz Chaim, Sha'ar Sefiras ha-Omer* no. 7).

Rambam (*Temidim and Musafim* 7:22), however, assumes that the mitzvah of *sefiras ha-omer* is still biblically mandated today and does not differ in this sense from its status at the time of the *Beit ha-Mikdash*. The Rav suggested that it is possible to explain the lack of *She-hecheyanu* even according to Rambam based on the understanding of the *Sefer ha-Chinuch*:

*The root of the mitzvah, on a simple level, is that the foundation of the Jewish people is the Torah ... The main purpose of the Jews being redeemed from Egypt was so that they would accept the Torah at Sinai and observe it ... For this reason ... we are commanded to count from the day after the beginning of Pesach until the day of the giving of the*

משרשי המצוה על צד הפשט, לפי שכל  
עיקרן של ישראל אינו אלא התורה ...  
והיא העיקר והסיבה שנגאלו ויצאו  
ממצרים כדי שיקבלו התורה בסיני  
ויקיימוה ... ומפני כן ... נצטוינו למנות  
ממחרת יום טוב של פסח עד יום נתינת  
התורה, להראות בנפשנו החפץ הגדול אל

*Torah to show our great desire for this glorious day that we have been anticipating ... because counting shows a person that his true longing and desire is to reach that day.*

**Sefer ha-Chinuch, Mitzvah 306**

היום הנכבד הנכסף ללבנו ... כי המנין  
מראה לאדם כי כל ישעו וכל חפצו להגיע  
אל הזמן ההוא.  
ספר החינוך מצוה שו

The *Chinuch* explains that the count expresses a sense of longing and anticipation for the ultimate goal of accepting the Torah at Sinai, and therefore indicates that we have not yet reached the goal. This is antithetical to the nature of *Shehecheyanu*, which is recited to express gratitude for having reached a particular goal. *Sefirah*, on the contrary, demonstrates that we have not yet reached the goal.

This understanding may also explain why the Torah has us wait until after the first day of Pesach to begin counting *sefiras ha-omer*. The *Chinuch* explains that the first day of Pesach is singled out for the specific purpose of remembering the miraculous Exodus, which in itself was a testament to God's dual role as Creator and Controller of history. Since *sefiras ha-omer* is an expression of our not having yet attained our intended goal, it is inappropriate to perform this mitzvah on the first day of Pesach and mitigate our happiness and joy over the actual Exodus. It is also perhaps for this reason that some people outside the Land of Israel follow the custom of reciting *sefirat ha-omer* on the second night only after completing the seder, so as not to mitigate the joy of the seder with our feelings of sadness for not yet having attained the ultimate goal of accepting the Torah.

The Rav's view concerning the recitation of *Shehecheyanu*—that the mitzvah of *sefiras ha-omer* is characterized by longing and aspiration and reaches culmination only with the arrival of Shavuot—can be applied in other situations as well. *Shach* (Y.D. 28:5) asks why there is no *Shehecheyanu* when a man marries a woman. He does not resolve the question.

Rabbi Shlomo Eiger, *Gilyon Maharsha* ad loc., answers that *kiddushin* (betrothal) itself is only a *hechsher mitzvah* (preparatory stage) necessary to fulfill the mitzvah of *p'ru ur'vu* (procreation). This answer may suffice according to Rabbeinu Asher (*Kesubos* 1:12). However, according to the Rambam (*Ishus* 3:23), who states that the *berachah* on *kiddushin* is a *berachah* on the mitzvah, similar to any other *berachah* on a mitzvah, it is clear that *kiddushin* itself is the mitzvah—so this answer will not suffice.

*Aruch ha-Shulchan* (OC 223:4) suggests a technical answer. He writes that one cannot recite *Shehecheyanu* at the time of the *kiddushin* because the process is not complete until the *nisuin* (marriage). One cannot recite *Shehecheyanu* at the time of *nisuin* because the other dimension of marriage takes place at the time of the *kiddushin*.

According to the Rav's approach, we could offer a different answer to the question of why there is no *Shehecheyanu* on marriage. The mitzvah of getting married (according to Rambam) does not take place in a moment's time, when the ring is placed on the wife's finger. Rather it is a life-long process, a goal that is fulfilled only with the passage of time as the relationship and the family is built. It is a lifelong endeavor, where the goal is never totally achieved, as the relationship between husband and wife is deepened and hopefully constantly enhanced. Therefore, as the goal is not at hand at the time of the initial marriage, *Shehecheyanu* is not recited.

The notion of the goal always beyond reach, the aspiration for the unattainable, animated the Rav. If there was an occasional somber tone to the Rav's demeanor, it was because of his sensitivity to this inescapable fact of human existence, that the goal is never reachable. Inherent to the human condition is the recognition of the infinite gap between frail, mortal, finite man and the Almighty. This precipitated in the Rav a tremendous sense of humility. This recognition can also lead to an existential frustration due to God's complete unknowability and otherness, hidden behind clouds of infinity.

By the same token, however, the process of striving for the goal banished complacency from the Rav's persona. He could never be complacent; he was always striving to develop new ideas and new insights. Certainly in the world of learning, he would always come to *shiur* with new ideas and approaches. I once quipped that the most noteworthy feature of a *chazara shiur* given by the Rav was that he was *chozer* from what he had said previously. This was part of the Rav's experience and his legacy to us, his *talmidim*—human beings can never attain the ultimate goal, but we bring sanctity to ourselves and into our lives with yearning and striving for that goal.

# The Dual Aspect of the Four Cups: A Core Idea of Pesach from the Rav

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*If one drinks these four cups using undiluted wine, he fulfills the mitzva of four cups but not the mitzva of freedom. If he drinks all four cups using diluted wine but drinks them simultaneously, he fulfills the mitzva of freedom but not the mitzva of four cups.*

**Rambam, Hilchos Chametz Umatza 7:9**

ארבעה כוסות האלו צריך למזוג אותן כדי שתהיה שתיה עריבה הכל לפי היין ולפי דעת השוטה, ולא יפחות בארבעתן מרביעית יין חי, שתה ארבעה כוסות אלו מיין שאינו מזוג יצא ידי ארבעה כוסות ולא יצא ידי חירות, שתה ארבעה כוסות מזוגין בבת אחת יצא ידי חירות ולא יצא ידי ארבעה כוסות.  
**רמב"ם, הלכות חמץ ומצה ז:ט**

The Rambam's words are enigmatic. Why does the Rambam distinguish between the mitzva of four cups and the mitzva of freedom? Rav Chaim Soloveitchik explained that there are two separate mitzvos fulfilled when one drinks the four cups of wine at the seder. One mitzva is the recitation of a special *beracha* over each cup of wine. A second mitzva is drinking the four cups in a manner expressive of freedom, *derech cheirus*. Normally, we say each of the four *berachos* separately: one at Kiddush, one after reciting *maggid*, one after Birkas Hamazon and one after Hallel. We fill the cup each time with diluted wine (i.e. wine that is pleasant to drink) and drink after the recitation of the *beracha*. By doing this, we fulfill both mitzvos. However, as the Rambam describes, the two mitzvos are divisible. If someone drinks very strong undiluted wine, he fulfills the mitzva of reciting a *beracha* on each cup of wine but lacks the mitzva of drinking the cups *derech cheirus*. If someone drinks four cups of diluted wine but doesn't recite any of the four special *berachos*, he fulfills the mitzva of drinking four cups *derech cheirus* but fails to fulfill the mitzva of reciting the *berachos*.

The Rav noted that this halachic distinction within the rabbinic mitzva of the four cups reflects a Torah distinction that we find in the biblical mitzva of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim*, the mitzva to recount the story of the Exodus. The mitzva of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim* has a dual aspect: one is education; the second is experiential.

*And you shall tell your son on that day saying: because of this G-d did this for me when I left Egypt.*

**Shemos 13:8**

והגדת לבנך ביום ההוא לאמר בעבור זה עשה ה' לי בצאתי ממצרים.  
**שמות יג:ח**

We must teach our children, others and ourselves about *yetzias Mitzrayim*. The recitation of the Hagada is *talmud Torah* (Torah study) *par excellence*. We ask questions and give answers. We study and try to understand the story of the Exodus, its history, significance and meaning. This is all part of the education aspect of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim*. It is a mitzva of the mind. For this reason, the Hagada tells us, כנגד ארבעה בנים דברה תורה, the Torah addresses four sons. Each of the sons represents a certain intellectual level. That section of the Hagada addresses the cognitive mitzva of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim*.

There is another aspect of the mitzva of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim*:

*Every person in every generation must see himself as if he himself left Egypt.*

**Mishna, Pesachim 10:5**

בכל דור ודור חייב אדם לראות את עצמו כאילו הוא יצא ממצרים.

משנה, פסחים י:ה

This obligation is reflective of the experiential aspect of the mitzva—to feel the Exodus as a real part of history, to personalize it and experience it emotionally. One must experience both the agony of the suffering brought about by the harsh slavery as well as the ecstasy of deliverance and freedom. This aspect is a mitzva of the heart, the emotional aspect of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim*.

The Rambam has a slightly different version of the text:

*Every person in every generation must display himself as if he himself just left the slavery of Egypt.*

**Rambam, Hilchos Chametz Umatza 7:6**

בכל דור ודור חייב אדם להראות את עצמו כאילו הוא בעצמו יצא עתה משעבוד מצרים.

רמב"ם, הלכות חמץ ומצה ז:ו

The single letter added by the Rambam is very significant. According to the Rambam, the experience of *yetzias Mitzrayim* must be so real that it is not restricted only to the internal psychological world of emotional feelings and imagination, but it also bursts forth into physical expression.

When we eat the maror and cry tears, these are real tears of the slave. We see the wanton deaths of our brothers, sisters, parents and children, and cry out in emotional agony and pain. When we eat the matza and drink the wine while reclining, we feel the real joy of redemption and rejoice in religious ecstasy. This joy expresses itself as we burst into the song of Hallel and the other Pesach songs at the end of the seder.

These two aspects of the biblical mitzva of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim* are reflected in the mitzva of drinking the four cups of wine. The mitzva of reciting four *berachos* is the intellectual expression of our thanks to G-d for His salvation. The drinking of the four cups of wine is the emotional and physical expression of our joy and appreciation.

The Pesach seder rejuvenates the Jew. It energizes us on all levels—spiritual, intellectual, emotional and physical—to understand and experience the blessings of *yetzias Mitzrayim* and being part of G-d's chosen holy people.

# Charoses: Why Don't We Recite a *Beracha*?

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The Mishna (*Pesachim* 114a) lists charoses among the matza, maror and other items placed on the table as part of the Pesach seder. However, the Mishna also records a difference of opinion as to the status of the charoses. According to R. Elazar B'Rebi Tzadok, charoses constitutes a mitzva, just as the other components of the seder ritual. However, the Tanna Kamma rules that there is no mitzva of charoses per se. Rather, the Gemara (116a) explains that it is present at the table so that maror may be dipped in the charoses, "*mishum kapa*." Namely, the charoses neutralizes harmful contaminants that may be present in the maror.

Rambam, in his *Commentary on the Mishna*, states:

R. [Elazar B'Rebi] Tzadok who rules that charoses is a mitzva would require one to recite the blessing, "[He] who has sanctified us with his mitzvos and commanded us on the eating of charoses." This is not the common practice.

**Rambam, Commentary on the Mishna, Pesachim 10:3**

ור' צדוק שאומר חרוסת מצוה חייב לדעתו לברך אשר קדשנו במצותיו וצונו על אכילת חרוסת. ואינה הלכה. פירוש המשנה להרמב"ם, פסחים יג:

According to Rambam's *Commentary on the Mishna*, a natural extension of R. Elazar B'Rebi Tzadok's opinion is that an additional *beracha* must be recited on charoses, "*al achilas charoses*." This follows the pattern of matza and maror and other mitzvos that are fulfilled when one eats certain foods.<sup>2</sup> Rambam concludes by stating that normative halacha is not in accordance with R. Elazar B'Rebi Tzadok, seemingly because our text of the Haggadah does not include a blessing for charoses, indicating that common practice follows the ruling of the Tanna Kama.

However, in *Mishneh Torah*, Rambam states as follows:

Charoses is a mitzva ordained by the Rabbis to commemorate the mortar used [by the Jewish people] when they were enslaved in Egypt. How is it made? One takes dates or dried figs or raisins or the like and crushes them.

החרוסת מצוה מדברי סופרים זכר לטיט שהיו עובדין בו במצרים, וכיצד עושין אותה לוקחין תמרים או גרוגרות או צמוקין וכיוצא בהן ודורסין אותן ונותנין

<sup>1</sup> Adapted by Rabbi Schachter's students from his *sefer*, *Eretz HaTzvi* no. 3.

<sup>2</sup> *Tur* (O.C. 475) rules that charoses is a mitzva. Nevertheless, he writes that a *beracha* is not recited because charoses is secondary to the maror with which it is eaten. Therefore, only the blessing "*al achilas maror*" must be recited. This may parallel the concept of *ikar* and *tafel* (primary and secondary) that pertains to *birchos hanehenin* (*Berachos* 44a). For further elaboration, see *Eretz HaTzvi*, pg. 15.

Vinegar and spices are added in the way that mortar is mixed with straw. Charoses is brought to the table on the nights of Pesach.

### Hilchos Chametz U'Matza 7:11

לתוכן חומץ ומתבלין אותן בתבלין כמו  
טיט בתבן ומביאין אותה על השלחן בלילי  
הפסח.

רמב"ם הלכות חמץ ומצה ז:יא

This ruling stands in contradistinction with the words of Rambam in his *Commentary on the Mishna*. In *Mishneh Torah*, Rambam codifies the view of R. Elazar B'Rebi Tzadok by stating that charoses is deemed a mitzva. Moreover, in *Mishneh Torah*, Rambam makes no mention of a *beracha* for charoses, whereas his *Commentary on the Mishna* identifies the blessing as a logical extension of R. Elazar B'Rebi Tzadok's opinion.<sup>3</sup>

Rav Soloveitchik explained that Rambam in *Mishneh Torah*, in fact, follows the opinion of R. Elazar B'Rebi Tzadok. However, in order to understand why there is no *beracha* recited, we must understand the nature of the mitzva of charoses. Indeed, eating charoses or dipping maror in charoses are not mitzvos in the same formal sense applied to the eating of matza or maror. However, there is a mitzva to place charoses on the seder table because of the symbolic significance of *zecher la'teet*, a reminder of the mortar used by the Jewish people during the slavery in Egypt.

For this reason, Rambam emphasizes its placement at the table when he lists the components of the seder at the very beginning of his discussion of the seder in Chapter 7 of *Hilchos Chametz U'Matza*. This serves as the primary designation of the role of charoses at the seder. He describes the dipping of the maror in charoses only later in *Mishneh Torah* when he expands upon the protocol of the mitzvos of the seder in Chapter 8. The purpose of dipping maror in charoses is merely to establish a connection between the charoses and the meal in which it is eaten. Its presence at the table as a *zecher la'teet* is actualized through this incorporation into the *seuda* (festive meal) of the seder night.

The Rav understood Rambam's omission of the *beracha* for charoses in light of this explanation. As a rule, Chazal instituted blessings for mitzvos only in the context of a *ma'aseh mitzva* (an action used to perform a mitzva). In other words, when one fulfills a mitzva without performing a specific, prescribed action, no *beracha* is recited.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, even according to R. Elazar B'Rebi Tzadok, Rambam rules that no *beracha* is said. The mitzva of charoses is achieved simply through its presence at the *seuda*. Dipping the maror is only a vehicle through which halacha recognizes the charoses' association with the seder; it is not a *ma'aseh mitzva* in its own right.

Rav Soloveitchik demonstrated that the aforementioned principle of *birchos hamitzvos* is manifest in other areas of halacha, as well. For example, Tosafos cite the opinion of Behag (Ba'al Halachos Gedolos):

<sup>3</sup> See *Lechem Mishneh* who observes that Rambam must have reversed his ruling and rejected the opinion of the Tanna Kama. However, *Lechem Mishneh* does not suggest a solution to Rambam's omission of a *beracha* for charoses.

<sup>4</sup> A related expression of this is the principle עובר לעשייתו עליהן מברכין עליהן, one always recites a *beracha* before its performance (*Pesachim* 7b). This highlights the performance (not the fulfillment) as the critical aspect of the recitation of the *beracha*.

*Halachos Gedolos ruled that if one missed a day of counting the omer, he should no longer continue counting because we require “complete” [counting]. This opinion is very puzzling and should not be accepted.*

**Tosafos, Menachos 66a**

פסק בהלכות גדולות שאם הפסיק יום אחד ולא ספר שוב אינו סופר משום דבעיא תמימות ותימה גדולה הוא ולא יתכן.  
תוספות, מנחות סו.

According to Behag, if one omits counting one of the 49 days of the *omer*, the mitzva can no longer be fulfilled. Apparently, Behag views *sefiras ha'omer* as one mitzva with 49 requisite components. *Pri Megadim* (O.C. 489:13) questions Behag's opinion based on our practice to make a separate *beracha* on each night of the *omer*. Seemingly, the institution of individual *berachos* indicates that we fulfill 49 individual mitzvos, contrary to Behag's approach.

However, the Rav resolved Behag's opinion based on the above rule. We saw from charoses that a *beracha* is not recited in the context of a *kiyum mitzva* (fulfillment of a mitzva) in the absence of a *ma'aseh mitzva*. Thus, it is the *ma'aseh mitzva* that is the impetus for the recitation of a *beracha*. A *beracha* can be recited in the context of a *ma'aseh mitzva*, even when it does not constitute a *kiyum mitzva*. Even Behag agrees that each night of the *omer* affords the opportunity to perform a *ma'aseh mitzva* by counting the *omer*. While Behag believes that no *kiyum mitzva* exists until all 49 days have passed, a *beracha* can indeed be recited each time one counts the *omer*. The *beracha* is on the *ma'aseh mitzva*.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Rav Soloveitchik also offered a different explanation to Behag's opinion. The reason why one who skips a day of counting may not continue counting with a *beracha* is because *sefiras ha'omer* requires consecutiveness. One who has skipped a day of counting cannot consider himself as “counting” because his count lacks consecutiveness. According to this explanation, Behag agrees that there are 49 mitzvos. If, for example, one misses the eighth night, it does not negate the fulfillment of the mitzvos that were performed on the first seven nights. It merely prevents someone from continuing to count on day nine because according to Behag, the number eight will always be lacking from his count. Based on this explanation, *Pri Megadim's* question is no longer valid. The question is premised on the fact that according to Behag, there is only one elongated mitzva. According to this explanation, Behag agrees that one fulfills a mitzva every night of the *omer* until one misses a night.

# Insights From the Rav on the Maggid Section of the Haggadah

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*Author's Note: The Rav often observed that the Yom Tov experience of one who devoted time in advance of its arrival to studying and reviewing the laws and themes of the holiday is immeasurably greater than the Yom Tov experience of one who did not do so. He himself would thus offer many special shiurim prior to each holiday, including, of course, Pesach. What follows is just a sampling of his many profound lessons and teachings relating to the Haggadah. I was privileged to hear some of these thoughts directly from the Rav myself; the majority, however, are culled from notes written (and in some cases published) by others, including HaRav Hershel Schachter, shlita, who was kind enough to lend me several of his notebooks from when he attended the Rav's shiurim. Any mistakes or inaccuracies here should be attributed solely to me.*

## *לכול דכפיין ייתי ויכול - Let all who are hungry come and eat*

Why does the maggid section of Haggadah, the primary focus of which is the fulfillment of the mitzvah of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim* (recounting the Exodus), begin with an invitation to those who are hungry to come eat?

It is obviously proper in general to be concerned with the well-being of those who are in need; the Gemara in *Ta'anis* (20b) in fact teaches that Rav Huna would invite hungry guests into his home on a regular basis using phraseology very similar to that mentioned here. Moreover, the Rambam (*Hilchos Yom Tov* 6:18) stresses that on *yomim tovim* in particular, one must be careful to see to it that those who are less fortunate will be able to enjoy the holiday as well. But why do we emphasize this specifically on Pesach and why at the very beginning of maggid?

The *Ramo* (*Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim* 429:1) rules that in advance of Pesach, there is a special custom to collect *maos chittin*, tzedakah funds that will be distributed to the poor in order to enable them to buy matzoh for the mitzvah at the seder. The Vilna Gaon there (*Biur HaGra*, s.v. *U'Minhag*) notes that this practice dates back to Talmudic times, and he points out elsewhere (as cited in *Divrei Eliyahu* to *Parashas Bo*, s.v. *shiv'as*) that it is even hinted at in a verse

in the Torah (Shemos 13:7) which alludes to an obligation to see that matzoh be eaten—apparently by others as well. It is thus perhaps to call attention to this unique requirement that we bring up the matter of feeding the poor at the start of the seder.

Alternatively, it may be suggested that this declaration is actually part of the demonstration of freedom and independence so central to the practices of the seder night (see Rambam, *Hilchos Chametz U'Matzoh* 7:6-7). The Gemara in *Pesachim* (88b) asserts that a slave has no possessions, since whatever he has belongs to his master. Consequently, a slave does not have the right to invite guests to join him for a meal; only the master can do so. By saying this phrase and telling guests to join us at our celebratory meal, we are affirming that we are in fact free independent people, not slaves. On this night, we proudly assert that we are masters, and we extend invitations to other to join us. This is thus a most appropriate way to begin the seder: by publicly demonstrating that we are *bnai chorin*. At the same time, though, we recognize that while still currently in exile, our freedom is somewhat incomplete; we thus conclude the paragraph with a request that we be able to return as a nation to Eretz Yisrael and experience true and complete freedom.

### ה-הלילה הזה כולנו מסובין - *On this night, we all recline*

The last of the Four Questions, known as the *Mah Nishtanah*, notes that on the night of Pesach, we are all “*mesubin*,” usually translated as “reclining,” a reference to the fact that on this night, there is a special mitzvah to recline (*heseibah*) while eating and drinking, incumbent upon even the poorest of people (see *Mishnah, Pesachim* 99b and Rambam, *Hilchos Chametz U'Matzoh* 7:7); it is this unusual practice that the questioner highlights at this point. There are, however, places in the Gemara where a form of the word *heseibah* is used to describe people eating together in a group (see *Berachos* 43b, 46b). On Pesach night, there is a special preference to eat the meat of the *korban Pesach* together with others, as noted by the Rambam (*Hilchos Korban Pesach* 2:2; see *Pesachim* 91a). The expression “*kulanu mesubin*” may thus refer to the fact that on this night, unlike other nights, we make a special effort to eat together in a group.

### מ-משועבדים היינו - *We would still be enslaved*

The *Ba'al HaHaggadah* states that had Hashem not taken us out of Egypt, we and all of our descendants would have remained “*meshubadim*,” “enslaved” to Pharaoh. Is it not possible, however, that somewhere along the line, one of the Pharaohs might have released the Jewish slaves on his own, as indeed happened on other occasions in history in other places? The answer is that had that happened, we might indeed have been politically free as a nation, but we would have owed a constant debt of gratitude to whichever Pharaoh it would have been who set us free. In that sense, we would never be able to become completely independent. This explains why the word used here is “*meshubadim*,” “enslaved,” and not “*avadim*,” “slaves”—we indeed would not have been slaves, but we would have been enslaved, in the sense of indebted, to Pharaoh.

### א-מעשה ברבי אליעזר - *A story involving Rabbi Eliezer*

It is clear from various sources in the Gemara that the different *talmidei chachomim* enumerated here lived in different places throughout Eretz Yisrael. For example, Rabbi Eliezer lived in Lod,

Rabbi Yehoshua lived in Peki'in and Rabban Gamliel lived in Yavneh (see *Sanhedrin* 32b). Why then did they assemble in Bnai Berak, which was the hometown of Rabbi Akiva, and not spend the holiday in the towns in which they each lived?

The mitzvah of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim* entails much more than simply retelling the story of the Exodus. After all, everybody already knows the basic outline of the events. Rather, what is required is in-depth analysis. We must search for new insights and interpretations; each person must delve into the details in an effort to come to a more sophisticated understanding, in accordance with his ability. This is why the study of the Scriptural passages describing the Exodus is done via the Midrashic exposition of each of the phrases, as opposed to via the simple reading of the text in the particular *parshiyos* (in the first part of *Sefer Shemos*) that relate the story. For this reason, the sages got together at the home of one of them in order to be able to converse about, discuss and expound upon the events with people on a similar level of scholarship, the better to be able to yield a deeper and more refined understanding for them all.

### **רבי אלעזר בן עזריה - Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah said...**

This passage in the Haggadah is taken from a Mishnah in *Berachos* (12b). The question is what its relevance is here, since the topic of that Mishnah is the mitzvah to mention *yetzias Mitzrayim* each and every night of the year, as part of the third paragraph of *Kerias Shema*. As such, it has nothing to do with Pesach night, per se, where the obligation is not merely to mention *yetzias Mitzrayim*, but to tell the story in depth and at length, from beginning to end, to relate it to others, and to analyze the reasons behind the unique mitzvos of the evening (see *Chidushei HaGrach* to *Pesachim* 116a). Why, then, is this Mishnah cited here at all?

In his version of the text of the Haggadah, the Rambam (found at the end of *Hilchos Chametz U'Matzoh*) adds the word "*lahem*," "to them," so that this passage reads, "*Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah said to them ...*," thus suggesting that Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah related the teaching in this Mishnah to others, namely, to the other scholars with whom he assembled for the seder in Bnai Berak on that very evening described above. Since it was on that evening that this Mishnah was taught, it appears here as a direct continuation of the previous story. Moreover, because the mitzvah of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim* mandates that one discuss the Exodus and the miracles related to it, the nightly recollection of the Exodus, albeit brief, is a part of the fulfillment of that special mitzvah on Pesach.

### **ברוך המקום - Blessed is the Omnipresent**

Of all the names used to refer to God (see *Shevuos* 35a-b), why here do we use the name *Makom*, the Omnipresent? Each of the numerous names refers to a different attribute of His; throughout our Torah literature and our liturgy, we thus use different names to refer to Him depending upon which of His attributes is being highlighted. The name used here suggests that God is indeed everywhere, even in those places and at those times when we might not readily sense His presence. In fact, we may note that it is specifically on those occasions when we might think that God is far away from us and has perhaps abandoned us entirely that we are reminded, by referring to Him with this particular name, that He is in truth very much with us in our midst.

We thus find, for example, that a mourner, who certainly feels as though God has turned away from him, is to be consoled with the phrase “*HaMakom yenachem eschem ...*” “May the Omnipresent comfort you ...” Similarly, when praying on behalf of our brethren who are suffering and in distress, who likewise feel that they have been neglected by God, we appeal to Him by saying “*HaMakom yerachem aleihem ...*,” “May the Omnipresent have mercy upon them ...” And on the night of Yom Kippur, as we stand on the threshold of a day on which we will recount our sins, our iniquities and our transgressions repeatedly, and may thus feel that we are very distant from God, we remind ourselves at the very beginning of the service that we are praying “*al da’as HaMakom*,” “with the approval of the Omnipresent.”

On Pesach night too, when about to introduce the Four Sons, who are so different in their respective relationships with God, we might be tempted to think that it is really only the Wise Son who is capable of understanding the intricacies of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim*, of discussing it intelligently, and of viewing himself as if he personally experienced the Exodus, and thus only such a person truly has a place at the seder table. Others not on that level might then feel alienated, as if somehow they don’t belong and as if they have no part in this special evening. We therefore say “*Baruch HaMakom ...*,” “Blessed is the Omnipresent ...,” here in order to stress that God in fact revealed Himself to each and every Jew, regardless of background or ability. Everybody, then, has to recall these events and everybody has a role to play at the seder, in accordance with his own ability, because God in fact is close to all.

### *אין מפטירין אחר הפסח אפיקומן - One may not eat dessert after eating the Pesach offering*

This phrase comes from one of the last *Mishnayos* in *Masseches Pesachim* (119b) and its inclusion here as the message to the Wise Son implies that he is to be taught all of the laws of Pesach, through and including this lesson regarding the *afikoman*. (Indeed, in the text of the Haggadah presented by the Vilna Gaon, the instruction is to teach to the wise son “*ad*,” “until,” meaning all the laws in the *Mishnayos* until, and including, this law concerning the *afikoman*.) In other words, part of the requirement of the seder night is not only to relate and discuss the events of the Exodus, but also to learn and study the laws of Pesach, as stated explicitly in the Tosefta in *Pesachim* (10:8; see Rosh there, 10:33). In the Torah, the response to the question of the Wise Son includes a reference to fulfilling God’s statutes and decrees (see Devarim 6:21-24); in order to do so one must know exactly what they are and the laws must thus be explained—in proper detail—to this inquisitive child, as this too is part of the evening’s mitzvah.

The particular detail relating to the *afikoman* being taught here is that one may not have any dessert or eat any additional food after partaking of the meat of the *korban Pesach*, which is consumed at the end of the meal. The Rambam (*Hilchos Chametz U’Matzoh* 8:9) rules accordingly, but then adds that today, in the absence of the *korban Pesach*, one must eat matzoh at the end of the meal, and not taste anything afterward, so that the flavor of the matzoh, the eating of which is the mitzvah of the evening, should linger in one’s mouth. Although eating matzoh was also a mitzvah in the days of the Beis HaMikdash, as was eating maror, the requirement in those days was to end the evening specifically with the taste of the *korban Pesach*

in one's mouth; although eating maror is still a mitzvah today, the requirement is to end the evening with the taste of specifically the matzoh in one's mouth. Evidently, this requirement relates to the food item whose consumption constitutes the principle, or the most prominent, mitzvah of the evening; in the days of the Beis HaMikdash that food item was the meat of the *korban Pesach*, while today it is the matzoh.

### *לפי שהוציא את עצמו מן הכלל כפר בעיקר - Because he removed himself from the community he has rejected everything*

By implying that the laws of the Torah do not apply to him, the Wicked Son effectively removes himself from the Jewish community. The Rambam (*Hilchos Teshuvah* 3:11) asserts that such a person is considered among those heretics who have forfeited their share in *Olam HaBa*, despite the fact that he may not technically have violated any particular transgressions. The mere fact that one fails to identify with his fellow Jews is sufficient to exclude him from the destiny of the Jewish people. Perhaps for this reason, the Haggadah, as pointed out by the Vilna Gaon in his commentary, does not actually include the response found in the Torah (Shemos 12:27) to the question raised by this son, as he is not really interested in—or entitled to—an answer, since he is “out of the pale.” Indeed, in discussing the requirement upon a parent to relate the story of *yetzias Mitzrayim* to his children, the Rambam (*Hilchos Chametz U'Matzoh* 7:2) omits any reference to responding to the question assigned here to the Wicked Son, as no response need be offered to him. The words in the verse in the Torah, and those in the Haggadah as well, are not actually directed to this son at all; they are rather the words that are to be shared with the others who are assembled at the seder table, who consider themselves members of *Klal Yisrael*.

### *בשעה שיש מצה ומרור מונחים לפניך - At the time that Matza and Maror are placed in front of you*

The mitzvah of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim* is inexorably connected to the mitzvos of matzoh and maror and thus can be fulfilled only when the obligation to eat those items is in force, namely on the night of Pesach and no earlier. Taking this a step further, the Vilna Gaon (*Biur HaGra to Orach Chaim* 430:1, s.v. *vehaminhag*) suggests that the custom cited there by the Ramo to recite the major portion of the maggid section of the Haggadah on *Shabbos HaGadol* (the Shabbos before Pesach) is improper because the obligation to eat matzoh and maror is not in effect at that time. Perhaps, however, that custom is designed to give people a chance to review some of the intricacies of the Exodus story in advance of Pesach, the better to be able to delve into them at the seder. The “prohibition” to relate the story when there is no mitzvah of matzoh and maror applicable yet pertains to one who is reading it with the intent of performing the mitzvah of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim*, not to one who is merely preparing for that mitzvah.

The Gemara in *Pesachim* (36a) states that the description in the Torah of matzoh as “*lechem 'oni*” (Devarim 16:3) refers to the fact that it is bread (*lechem*) upon which we declare (*'onin*) many things; Rashi there (s.v. *she'onin*) explains that the “many things” include Hallel, which is of course part of the Pesach seder. The Rambam (*Sefer HaMitzvos, Mitzvas Asei* 157) and the *Sefer HaChinuch* (*Mitzvah* 21) both consider praising God, which is the essence of Hallel, to be a

fundamental part of the mitzvah of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim*. The problem is that by the time that Hallel is recited at the seder, there is no longer any matzoh and maror at the table, as the mitzvah to consume them has already been completed. If *sippur Yetzias Mitzrayim* can be fulfilled only in conjunction with matzoh and maror, how can Hallel be included as part of that mitzvah? Presumably then, Rashi's reference is only to the first two paragraphs of Hallel, as they are recited prior to the meal, when matzoh and maror are still on the table. Alternatively, the fact that one may not eat anything after consuming the last piece of matzoh and therefore still has the flavor of the matzoh in his mouth (see Rambam, *Hilchos Chametz U'Matzoh* 8:9) results in at least the flavor of matzoh being present when the second part of Hallel is recited.

### *מתחילה עובדי עבודה זרה היו אבותינו - In the beginning, our forefathers were idol worshippers*

According to Rav, cited by the Gemara in *Pesachim* (116a), the recitation of this phrase fulfills the requirement presented in the Mishnah there to begin the mitzvah of *sippur Yetzias Mitzrayim* by relating the degrading part of the story; it is indeed degrading to recall that our ancestors were idolaters. Shmuel, however, is of the opinion that the degrading part of the story is that we were once slaves to Pharaoh, as we declared earlier in the Haggadah, *Avadim Hayinu*. At issue here is whether the thrust of our enslavement was the spiritual side of it or the physical side of it. Rav emphasizes the spiritual degradation, as symbolized by our admission of the fact that we come from an idolatrous background, while Shmuel stresses the physical degradation, as seen in our acknowledgement that we were physically enslaved. In practice, of course, we have accepted both opinions, incorporating both our spiritual and our physical disgrace—and their ultimate reversals—into the Haggadah, and we indeed conclude the maggid section of the Haggadah with a *berachah* that includes praising God “*al geulaseinu*” — “for our redemption,” which is physical, and “*al pedus nafsheinu*” — “for the deliverance of our souls,” which is spiritual.

### *ואחרי כן יצאו ברכוש גדול—And afterwards, they will leave with great wealth*

Why was it necessary for the Jewish people to leave Egypt laden with gold, silver and other material wealth? The Gemara in *Berachos* (9a-b) explains, citing this very phrase, that God had promised Avraham Avinu that such would indeed be the case, and He obviously had to keep His word. Nevertheless, why was this point made such a basic part of the covenant with Avraham in the first place? The answer is that ownership of property is perhaps the most basic demonstration of a person's freedom. A slave owns nothing, as emphasized by the Gemara in *Pesachim* (88b), which teaches that whatever a slave possesses belongs to his master. When the Jewish people were slaves in Egypt they therefore had no material possessions belonging to them. When they would become free, therefore, they would immediately be given possessions, which made it clear that they were now no longer slaves. And the fact that these possessions would actually be given to them by the Egyptian people (see Shemos 3:21-22, 11:2-3 and 12:35-36) indicates that the Egyptians themselves at that point acknowledged their freedom.

## *והיא שעמדה - And this has stood by [us]*

*Yetzias Mitzrayim* is not to be understood as a one-time event, having occurred many centuries ago, and which we now merely commemorate or even re-experience by means of various symbolic observances. Rather, it is an ongoing drama because there is always a Pharaoh who wishes to annihilate our people for reasons that are often unclear, and we survive as a nation only because God watches over us and protects us. The continued existence of the Jewish people against overwhelming odds is testimony to the fact that *Yetzias Mitzrayim* takes place very much in the present. Before we begin our analysis of the Exodus story, we remind ourselves here of our destiny as a people.

## *וירד מצרימה: אנוס על פי הדיבור ... ויהי שם לגוי גדול went down to Egypt: Forced by the Divine decree ... and he became a great nation*

The Haggadah indicates that Yaakov went down to Egypt having been forced to do so by Divine decree. But didn't Yaakov himself decide to go there in order to see his beloved son Yosef, upon hearing that he was in fact still alive (see Bereishis 45:28)? Evidently, Yaakov's initial plan had been to go down to Egypt to see Yosef for a certain finite period of time, but then to return thereafter to Eretz Yisrael. The directive from God to go to Egypt and to stay there was the Divine decree that forced Yaakov's hand and is what is being referred to in this passage.

It was the will of God that the Jewish people, in order to emerge as the nation chosen to receive the Torah, must pay with great suffering for that special chosen status. Their development into the "goy gadol" —the great nation alluded to in the latter part of this verse—depended upon their first going through the harrowing experience of Egypt. Their national sensitivity to compassion and their aversion to cruelty (see *Yevamos* 79a regarding certain natural tendencies of the Jewish people) was to be molded by their own conditions in Egypt. Without the "vayeired Mitzraymah" (and he went down to Egypt) there could thus be no "goy gadol." The Jewish people are likened to a flower among the thorns (see *Shir HaShirim* 2:2); just as a flower that blossoms among thorns stands out in its beauty, the Jewish people, emerging from the difficult environment of Egypt, would achieve their unique chosenness, applicable eternally, in a similarly dramatic fashion. The people's eternal greatness resulted directly from their affliction in Egypt.

## *ורב: כמה שנאמר רבבה כצמח השדה And numerous: as it says, "numerous like the sprouts of the field"*

At first glance, it would appear that the text (from *Yechezkel* 16:7) quoted here to explain the word "VaRav," "and numerous," is inappropriate, since it speaks of growth and development more in the sense of beauty and physical appearance than in the sense of numbers. Evidently then, the Torah is in fact communicating here not that the Jewish people increased in population, as that point was actually already made by the verse's previous phrase (and "supported" in the Haggadah by the citation from *Shemos* 1:7). Rather, the Torah here means

to teach us that the people matured and grew in terms of stature and dignity. They were now ready to be redeemed and become the chosen people who would receive the Torah. All they were still missing were the mitzvos, as alluded to by the nakedness mentioned at the end of the verse in Yechezkel.

### *וירעו אותנו המצרים - And the Egyptians thought of us as evil*

This phrase is usually translated as meaning that the Egyptians mistreated us. Grammatically, however, if that were indeed the message, the verse should more properly have stated “*VaYarei’u lanu.*” As phrased here, the more correct translation would seem to be that the Egyptians thought of us as evil. They assigned bad attributes to us, depicted us as terrible people and attributed negative qualities to us. We thus read in the verse from Shemos (1:10) that Pharaoh accused the Jews of disloyalty, of plotting a revolution, of nefarious scheming. The Egyptians thus besmirched the reputation and good name that the Jews had previously enjoyed.

There was, of course, no logical basis for such accusations. The Jews had done nothing wrong; there is no indication anywhere that they were anything but model citizens in their adopted land, contributing to the country’s general development and well-being. But in seeking to isolate and ultimately persecute them, Pharaoh played on many people’s natural fear of those who are not just like them, portraying the Jews as “other” and “different,” as being aliens and outsiders and thus as a threat to be feared. In this way, Pharaoh was able to get widespread support from his Egyptian countrymen for his campaign to enslave the Jews. This of course is paradigmatic of classic anti-Semitism through the ages. Jews can live comfortably and productively in a land for many, many years, develop great and unswerving loyalty toward it, and work hard and even sacrifice on behalf of its welfare and success. But they are always in danger of an enemy who will arise, as has indeed happened on so many occasions in history, who will ignore their valuable contributions, paint them as dangerous and undermining outsiders looking for power and control, and create mistrust in and suspicion of them in the minds of those who consider themselves “native” citizens. This has been the experience of the Jew in exile for centuries.

### *ויאנחו בני ישראל מן העבודה - and the Jewish people cried out because of the work*

While slaves in Egypt, the Jewish people could think only of their physical suffering, and thus cried out to God only “*min ha’avodah*”—because of the (hard) work that they could no longer tolerate. They had hoped that perhaps with the death of the first Pharaoh that their situation would improve; when it did not, they could no longer bear their situation and thus cried out to God in agony. Though they were spiritually oppressed as well, they either failed to recognize it or did not deem that worthy of their prayers, overwhelmed as they were with their oppressive physical conditions. One of the tragedies experienced by someone like a slave who is downtrodden and abused is that he cannot even appreciate clearly the magnitude of his unfortunate overall condition, accepting it as the norm. All he can focus on his physical pain.

## וַיֵּדַע ... וַיֵּרָא - *And He saw ... and He knew*

God saw and comprehended much more about the Jewish people's situation than they themselves did. He thus heeded their prayers for relief from their physical disaster, but He did much more. Had He indeed responded only to their cries, the redemption would have been incomplete, focusing only upon the physical. Instead, however, He saw and comprehended that man is sometimes incapable of praying for what he himself needs because he is actually unaware of what he truly needs. In fact, people sometimes pray for things that in truth are unimportant or even detrimental to them. In Egypt, God saw the total damage done to the Jewish people and comprehended their spiritual deterioration; He then responded accordingly and brought about their complete redemption.

With this notion in mind, we can understand why, when we ask God in our daily prayers to hear our voices (*Shema Koleinu*), we implore Him to accept our prayers “*berachamim u'veratzon*”—with mercy, but with favor, meaning that He should fulfill only those requests of ours that are indeed favorable for us. We acknowledge that God alone knows what's really best for us and we ask Him to make the ultimate decision as to which of our prayers to realize and fulfill and which to reject. Only then will we be granted that which is truly in our best interests.

## בִּיד חֲזָקָה - *With a strong hand*

What exactly is meant by the strong hand that we are told God used in the process of redeeming the Jews from Egypt? On its simplest level, this description is of His great power, which was manifested when He performed the various miracles that were part of the Exodus. The reference may, however, be to something else entirely. The Gemara in *Sotah* (2a) describes the splitting of the Red Sea as a task that was difficult for God to accomplish (see also *Pesachim* 118a). What can this possibly mean? Is any task too difficult for Him? The answer is that when the Jews were crossing the Red Sea with the Egyptians in hot pursuit, and it became clear that God would miraculously lead the Jews to safety and then punish the Egyptians, an objection was raised: *Hallalu ovdei avoda zarah, vehallalu ovdei avodah zarah—these are idolaters and those are idolaters* (see *Midrash Tehillim* 15:5). At that time, there was no significant difference between many Jews and their Egyptian counterparts. Many Jews were not at all worthy of being redeemed. Why, then, should those people also be allowed to be the beneficiaries of this great miracle? Let them perish with the Egyptians!

And yet, God split the Red Sea and permitted *all* the Jews cross in safety nonetheless. To do so, He had to disregard His attribute of justice and perform this miracle for the Jews—for all of the Jews, even the undeserving—and that is what made the splitting of the Red Sea so “difficult” for Him. It was in that sense as well that at the earlier stages of the Exodus story, God likewise had to employ a strong hand, as He needed it, as it were, to enable Himself to overcome that which strict justice demanded. When we speak of God redeeming the Jews with a strong hand, then, we are perhaps referring to this idea that He had to “force” Himself to push aside His attribute of justice and take all the Jews out of Egypt.

## *ובמורא גדול: זו גילוי שכינה - And with a great fear: This is the revelation of the Divine*

By deriving that “*mora gadol*” refers to Divine revelation, we see that according to this analysis, the word “*mora*” is not related to the word *yirah*, meaning fear or awe, but rather to the word “*re’iyah*” meaning something that is seen. At the time of the Exodus from Egypt, God’s Presence was seen, His *Shechinah* revealed. Later in the Haggadah, we highlight this point when discussing matzoh and describing the fact that there was no time for the dough that they were preparing to rise because God suddenly revealed Himself to the people and redeemed them. The notion of *giluy Shechinah*, Divine revelation, generally more readily associated with the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai, was evidently a pivotal piece of the *yetzias Mitzrayim* story as well. It is for this reason that we find numerous times throughout the Torah’s description of the wonders performed in Egypt, including the ten plagues, that part of the desired goal was for Pharaoh and the Egyptians to come to the realization of and to acknowledge the existence and the power of God. In light of this approach, we can understand why the Divine revelation is included in the same verse with other examples of God’s miraculous manifestations associated specifically with the Exodus.

## *מכת בכורות - The plague of the first-born*

Why did God choose to punish the Egyptian first-borns in particular? In Egyptian society, as in many cultures, the first born has a special status in the family. It is he who can exercise control over other family members, who can set the tone for his siblings, and who can often lay down the law for the entire family. It is important to stress that although the Jews in Egypt were slaves to Pharaoh, they were really slaves to the entire Egyptian nation as well. It would not have been possible for even a despot like Pharaoh to have carried out his plan to enslave the Jewish nation without support from the leadership of the rank and file. Given the influence that the first-borns had in their respective families, they must have played an active role in assuring that the Egyptian people fully “bought into” Pharaoh’s plans. Since they were part of the enslavement process, they were singled out for special punishment.

## *רבי יוסי הגלילי אומר - Rabbi Yosi from the Galil said*

This passage, which presents a three-way dispute as to exactly how many plagues were visited upon the Egyptians in Egypt and how many at the Red Sea, does not appear at all in the Haggadah of the Rambam. The reason may relate to a comment made by the Rambam in *Hilchos Chametz U’Matzoh* (7:1), where he states that there is a *mitzvas aseï* (positive commandment) in the Torah to speak about the miracles and the wonders that were performed on behalf of our ancestors in Egypt on the night of the fifteenth of Nissan. This can be understood in one of two ways. Either it means that the mitzvah itself applies on the night of the fifteenth of Nissan, the last phrase modifying the first, or it means that the mitzvah is to speak about the miracles and wonders which were performed on (or leading up to) the fifteenth of Nissan, the last phrase modifying what immediately preceded it. If the latter is correct, then the mitzvah on Pesach night does not include speaking about what took place at the Red Sea, as

those events, important though they were, transpired after the fifteenth of Nissan. In consideration of this latter approach, the Rambam omits from the text of his Haggadah any discussion about things that did not happen on the night of the fifteenth of Nissan (including both this passage about the plagues at the Sea and the subsequent “Dayeinu” passage, which likewise brings up other events, such as the giving of the Torah).

## ובנה לנו את בית הבחירה - *and [He] built for us the Chosen House*

What is the significance of the name for the Beis HaMikdash used here, the “*Beis HaBechirah*,” “the Chosen House?” There are actually two independent aspects of the *Mikdash*, impacting different laws relating to it. In *Hilchos Beis HaBechirah* (1:1), the Rambam identifies the mitzvah to build a house dedicated to God, in which the sacrifices will be brought and which will be visited three times a year, based on the Scriptural verse that says “*v’asu li Mikdash*,” “and they shall make for Me a Mikdash” (Shemos 25:8). In *Hilchos Melachim* (1:1), however, the Rambam speaks of the same mitzvah and yet, after asserting that it goes into effect only after the entry of the Jewish people into Eretz Yisrael, the establishment of a sovereign government, and the eradication of the descendants of Amalek (see *Sanhedrin* 20b), he cites as its source a completely different verse (Devarim 12:5), which speaks of a place that God has chosen. The *Lechem Mishneh*, among others, takes note of and attempts to resolve this apparent contradiction. Perhaps, however, the answer lies in understanding that there are indeed these two aspects to the *Mikdash*.

One aspect relates to the *Mikdash* in terms of its unique functions such as, for example, to serve as the place where the sacrifices are brought. This has nothing to do with a particular chosen place, as evidenced by the fact that the Jewish people had such a place in the desert, namely the *Mishkan*, whose location changed regularly as the people travelled. Even in Eretz Yisrael, the *Mishkan* stood in a number of different locations. The requirement to build such a building is derived from the verse in Shemos. The other aspect, however, relates to the *Mikdash* in terms of its being built in a specially determined location that would have on-going sanctity, and after whose designation no other location could ever again be eligible to house it. This building could be only in Eretz Yisrael, and could be built only after the establishment of a government and the eradication of Amalek; the requirement to build this place is derived from the verse in Devarim. This is the *Beis HaBechirah*, the Chosen House, referred to here, and the location where it stood, unlike that of any of the places where the *Mishkan* stood, has sanctity and significance to this very day. (For further elaboration, see *Chidushei HaGra”m VeHaGri”d* to the Rambam’s *Hilchos Beis HaBechirah* 6:14.)

## פסח מצה ומרור - *Pesach, matzoh and maror*

The three mitzvos referred to here in Rabban Gamliel’s teaching (quoted from the Mishnah in *Pesachim* 116a-b) appear to be presented out of order. After all, given that the maror symbolizes the bitterness of the slavery, that should be mentioned first, followed by the Pesach, which reminds us of the fact that God passed over the Jewish homes when punishing the Egyptians,

and finally the matzoh, which calls our attention to the fact that there was no time for the people's dough to rise when they finally left Egypt in great haste. It must be, then, that the order here relates not to the chronology of the events represented by these food items, but to the significance of each particular item in terms of halachah. Pesach is first because it is the most important food item; in the days of the Beis HaMikdash, when there was a *korban Pesach*, the matzoh and the maror were eaten simply as an adjunct to the meat of that *korban*, as stated in Shemos 12:8. Matzoh is second because there does exist an independent Biblical mitzvah to eat it even in the absence of the *korban Pesach* (see Shemos 12:18); that mitzvah is in effect even today. Maror is last because today, the obligation to eat maror exists only on a Rabbinic level, as maror is mentioned in the Torah solely in conjunction with the *korban Pesach* which we obviously no longer have (see *Pesachim* 120a).

### בכל דור ודור ... לפיכך אנחנו חייבים להודות *In every generation ... therefore we must thank*

The phrase “*bechol dor vador...*,” found in the Mishnah in *Pesachim* (116b), seems to be simply the formulation of a halachic requirement to view oneself as if one has personally experienced the Exodus from Egypt (see Rambam, *Hilchos Chametz U'Matzoh* 7:6). Why, then, is it recited as part of the text of the Haggadah? The answer is that it serves as the prelude, indeed as the basis, for what follows, namely our acknowledgement and fulfillment of the obligation to offer song and praise to God on this joyous occasion. Precisely because we view ourselves as having gone through the Exodus personally, this obligation is indeed our very own. It is not the recollection of something done in times gone by; it is our song, our praise, our Hallel, that is about to be offered. It may indeed be suggested that the narrative of the seder is in fact called “Haggadah” because it is a form of “*haggadas eidus*” – of testimony in which we attest to events that we ourselves, as it were, have personally witnessed. These events impact us today the same way they influenced our ancestors so many years ago.

# Why We Shouldn't Rush the Seder Meal

An analysis of the role of physical actions  
in the pursuit of spiritual goals

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A perennial debate invariably ensues every year at my family seder. The scholarly but insensitive members protract *maggid*, and then insist on abbreviating *shulchan orech* in order to complete the *afikomen* by midnight. Other family members, hungry and bored, having endured the drawn-out *divrai Torah*, resent the rushed *seudah* (meal), especially after so much effort was expended to prepare a delectable meal.

One might have expected the Rav to favor those who focus on *maggid*. After all, the Rav felt that the seder was a night of Torah study. However, in a fascinating essay,<sup>1</sup> Rabbi Soloveitchik argues that the former group errs, not just because of their egregious insensitivity to the hard work and legitimate feelings of the others, but in their basic presumption that the meal is not a crucial part of the seder experience, as opposed to merely a concession to the spiritually insensitive. Indeed, the *seudah* plays a crucial role in transforming the evening and reflects a central tenet of Jewish belief—the positive value of the physical amidst the spiritual. “In the eyes of the *halakhah*, the meal is not something incidental, meaningless, and completely mechanical ... *halakhah* has developed an etiquette as well as ethic of *seudah*” (*Festival of Freedom*, 4). How?

The Rav posited that to some degree the debate at my family seder reflects a longstanding disagreement concerning the role of physical actions in the pursuit of spiritual goals. Before we consider the Rav's considerable contribution to this question, we must take a step back and consider the presentation of the Rishonim.

In the *Guide* 3:26–49, Maimonides suggests reasons for the Torah's mitzvot, offering rationales even for enigmatic commandments (*chukkim*) such as *shatnez* (the prohibition against wearing

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<sup>1</sup> Printed in *Festival of Freedom* entitled “An Exalted Evening: The Seder Night” Edited by Joel B. Wolowelsky and Reuven Ziegler. (Jersey City: Ktav, 2006)

garments made of wool and linen combined) and the red heifer. However, when it comes to the *lechem ha-pannim* (showbread), Rambam admits ignorance:

*The use of the altar for incense and the altar for burnt-offering and their vessels is obvious; but I do not know the object of the table with the bread upon it continually, and up to this day I have not been able to assign any reason to this commandment.*

**Guide for the Perplexed, 3:45**

והצורך למזבח הקטורת ומזבח העולה וכליהם מבואר, אבל השלחן והיות עליו הלחם תמיד לא אדע בו סבה, ואיני יודע לאיזה דבר איחס אותו עד היום.  
ספר מורה הנבוכים חלק ג פרק מה

One wonders what accounts for the showbread’s mysteriousness?<sup>2</sup> R. Moshe Stav once showed me that a clue can be found in the Shabbat zemer “*Ki Eshm'rah Shabbat*,” where R. Avraham ibn Ezra writes:

*Engraved in God’s law is a chok [decree] for His priest. To prepare showbread before Him. Therefore, fasting on Shabbat is prohibited, as explained by His sages. Except for on Yom Kippur.*

רָשָׁם בְּדַת הַקֵּל חֵק אֶל סִגְנִיו. בּו  
לְעֶרְךָ לְחֵם פְּנִים לְפָנָיו. עַל כֵּן  
לְהִתְעַנּוֹת בּו עַל פִּי נְבוּנָיו. אֲסוּר לְבַד  
מִיּוֹם כְּפֹר עֹנֵי:

In this poem, ibn Ezra alludes to the mysteriousness of the showbread, calling it a *chok*. Then he writes that the law of the showbread serves as the reason for the prohibition against fasting on Shabbat. How?

To answer these questions we must recollect a highly unusual element of the showbread’s service. Generally, when it comes to Temple service, the services done inside, and therefore in close proximity to the Holy of Holies, were not eaten. Thus, the inner alter was used only for incense. Any sacrifice whose blood was brought inside was not eaten. For example, a regular *chatat* (sin offering) was consumed by *kohanim*, while the *chatat penimi* (inner sin offering),<sup>3</sup> which was brought inside, was entirely burnt. Rambam understood that this stems from the sacrifice’s proximity to the Divine Presence (see *Guide* 3:46). Thus, the holiness of the *korban*, as reflected by its being brought inside, precludes the possibility of its being eaten. Put differently, physical ingestion contradicts holiness, such that the holiest sacrifices may not be consumed. If this is the case, Rambam is left with a mystery: the showbreads were brought inside, reflecting intense holiness, and yet were entirely consumed.<sup>4</sup> This apparent inconsistency with the law of sacrifices clarifies the reason for Rambam’s admission that he cannot understand the reason for the showbread.<sup>5</sup>

Ibn Ezra, aware of the enigma, concludes that the secret of the showbread is that physical activities, such as eating, do not contradict holiness. On the contrary, activities such as eating can elevate us spiritually in a manner that purely spiritual activities cannot. The *lechem hapanim* demonstrate this, and therefore teach us that we may not fast on Shabbat, the holiest day of the week.

Indeed, this debate relates to a fundamental question concerning physical actions and spiritual achievements. Maharal writes:

<sup>2</sup> Indeed, Ramban, Shemot 25:24 as well as *Chinukh* 97 offer reasons for the law.

<sup>3</sup> פר העלם דבר של ציבור, פר הכהן המשיח, ופר ושעיר של יום הכיפורים.

<sup>4</sup> Only the cups of *levona* were offered upon the altar.

<sup>5</sup> This may also relate to the midrashic interpretation (see *Midrash Rabba*, Vayikra 32:3) that the mitzva of the showbread caused the blasphemer to blaspheme.

*The philosophers that we mentioned earlier give recognition and glory exclusively to the intellect, believing that through intellectual achievements a person can achieve eternity [olam haba].<sup>6</sup> They made physical acts [mitzvot] like a ladder to reach intellectual achievements. And from this ladder they [the philosophers] fell.*

**Tiferet Yisrael 9**

הפילוסופים אשר זכרנו למעלה, יתנו שם ותפארת אל השכל, ועל ידי המושכלות יקנה האדם הנצחיות, ויעשו המעשים הישרים והטובים כמו תכונה וסולם, אשר יגיע בהן אל המושכלות. ומזה הסולם נפלו.

**ספר תפארת ישראל פרק ט**

According to Maharal, the philosophers erred when they elevated the intellect upon a pedestal, claiming that physical activities ran counter to spiritual achievements.<sup>7</sup> Their focus on the intellect ignores the fact that we, as humans, are physical as well as spiritual creatures.<sup>8</sup> The mitzvot, many of which involve physical activities alongside intellectual involvement, elevate the human and allow him to achieve his full potential.

Likewise, the author of *Iggeret Ha-Kodesh* blames Aristotle’s pernicious influence upon Rambam for Rambam’s negative attitude toward marital relationships.<sup>9</sup>

This debate likely relates to the dispute concerning the physical body in *Olam Haba* (the World to Come). The Talmud states:

*In Olam Haba there is no eating, drinking, procreation, business, jealousy, hatred, or competition. Rather, the righteous sit with their crowns on their heads and bask in the radiance of the divine presence.*

**Berachot 17a**

העולם הבא אין בו לא אכילה ולא שתיה ולא פריה ורביה ולא משא ומתן ולא קנאה ולא שנאה ולא תחרות, אלא צדיקים יושבין ועטרותיהם בראשיהם ונהנים מזיו השכינה תלמוד בבלי מסכת ברכות דף יז.

According to Rambam, *Olam Haba* is an entirely spiritual existence. He derives this from the above passage; after all, if there is no eating or drinking, why would there be a body?

<sup>6</sup> See Addendum for an elaboration on this point.

<sup>7</sup> Maharal’s critique of philosophers does not imply a lack of veneration for Rambam and respect for the *Guide*. Maharal calls Rambam “the great rabbi—who was filled like the sea with wisdom in all natural, theological, and scholastic disciplines.” (*Be’er ha-Golah, Be’er 4, p. 49*)

<sup>8</sup> Maharal argues that that the philosophic worldview is highly elitist:

לפי דבריהם לא תהיה רק לאחד או לשנים בדור, וכי בשביל אלו העולם נמצא.

*According to the philosophers [who value only abstract cognitive activity] there could only be one or two people in a generation who could achieve greatness. Could we imagine that for these [one or two philosophers] the world was created?*

<sup>9</sup> *Iggeret Ha-Kodesh* is a small work dealing with marriage and is attributed to Ramban, but the source of its attribution to Ramban is unclear. R. Chaim Dov Chavel included it in the second volume of his *Collected Writings of the Ramban* (Mosad HaRav Kook, Jerusalem 5724 1964), where he discusses the authorship of this important work.

דע כי חבור זה הוא ענין קדוש ונקי כשיהיה הדבר כפי מה שראוי ובזמן הראוי ובכוונה הנכונה. ואל יחשוב אדם כי בחבור הראוי יש גנאי וכיעור ח"ו. שהחבור הראוי נקרא ידיעה, ולא לחנם נקרא כך כאמור (ש"א א) וידע אלקנה את חנה אשתו. וזהו סוד טפת הזרע כשהיא נמשכת ממקום הקדושה ובטהרה נמשכת הדעה [והחכמה] והבינה והוא המוח. ודע שאלו לא היה בדבר קדושה גדולה לא היו קוראין אל החבור ידיעה. [ואין הדבר כאשר חשב הרב המורה ז"ל במורה הנבוכים בהיותו משבח לארסטו"ו על מה שאמר כי חוש המשוש הוא חרפה לנו. חלילה, אין הדבר כמו שאמר היוני, לפי שדעתו היוני יש שמץ מינות שאינו מורגש, שאלו היה מאמין שהעולם מחודש בכוונה לא היה אומר כך זה היוני הבליעל. אבל כל בעלי התורה מאמינים שהשם] (והשי"ת) ברא את הכל כפי מה שגזרה חכמתו, ולא ברא דבר שיהיה גנאי או כיעור, שאם יאמר שהחבור הוא דבר של גנאי, הנה כלי המשגל הם כלי הגנות, והרי השי"ת בראם במאמרו דכתיב (דברים לב) הוא עשך ויכוננך ואז"ל במסכת חולין (נו ב) שברא הקב"ה כונניות באדם. ובמדרש קהלת (ב, יב) אמרו אשר כבר עשוהו מלמד שהוא ובית דינו נמנו על כל אבר ואבר והושיבוהו על כנו. ואם כלי המשגל גנאי, היאך ברא השי"ת דבר שיש בו משום חסרון או גנות חלילה, אלא פעולותיו של הקב"ה תמימות שנאמר (שם לב) הצור תמים פעלו. [ואמר וירא אלקים את כל אשר עשה והנה טוב מאד].

Rather, the pleasures of *Olam Haba* are entirely spiritual and beyond our ability to relate to.

*Life in the World To Come does not involve a body or an inner body. The World To Come is inhabited by souls of the righteous people without their bodies, like the ministering angels. Since they do not have any bodies they don't need to eat or drink, nor do they need to do any of the things that men's bodies in this world need, and nor do they do any of the things that people in this world do with their bodies, such as standing, sitting, sleeping, dying, feeling pain, acting frivolously, et cetera. The first Sages said that in the World To Come there is no eating, drinking or coition, but that the righteous people sit with their crowns on their heads and benefit from the radiance of the Divine Presence. This shows that because there is no eating or drinking there is no [physical] body. When they said that the righteous people sit they meant it figuratively, i.e. the righteous people are there, without laboring or pains. Similarly, when they said that the righteous people have crowns on their heads they were referring to the knowledge because of which they inherited a place in the World To Come. This knowledge is always with them, as is their crown, as Solomon said, "...with the crown with which his mother crowned him." It is also written, "...and everlasting joy shall be upon their head" —this is not physical pleasure that they will receive, but the crown of the Sages, i.e. knowledge. When they said that they will benefit from the radiance of the Divine Presence they meant that they will know and understand the existence of God in a manner that they couldn't while in their gloomy and paltry bodies.*

### **Hilchot Teshuvah 8:2**

העולם הבא אין בו גוף וגויה אלא נפשות הצדיקים בלבד בלא גוף כמלאכי השרת, הואיל ואין בו גויות אין בו לא אכילה ולא שתייה ולא דבר מכל הדברים שגופות בני אדם צריכין להן בעולם הזה, ולא יארע דבר בו מן הדברים שמארעין לגופות בעולם הזה, כגון ישיבה ועמידה ושינה ומיתה ועצב ושחוק וכיוצא בהן, כך אמרו חכמים הראשונים העולם הבא אין בו לא אכילה ולא שתייה ולא תשמיש אלא צדיקים יושבים ועטרותיהם בראשיהן ונהנין מזיו השכינה, הרי נתברר לך שאין שם גוף לפי שאין שם אכילה ושתייה, וזה שאמרו צדיקים יושבין דרך חידה אמרו, כלומר הצדיקים מצויין שם בלא עמל ובלא יגיעה, וכן זה שאמרו עטרותיהן בראשיהן כלומר דעת שידעו שבגללה זכו לחיי העולם הבא מצויה עמהן והיא העטרה שלהן כענין שאמר שלמה בעטרה שעטרה לו אמו, והרי הוא אומר ושמחת עולם על ראשם ואין השמחה גוף כדי שתנוח על הראש כך עטרה שאמרו חכמים כאן היא הידיעה, ומהו זה שאמרו נהנין מזיו שכינה שידועים ומשיגין מאמתת הקב"ה מה שאינם יודעים והם בגוף האפל השפל.

**רמב"ם הלכות תשובה ח:ב**

Most Rishonim, among them Ramban in *Sha'ar Ha-Gemul*, disagree and maintain that *Olam Haba* is a future existence that begins with the resurrection of the physical body.<sup>10</sup> Explaining the need for the physical body in *Olam Haba* lies beyond the scope of this essay, but presumably this debate is yet another manifestation of the discussion concerning the value of the physical body in the spiritual realm.

The Rav frequently inveighed against the dangers of an entirely intellectual or spiritual religion. In *U-vikkashtem Mi-sham* he writes: "Confining religious experience and existence to a purely spiritual framework deprives religion of its splendor and influence" (*U-vikkashtem Mi-sham*, 162).<sup>11</sup>

With this the Rav notes that halakha deals with man as he is—its realistic approach allows for its tangible results. He continues:

<sup>10</sup> **תורת האדם שער הגמול:** עכשיו ביארנו כוננתנו בשכרי המצות ועונשן, ונחזור בקצרה כי שכר הנפשות וקיומם בעולם הנשמות נקרא לרבנותינו גן עדן, ופעמים קורין אותו עליה וישיבה של מעלה, ואחרי כן יבאו ימי המשיח והוא מכלל העולם הזה, ובסופן יהא יום הדין ותחיית המתים שהוא השכר הכולל הגוף והנפש והוא העיקר הגדול שהוא תקות כל מקוה להקב"ה, והוא העולם הבא שבו ישוב הגוף כמו נפש, והנפש תדבק בדעת עליון כהדבקה בגן עדן עולם הנשמות, ותתעלה בהשגה גדולה ממנה ויהיה קיום הכל לעדי עד ולנצח נצחים.

<sup>11</sup> Translation by R. Ronnie Ziegler.

*Religiosity lacking an objective-revelatory foundation, which obligates one in certain actions, cannot conquer the animal in man. Even if it assumes a guise of love of God and man, the subjective faith of which Paul of Tarsus spoke ... cannot endure if it does not contain explicit commands to perform good deeds and to fulfill specific mitzvot. ... The Holocaust can serve as proof of this. All those who spoke of love stood by silently and did not protest. Many of them even participated in the extermination of millions of human beings (U-vikkashtem Mi-sham, 163).<sup>12</sup>*

With this powerful quote in mind we can return to the Rav's presentation of the *seudah*:

*At the root of the halakhic conception of the seudah lies a problem which assailed the minds of our sages. Man responds to the biological pressure to take nourishment; he has no choice in the matter ... So acts the brute, the beast in the field ... There is nothing human or meaningful about the act of consuming food ... Judaism maintains the universality of the process does not mean that man and animal must engage in an identical performance. (Festival of Freedom, 4)*

R. Soloveitchik then elaborates upon four differences between human and animal eating as a means of describing how the human being can convert this animalistic act into a uniquely human endeavor. Remarkably, eating can be transformed from a means of survival to an act of communion with God. The Rav proves the magnificent spiritual quality of eating from the numerous verses which describe “eating **before** God”; for example:

*and there ye shall eat before the LORD your God, and ye shall rejoice in all that ye put your hand unto, ye and your households, wherein the LORD thy God hath blessed thee.*

**Devarim 12:7**

וְאָכַלְתֶּם-וְשָׂם, לִפְנֵי ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם,  
וְשִׂמְחֶתֶם בְּכֹל מַשְׁלַח יְדְכֶם, אֲתֶם  
וּבְתֵיכֶם--אֲשֶׁר בְּרַכָּה, יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיךָ.  
דְּבָרִים יב:ז

The Rav contrasts the Torah's view with that of the Greeks, who ridiculed the notion of connecting to God through such an unrefined carnal activity, and who maintained that only through intellectual cognition can a human connect to the Divine.

Thus, the *seuder*, which celebrates our formation as a people, necessarily involves a *seudah*—because the *seudah* is the:

*... means by which Judaism distinguishes between eating as a beastly-brutish function and as a human spontaneous performance... Judaism tries to convert the meal into a covenantal feast, a covenantal event. (Festival of Freedom, 27)*

<sup>12</sup> Another element of this realistic approach is that which perpetually guides the ever-changing human. This notion is powerfully expressed in Halakhic Man:

*The fundamental tendency of the Halakha is to translate the qualitative features of religious subjectivity—the content of religious man's consciousness, which surges and swells like the waves of the sea, then pounds against the shores of reality, there to shatter and break—into firm and well-established quantities, 'like nails well fastened' (Kohelet 12:11), that no storm can uproot from their place. (57)*

*The Halakha wishes to objectify religiosity not only through introducing the external act and the psychophysical deed into the world of religion but also through the structuring and ordering of the inner correlative in the realm of man's spirit. The Halakha sets down statutes and erects markers that serve as a dam against the surging, subjective current coursing through the universal homo religiosus, which, from time to time, in its raging turbulence sweeps away his entire being to obscure and inchoate realms. (59)*

How is the meal covenantal? Through his eating, the human being can reaffirm his place in a covenantal community that transcends the present and connects the Jew with his past and future. At the *seder* meal, we see our *seudah* in the historical context of the Jewish people throughout the ages and renew our commitment to the historical covenant—hence the focus on the family on this night. Moreover, the halakhic obligation to join together into a *chaburah* (group) ensures that the seder will be an act of *chesed*, reminding all involved of their shared historical tradition with the covenant at its center.

This remarkable innovation began at the dawn of our history—on the night of redemption:

*Did the liberated slaves set fire to the exclusive neighborhood of their former overlords? Did the teenagers smash at least the windowpanes of the offices where their taskmasters used to assemble and plan sadistic edicts? Nothing of the sort. Not one person was hurt, not one house destroyed. The liberated slaves had the courage to withdraw, to defy the natural call of the blood. What did the Jews do in the hour of freedom? They were locked up in their houses, eating the paschal lamb and reciting the Hallel. (Festival of Freedom, 33)*

Thus, in this essay, originally entitled “The Redemption of Eating,” we discover that those who wish to shortchange *shulchan orech* deny a central element of our redemption. Surely the *divrai Torah* of *maggid* are important, but they alone do not express the nature of our redemption and uniqueness. For the transformative element of the seder to be fully realized, we must redeem the meal—and with this we will become truly human.

*Translations of scripture are from the JPS 1917 edition. Translations of Mishna Torah are from Immanuel O'Levy [www.panix.com/~jjbaker/rambam.html](http://www.panix.com/~jjbaker/rambam.html). All translations from the Guide for the Perplexed are from the Friedländer tr. [1904], at [sacred-texts.com](http://sacred-texts.com).*

## Addendum: Rambam's Association of Olam Haba and Intellectual Acquisitions

*Life in the World To Come does not involve a body or an inner body. The World To Come is inhabited by souls of the righteous people without their bodies, like the ministering angels. Since they do not have any bodies they don't need to eat or drink, nor do they need to do any of the things that men's bodies in this world need, and nor do they do any of the things that people in this world do with their bodies, such as standing, sitting, sleeping, dying, feeling pain, acting frivolously, et cetera. The first Sages said that in the World To Come there is no eating, drinking or coition, but that the righteous people sit with their crowns on their heads and benefit from the radiance of the Divine Presence. This shows that because there is no eating or drinking there is no [physical] body. When they said that the righteous people sit they meant it figuratively, i.e. the righteous people are there, without laboring or pains.*

העולם הבא אין בו גוף וגויה אלא נפשות הצדיקים בלבד בלא גוף כמלאכי השרת, הואיל ואין בו גויות אין בו לא אכילה ולא שתייה ולא דבר מכל הדברים שגופות בני אדם צריכין להן בעולם הזה, ולא יארע דבר בו מן הדברים שמארעין לגופות בעולם הזה, כגון ישיבה ועמידה ושינה ומיתה ועצב ושחוק וכיוצא בהן, כך אמרו חכמים הראשונים העולם הבא אין בו לא אכילה ולא שתייה ולא תשמיש אלא צדיקים יושבים ועטרותיהם בראשיהן ונהנין מזיו השכינה, הרי נתברר לך שאין שם גוף לפי שאין שם אכילה ושתייה, וזה שאמרו צדיקים יושבין דרך חידה אמרו, כלומר הצדיקים מצויין שם בלא עמל ובלא יגיעה, וכן זה שאמרו

Similarly, when they said that the righteous people have crowns on their heads they were referring to the knowledge because of which they inherited a place in the World To Come. This knowledge is always with them, as is their crown, as Solomon said, "...with the crown with which his mother crowned him." It is also written, "and everlasting joy shall be upon their head"—this is not physical pleasure that they will receive, but the crown of the Sages, i.e. knowledge. When they said that they will benefit from the radiance of the Divine Presence they meant that they will know and understand the existence of God in a manner that they couldn't while in their gloomy and paltry bodies.

Whenever the word "soul" is mentioned, it does not mean the soul-body combination but the actual soul itself, which is the understanding given by the Creator and which causes other understandings and actions. This is the form which was explained in the fourth chapter of the Laws of The Basic Principles of The Torah. It is called "soul" with respect to this matter. This life, which does not involve death, for the reason that death is an occurrence of the body, or a body is called the bond of life, as it is written, "Yet the soul of my lord shall be bound with the bond of life"—this is the reward above which there is no other rewards, and the goodness above which there is no other goodness, and with which all the Prophets were granted.

### Hilchot Teshuvah 8:2-3

As Rambam explains in the Guide 3:54, this is because there is a true attachment between a person's intellectual achievements and their soul:

*The ancient and the modern philosophers have shown that man can acquire four kinds of perfection. The first kind, the lowest, in the acquisition of which people spend their days, is perfection as regards property ... The second kind is more closely related to man's body than the first. It includes the perfection of the shape, constitution, and form of man's body ... The third kind of perfection is more closely connected with man himself than the second perfection. It includes moral perfection, the highest degree of excellency in man's character. Most of the precepts aim at producing this perfection; but even this kind is only a preparation for another perfection, and is not sought for its own sake. ... **The fourth kind of perfection is the true perfection of man: the possession of the highest intellectual faculties: the possession of such notions which lead to true metaphysical opinions as regards God. With this perfection man has obtained his final object; it gives him true human perfection; it remains to him alone; it gives him immortality, and on its account he is called man...***

Rambam proves this order of achievement from Jeremiah:

עטרותיהן בראשיהן כלומר דעת  
שידעו שבגללה זכו לחיי העולם הבא  
מצויה עמהן והיא העטרה שלהן כענין  
שאמר שלמה בעטרה שעטרה לו אמו,  
והרי הוא אומר ושמחת עולם על ראשם  
ואין השמחה גוף כדי שתנוח על הראש  
כך עטרה שאמרו חכמים כאן היא  
הידיעה, ומהו זהו שאמרו נהנין מזיו  
שכינה שיודעים ומשיגין מאמתת  
הקב"ה מה שאינם יודעים והם בגוף  
האפל השפל.  
כל נפש האמורה בענין זה אינה הנשמה  
הצריכה לגוף אלא צורת הנפש שהיא  
הדעה שהשיגה מהבורא כפי כחה  
והשיגה הדעות הנפרדות ושאר  
המעשים והיא הצורה שביארנו ענינה  
בפרק רביעי מהלכות יסודי התורה  
היא הנקראת נפש בענין זה, חיים אלו  
לפי שאין עמהם מות שאין המות אלא  
ממאורעות הגוף ואין שם גוף נקראו  
צורר החיים שנאמר והיתה נפש אדוני  
צורה בצורר החיים, וזהו השכר שאין  
שכר למעלה ממנו והטובה שאין אחריה  
טובה והיא שהתאוו לה כל הנביאים.  
הלכות תשובה ה:ב-ג

Thus saith the LORD: Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches; But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth, and knoweth Me.

**Jeremiah 9:22-23**

כה אָמַר ה' אֵל יִתְהַלֵּל חָכְם בְּחַכְמָתוֹ וְאֵל יִתְהַלֵּל הַגִּבּוֹר בְּגִבּוֹרָתוֹ אֵל יִתְהַלֵּל עֲשִׂיר בְּעֲשָׂרוֹ: (כג) כִּי אִם בְּזֹאת יִתְהַלֵּל הַמֵּתְהַלֵּל הַשֶּׁפֶל וְיָדַע אוֹתִי יִרְמִיָּהוּ ט:כב-כג

Nevertheless, in this very chapter, Rambam notes the verse's conclusion indicates that intellectual apprehension alone is not the true end:

But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth, and knoweth Me, because I am the LORD who exercises mercy, justice, and righteousness, in the earth; for in these things I delight, saith the LORD.

**Jeremiah 9:23**

כִּי אִם בְּזֹאת יִתְהַלֵּל הַמֵּתְהַלֵּל הַשֶּׁפֶל וְיָדַע אוֹתִי כִּי אֲנִי ה' עוֹשֵׂה חֶסֶד מִשְׁפָּט וּבְדִקָּה בְּאֶרֶץ כִּי בְּאֵלֶּה חַפְצָתִי נְאֻם ה': יִרְמִיָּהוּ ט:כג

Ultimately, Rambam readily concedes that kindness and justice are God's truest desire. Thus, in numerous places Rambam stresses the importance of mitzvot, and not merely wisdom, in achieving immortality. Thus, in his commentary to *Makkot* 3:17 he writes that performing one mitzva perfectly guarantees olam haba. Likewise, in the ninth chapter of *Hilchot Teshuva* he repeatedly stresses the role of mitzvot alongside wisdom:

The Holy One, Blessed Be He, gave us this Torah, which is a support of life, and anybody who does what is written in it and knows that everything contained in it is complete and correct, will merit life in the World To Come. He will merit [a portion] in proportion to the magnitude of his actions and to the extent of his knowledge... If one does not acquire wisdom and if one has no meritorious deeds, then with what will one merit life in the World To Come?! For it is written, "...and there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in Sheol." If one ignores God and transgresses by means of food, feasting, adultery or similar activities, then one will bring upon oneself all these curses and remove all the blessings, so that one's days will end in panic and fear and one will not have the opportunities or perfect body to perform mitzvot, and one will not merit life in the World To Come, and then one will have lost out on two worlds, for when someone is troubled in this world by illness, plague or hunger he does not busy himself with learning or mitzvot, with which life in the World To Come is merited.

**Hilchot Teshuvah 9**

הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא נָתַן לָנוּ תּוֹרָה זוֹ, עֵץ חַיִּים, וְכָל הָעוֹשֶׂה כָּל הַכְּתוּב בָּהּ, וְיִוְדְעוּ דַעַת גְּמוּרָה נְכוֹנָה--זוֹכָה בָּהּ לַחַיִּי הָעוֹלָם הַבָּא; וְלִפִּי גִדְל מַעֲשָׂיו וְגִדְל חַכְמָתוֹ, הוּא זוֹכָה... נִמְצָא פְרוּשׁ כָּל אוֹתָן הַבְּרָכוֹת וְהַקְּלָלוֹת, עַל דֶּרֶךְ זוֹ: כְּלוּמַר אִם עֲבַדְתֶּם אֶת ה' בְּשִׂמְחָה, וּשְׂמַרְתֶּם דְּרָכָיו--מִשְׁפִּיעַ לָכֶם הַבְּרָכוֹת הָאֵלֶּה וּמִרְחִיק הַקְּלָלוֹת, עַד שֶׁתִּהְיוּ פְנוּיִים לְהִתְחַבֵּם בְּתוֹרָה וְלַעֲסֹק בָּהּ, כְּדִי שֶׁתִּזְכּוּ לַחַיִּי הָעוֹלָם הַבָּא, וְיִיטֵב לָהּ לְעוֹלָם שֶׁכֵּלּוּ טוֹב וְתִאֲרִיךְ יָמִים לְעוֹלָם שֶׁכֵּלּוּ אָרוּךְ. וְנִמְצָאֲתָם זוֹכִין לְשְׁנֵי הָעוֹלָמוֹת, לַחַיִּים טוֹבִים בְּעוֹלָם הַנְּהַ הַמְּבִיאִין לַחַיִּי הָעוֹלָם הַבָּא: שְׂאֵם לֹא יִקְנֶה הַנְּהַ חַכְמָה וּמַעֲשָׂים טוֹבִים--אֵין לוֹ כְּמָה יִזְכָּה, שֶׁנֶּאֱמָר "כִּי אֵין מַעֲשֶׂה וְחֶשְׁבוֹן, וְיָדַעַת וְחַכְמָה, בְּשִׂאוֹל... " (קוהלת ט, י). הַל' תְּשׁוּבָה פֶּרֶק ט'

Thus, Rambam's view on this topic is complex, and a full analysis is beyond the scope of this essay. However, clearly he is not adopting the position that the above passage in Maharal is attributing to philosophers.

# Bringing the Classroom to the Seder Table

From The Legacy Heritage Teacher Training Fellowship  
a project of Yeshiva University's Institute for University-School Partnership

## On Moshe Rabbeinu – Moshe, Our Teacher

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Moshe is famously absent from the Haggada. He is never directly mentioned and plays no role, other than one passing reference in a proof text regarding *kriyat yam suf* (the splitting of the Sea): "And Israel saw the great hand that Hashem had done in Egypt, and the people were in awe of Hashem, and they had faith in Hashem and in Moshe, His servant." (Shemot 14:31) The Vilna Gaon, among others, explained that Moshe is largely absent so as not to obscure the role of Hashem. It might seem like Moshe, rather than Hashem Himself, orchestrated the Exodus, or that Hashem could not have done it without Moshe His servant. So on the night of the seder, Moshe appropriately takes a back seat. Others have argued that Moshe's absence has to do with his humility and desire to not be the focus of the story. A third answer is that the seder night focuses on the spiritual liberation of the Jewish people, not their physical liberation. Since Moshe's primary responsibility was their physical exodus, his role is thus minimized. Each of these answers falls short in various ways. If there was such concern for Moshe's role being blown out of proportion, we might expect the book of Exodus to similarly minimize Moshe's role, but it does not. If Moshe truly requested that his name be taken out of the Haggada, where is that request to be found and how would all the authors and editors of our Haggada have known to honor it? It also seems demonstrably true that the Haggada is concerned with both physical and spiritual liberation and that Moshe's role could not have been limited to just the physical.

Despite Moshe's absence from the Haggada, when we think and learn about *yetziat Mitzrayim* it is impossible to conceive of the story without Moshe. As Hashem's servant, Moshe was instrumental in many ways and fulfilled many roles. Whether through his negotiations with Par'o, his implementation of the miracles and plagues, or his consistent instruction to the Jewish people, Moshe's participation is a constant throughout the exodus story and, indeed, for a full four out of the five books of the Torah. His role throughout Jewish history similarly looms large in law, literature, and lore.

Because his presence is so important and yet still ambiguous, Rav Soloveitchik asked a fundamental question: “What, then, is Moses’ role in Jewish History?” If we had to narrow it down, how should we understand Moshe’s role?

The Rav answered, “He was not immortalized as a political hero or a strategist. Moses was immortalized as a teacher. We do not say *Moshe Go’aleinu* or *Moshe Moshi’enu*, or *Moshe Meshi’henu*; we say *Moshe Rabbeinu*.”

Moshe did many great things—as a national leader, a prophet, and a judge (to name a few!), but he is immortalized as a teacher. I like to think that this is, at least in part, to show us the great importance of teachers and the position of honor that teachers should hold. As a society, we too often get the message that banking, law, and medicine are more prestigious fields than education. However, those who teach know that a teacher must be like a banker—tracking data, noting inputs and outputs, examining the growth of “investments,” and assessing potential. A teacher must be like a lawyer—acting in the interest of our “clients,” testing for logic, and considering precedent. A teacher must be like a doctor—taking a careful history, diagnosing problems, and ensuring continuity of care. A teacher is like a CEO—managing multiple responsibilities, constituencies, and personalities. Our greatest leader is called *Moshe Rabbeinu*—Moshe, Our Teacher—in order to show him honor because of the tremendous challenge, privilege, and responsibility of teaching. There can be no greater achievement in Jewish life than to be a great teacher.

In fact, this is the Rav’s solution to the conundrum of Moshe’s absence from the Haggada. “Where can we find Moses? Where is Moses rewarded and glorified as the leader? It is at Sinai on Shavu’ot. There he is the great teacher of the people, *Moshe Rabbeinu* ... He is called *Moshe Rabbeinu* only in reference to Sinai, not in reference to *ge’ulat mitzrayim* ...” Moshe is glorified in exactly the place where he belongs; not in Egypt, but at Sinai, during the greatest educational endeavor of the Jewish people.

The Rav said, “The teacher of mankind, and particularly the Jewish community, is the Almighty. Behind every teacher ... stands God. The attributes of wisdom, knowledge, kindness and grace belong exclusively to God, but man has a right—even a duty—to usurp them, to take something of God’s attributes to himself. He is duty-bound to imitate God—not regarding power, but regarding teaching.” One can only hope that each of us has the capacity to live up to this mandate, for one needn’t be a classroom teacher to fill this role. Every parent has the mitzva to teach Torah to her children. Every individual has the opportunity to teach his neighbor.

The selections that follow are two examples, one from a middle school teacher and one from a high school teacher, of how we can use techniques of the classroom at our seder table. They were written by young teachers who have decided to dedicate their lives to imitating God regarding teaching, as *Moshe Rabbeinu* did before them. Please use these contributions to this collection to join them in the holy work of educating our next generation.

**Source:**

Soloveitchik, Joseph B. “Moses and the Redemption.” *Festival of Freedom*. Ed. Joel B. Wolowelsky and Reuven Ziegler. New York: Toras HoRav Foundation, 2006.

# Tips for a “Colorful” Interactive Seder

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In a Memorial Lecture for Rabbanit Tonya Soloveitchik entitled “The Story of Exodus,” the Rav stated that the seder night was one of two nights that “stand out as endowed with unique qualities, exalted in holiness and shining with singular beauty.” For the Rav, the Seder night flowed with “a strange peaceful stillness... joy and ecstasy... holiness.” The Rav said that it was these emotions and experiences that “have always been the fountainhead of my religious life.” For the Rav, his “colorful religious life” was “derived from my childhood experiences...”

The Rav taught that the purpose of many of the practices of the Seder night (karpas, yachatz, stealing the afikomen, wearing a kittel, etc.) is to interest the children and propel them to ask questions. In fact, the *Beit Ha'Levi* (the Rav's great-grandfather) used to add his own practices beyond the traditional practices in order to arouse the children's curiosity.

Growing up, my parents always involved my siblings and me in all holiday preparations, specifically for Pesach. By the time Seder night arrived, we were silly with excitement. The following are some activities I have prepared based on my own experiences growing up.

1. Take a large light blue sheet (bed sheet, shower curtain, or whatever works for you) and a few boxes of Sharpie markers. Ask your children to decorate the blue sheet to make it look like the ocean, with whales, sharks, corals, blowfish, seaweed, etc. When they are done, cut a line down the middle of the sheet, leaving about a foot and a half uncut at the top, and hang it at the most-frequently used doorway. You have just created your very own handmade kriyat Yam Suf (splitting of the Sea)! It is so much fun walking through the “Yam Suf” and imagining what it must have felt like for B'nei Yisroel.
2. Assign the children the task of making the *makkot* come alive at the seder table. Some helpful materials to give your children beforehand are as follows:
  - A. Blood: Red food coloring.
  - B. Frogs: Plastic frogs for the children to throw around the table (sounds messy and chaotic, but it is well worth it). These can also be handmade, if preferred.
  - C. Lice: Plastic lice (or any small white insect) for the children to throw around the table.
  - D. Wild Animals: Masks of lions/tigers/bears for the children to wear as they run around the table yelling “ROAR!”
  - E. Plague: No need to provide anything, as the ‘wild animals’ just drop to the floor silently.
  - F. Boils: No need to provide anything; the children can just pretend to have boils or prepare hand-drawn boils.
  - G. Hail: Ping-Pong balls and red Sharpie markers. The children should draw fire on the balls of hail, and then throw them around the Seder table.
  - H. Locust: Plastic crickets for the children to throw around the table.

- I. **Darkness:** Cut out rectangular pieces of navy/black cotton material which everyone (kids and adults alike) tie around their heads covering their eyes and sit silently for 30 seconds.
3. Buy a medium/large cardboard box. Cut out a hole on one side of the box, big enough for you to stick your hand and arm in. Cut off the foot of a knee sock and then staple one opening of the sock to the hole in the box (creating a tube-like structure that looks a bit like an elephant's nose). Ask your children to decorate the box however they like. Then, stuff the box with all kinds of prizes and tape the box shut. Find a good hiding place for this box, because your children will surely try to locate it and guess what prizes are inside. Throughout the seder, ask your children dozens of questions (prepared or impromptu). When your child answers his or her question correctly, he or she is rewarded by sticking his/her hand in the sock, through the hole, and pulling out a prize from the "prize box". The prizes can be as simple as hair clips, yo-yo's, or a package of kosher-for-Pesach gum. This prize box might sound like a lot of work, however it is a strong motivator for the children to be involved in the seder and share what he or she has learned. After all, for a child, the suspenseful excitement of being called on to answer a question, getting it correct, walking to the front of the table to stick their hand in the box and pulling out a prize is completely exhilarating.
4. Assign to each of the children different parts of the Haggadah to act out. Some ideas are: The 4 sons, the hard work and enslavement of the Jews, the Jews crying out to Hashem to save them, a student coming to tell his *Rebbeim* that it is time for Shacharit, etc. In most cases, the children will become thrilled about the idea of performing in front of family and guests, and work hard to prepare his or her "portion" beforehand. This really gets the child thinking and excited about the Seder ahead of time, and oftentimes helps with camaraderie between all the children as usually the "performer" needs some assisting actors.

**Sources:**

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## Making Hallel Meaningful

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**Introduction:**

Most of us are familiar with the Hallel prayer. There is an additional emphasis on Hallel on the holiday of Pesach when it is the one time a year when we say Hallel at night, and in fact some have the tradition to recite it twice at night, once after Maariv, and once during the seder. When we think about the meaning of this prayer, we can take away a profound lesson for our daily lives.

Shlomo, a 15 year old boy, had stomach pains for several years. His parents took him from doctor to doctor and from test to test to try to uncover the source of these pains and to see if there was anything that could alleviate them. After much searching and trials they were referred

to Dr. Young, who diagnosed him and prescribed for him an experimental medicine that he thought may help Shlomo. After a week of taking the pills, Shlomo was feeling a lot better and the stomach pains were gone.

**Questions for discussion:**

- When Shlomo goes back to Dr. Young for his follow up visit what do you think Shlomo will say to Dr. Young?
- When Shlomo sees Dr. Young again, how do you think he will feel about what Dr. Young did for him in the past?
- What will Shlomo expect in the future from Dr. Young? Will he ask him for anything? If so, why?
- Can asking for something be praising the person being asked?

Think about the answers to these discussion questions as you continue.

**Activity:**

Before reading ahead, think about the definition of the word הלל. If you are unsure of the translation of this word, look it up in a dictionary. Once you have done so pull out a siddur (or a Haggadah) and look through the paragraphs of Hallel and note the content of these prayers. Does the content of these prayers completely match the definition of the title Hallel? If you were the one creating the Hallel prayer, would you have selected all of the paragraphs that are currently present?

**Let's discuss:**

The word Hallel means praise, so we would expect that the prayer of Hallel would be full of praises to Hashem. While this is partially true, Rav Soloveitchik points out something that you may have noticed when carefully examining Hallel - that much of the content of the Hallel prayer is not praises but petitions. Let us look at a few specific examples together:

In the paragraph of 'מה אשיב לה', "what shall I respond to G-d", there is the following phrase, "אנא - "please G-d because I am your servant the son of your maidservant - you release me from my binds (chains)."

The whole paragraph of 'מן המצר קראתי ה' - "from the places of distress I called out to G-d" discusses asking Hashem for different things, culminating in the refrains, "אנא ה' הושיעה נא, אנא - "G-d please save me, G- d please give me success"

These are not praises at all! Rather, they are requests, petitions, asking for something. Why would these verses of Tehillim be included in the Hallel prayer at all? Hallel should be the time we praise ה', not where we submit request and ask favors of Him?

Rav Soloveitchik explains this with the following idea. The Mishna in *Berachot* states the following:

*Ben Azzai says ... "and give thanks to what has passed, and cry out for what will happen in the future"*

**Talmud Tractate Berachot Chapter 9 Mishna 4**

בְּן עֲזַאִי אוֹמֵר ... וְנוֹתֵן הַדָּאָה לְשֹׁעֵבֵר, וְצוֹעֵק  
לְעֵתִיד לְבֹא  
תְלִמוּד בְּבֵלִי מִסַּכַּת בְּרִכּוֹת פֶּרֶק ט - מִשְׁנֵה ד

The Rav explains that in Judaism, we cannot praise G-d without also praying to and beseeching

Him as well. This is because if you do not "cry out for the future," it means that you are secure and confident about your future. Even in our times of success and triumph, we must realize that the continuation of that success will only happen if G-d allows us to do so. Yes, we should thank G-d for what he has done thus far, but once we have done so we should also continue to look to the future, to look at the potential for our continued growth, which we must recognize can only happen with the help of G-d. By recognizing this, we are giving even greater praise to G-d, because we are showing that we are not only thankful for what he has done for us in the past, but also that we will continue to thank Him for everything He will help us with in the future.

**Sources:**

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# The Religious Zionism of Rav Soloveitchik: A Synthesis of Worlds

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This article attempts to give a full and fair account of Rav Soloveitchik's relationship with Religious Zionism, the long journey he travelled to develop this relationship, and the synthesis of worlds that he achieved.

There are two key issues to consider; the first is why the Rav was so firmly anti-Zionist when he arrived in America. To understand this, we must discuss the Rav's historical and sociological background; his childhood in Europe and early years in America. We must also examine the trends of secularism, nationalism and communism in 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup>-century Europe, along with the responses of the Yeshiva world.

The second issue is how the impact of the Holocaust and birth of the State of Israel caused the Rav to fundamentally change his perspective. We will examine the philosophy of activism and Religious Zionism that he developed, and consider the nature of the Rav's Zionism and how his independent thought, creative intellect and family heritage gave rise to a Zionism different to that of other 20<sup>th</sup>-century thinkers.

## The Rav's Agudah Philosophy

Attitude formation is a complex process. Attitudes develop based on a complex interplay between environmental factors, familial influences, personal experiences and intellectual arguments. This section will highlight several factors that were key to the formulation of the Rav's initial Agudist philosophy. We will highlight: his family influence, the struggles faced by his father teaching in a Mizrachi school, his exposure to the world of Agudah in Berlin, and the role models he found when beginning life in America.

## Rav Chaim of Brisk

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, deep rifts spread across the Jewish world. The secularism of enlightenment philosophy clashed with the Torah values of Orthodoxy. The political trend of

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nationalism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century also deeply impacted the Jewish world. If the Italians, Germans and Hungarians could have their own autonomous states, then perhaps this could also be a realizable dream for the Jewish people. The desire to return to Jerusalem and renew the link with *Eretz Yisrael* is embedded in religious thought and prayer, and nationalism provided a secular language in which to express this religious ideology. The continued presence of persecution and anti-Semitism acted to crystallize Jewish nationalism, and it was following the tragic accusation of Dreyfus for treason against France that Theodore Herzl first gave form to the dream of a Jewish State in Israel.

Zionism caused a huge upheaval in the Yeshiva world. Herzl appealed to many Jews, but the religious world recoiled from the practical secularism that he preached. The yeshiva world of Eastern Europe was partially isolated from the powerful influence of the Enlightenment, yet ideas still travelled from Western Europe and could have strong impacts. The most famous yeshiva of those times was Volozhin, and this drama was played out in their *beit midrash* even before Herzl began his campaign.

The most famous rosh yeshiva of Volozhin was the Netziv, Rav Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin; he was well versed in Enlightenment literature and was a passionate supporter of the nascent Zionist vision. His son, Rabbi Meir Berlin (who later changed his last name to Bar-Ilan), became the president of World Mizrahi, which the Religious Zionist Organization founded in 1902, and his closest student was Rav Kook.

The co-rosh yeshiva of Volozhin was Rav Joseph Dov Soloveitchik, and, though he left Volozhin to become the rabbi of Slutsk, his son, Rav Chaim Soloveitchik, stayed in Volozhin and soon rose to the fore. He became a dominant personality in the yeshiva, with many followers. Rav Chaim was vehemently opposed to Zionism, which he viewed as godless secular nationalism, which would only result in taking Jews away from Judaism. However, he deeply loved and cared about the holiness of the Land of Israel, delivering high level *shiurim* on *Kodashim* and *Taharat* (two complex areas of the Talmud that are mostly applicable in Temple times). This duality was a key component of the Rav's heritage.

## Rav Moshe Soloveitchik in Warsaw

The Rav's father, Rav Moshe Soloveitchik, began his main rabbinic career as the community rabbi of the town of Kislavichi, where the Jewish population was mostly Lubavitch and religious. The Russian revolution changed Jewish life irreparably. Communism rampaged throughout Russia and religious life was decimated. Communism engendered a deep hatred of tradition and religion, and many youth were swept up in the tide as it engulfed the country. The Rav's family managed to escape from communist Russia and arrived in Warsaw. Warsaw was a center of Ger Chassidism and the Chassidic towns in Russia were centers of the newly founded Agudah movement. Agudah was founded in 1912 with the intention of creating an over-arching organization to unite Torah Jews in the face of secularizing influences. However, the conservative element rapidly gained dominance within the organization and Agudah came to be defined in opposition to Mizrahi and its support for Zionism. Agudah stood for the values of traditional European Torah Jewry and it was within this environment of ideological conflict that the Rav grew up.

Rav Moshe began teaching in a Mizrahi school, an enlightened institution in which secular studies were encouraged alongside Jewish studies. The Rav saw how his father was mocked and rejected by his family due to his association with a Mizrahi institution. Furthermore, the Rav saw his father suffering within the school, as his conservative views differed from the more radical and modern approach of certain members of the faculty. The intense sensation of pain a child feels when he sees his father unhappy runs deep, and the Rav's childhood experiences of watching his father suffer firmly established a negative association with Mizrahi organizations.

## Life in Berlin

In 1926, the Rav travelled to Berlin, the center of the German Jewish world. The Judaism and rabbinic life in Berlin was a world away from that which he had been exposed to in either Russia or Poland. He was exposed to the world of Torah and *Derech Eretz*, the legacy of Rav Hirsch. He attended *shiurim* of the *Sridei Aish*, went to visit Hildesheimer, and encountered a *beit midrash* full of rabbinic students with a mature secular education. This was not the Agudah that the Rav was exposed to in Russia, this was Agudah with PhDs; sophisticated, educated and worldly. The Rav was overawed by this experience. During the six years he spent in Berlin, he mixed with the greatest Jewish thinkers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and was in the thrall of the great leaders of the Agudah movement. The Rav aspired to follow this path, to become one of these great Agudah leaders, entrenched in the world of Torah and of tradition, yet also well versed in secular philosophy, science and politics.

## Agudah in America

The third factor that influenced the formulation of the Rav's Agudist position was the role models he encountered in America. In 1932, the Rav came to the United States, brought in by the Chicago Hebrew Theological College. When the Depression hit the American economy, the community was unable to honor the contract, and so the Rav moved to Boston. Religious life in Boston was a challenge and the person that Rav Soloveitchik respected most was Rabbi Eliezer Silver. Rabbi Silver was the first American-made *talmid chacham*, a student of Rav Chaim Ozer who had come to America and worked in the insurance business before serving as a community rabbi in Harrisburg. In 1937, Rabbi Silver led the American delegation to the last European Agudah conference, and received a mandate to establish Agudah in the United States. Rav Soloveitchik was one of the founding members. In the late 1930s, when the rabbinic leaders of Agudah refused to support a boycott of Germany and of Hitler, the Rav sided with them. This decision seems perverse in hindsight, but we must recall that Agudah of the 1930s was still stuck in the mind-set of the ghetto. They maintained an inherent aversion to confronting government authority and they felt that a boycott would only anger Hitler and make the situation worse for European Jews.

The highlight of the Rav's Agudist career was the eulogy he gave in 1940 for Rav Chaim Ozer. This was the clearest, most expressive and eloquent expression of Agudah philosophy ever given on American soil. The Rav described two of the unique garments of the *kohen gadol* (high priest): the *tzitz* (head-plate) and the *choshen* (breast-plate). The *tzitz* represents the mind committed to halachic issues for which the *kohen gadol* is the ultimate authority, and the *choshen* represents worldly issues, the political, the military and the questions of practical reality for which the *kohen gadol* must also be the ultimate arbiter. There can be no separation between the

bearer of the *tzitz* and the *choshen*; rabbinic control must be absolute in both realms. The Rav fully condoned the actions of the Agudah in not boycotting Hitler, and echoed Rav Chaim Ozer's disapproval of Zionism and the secularizing influences with which it was inextricably linked. For the Rav, secular Zionism's attempt to sever itself from the domain of halachah and from the purview of rabbinic authority could not be tolerated.

## Antithesis and Synthesis

We now deal with the issue of how the Rav justified the switch from being a committed Agudist to being a powerful and eloquent advocate for Religious Zionism. The Rav himself described this process in terms of a dialectic comprised of three stages: his thesis was Agudah, the primacy of the insulated Torah community and adherence to doctrine as defined by the rabbinic leadership; the antithesis was the pain, disaster and destruction of the Holocaust; and his synthesis was an activist Religious Zionism. In this section we explain the latter two stages of this journey and distinguish between two fundamental components of his great synthesis; first, the necessity for constant, dynamic reevaluation of *hashkafic* (worldview) decisions, and second, the religious mandate of activism and creativity. The Rav dealt extensively with the question of the rationale behind his change of heart, and we draw from his own allegory and exegesis to support and explain this process.

## Rejection and Destruction

The initial catalyst for the Rav's change of heart came in 1943, when the horrific nature of the destruction being wreaked among European Jewry became evident. American Jewry woke up to Hitler's crimes and many members of the Agudah leadership, who had rejected a boycott in the 1930s, announced that the time had come to take action. Two days before Yom Kippur, Agudah leaders, the Rav among them, marched to Congress to request a meeting with the president. The greatest rabbinic delegation that America could muster was denied an audience. Their protest went unanswered and they returned home, defeated and dejected. When the full extent of the destruction of European Jewry became apparent, the knowledge that six million Jews had been murdered and countless communities obliterated caused deep and lasting mental anguish. Furthermore, it caused the Rav to make a frank and full reevaluation of his philosophy. The Rav came to the decision that he had been wrong; he had been wrong about the primacy of rabbinic edict in the realm of *hashkafah*, and he had been wrong about the relevance of Jewish activism.

## Religious Innovation—Yosef and the Brothers

In his addresses to the American Mizrahi Association, which were subsequently transcribed as the *Chamesh Derashot*, the Rav explained the first aspect of this change of heart. The Rav noted that in the realm of halachah, the rabbinic majority reigns supreme. G-d gave the Torah to man and our capacity for halachic creativity and decision-making is axiomatic to a live and vibrant relationship to G-d. In *hashkafah* however, the rules are different. For questions that are outside the four volumes of the *Shulchan Aruch*, the focus is not on man's insight and deduction, rather we have to be constantly evaluating what it is that G-d wants of man. We have to continually reevaluate our decisions to ensure they align with *ratzon Hashem* (the will of G-d), and we have to adapt to the world around us. In *hashkafah*, there is no edict that is infallible and no rebbe

who is exempt from this obligation for constant reappraisal and review. Once halachah is fixed by man it becomes law that even G-d cannot alter, the heavenly voice affirms *lo bashamayim hi*—it is not in heaven. *Hashkafah*, however, must be in a constant state of flux and adaptation.

The Rav connected this message to the conflict between Yosef and his brothers. All the children of Ya'akov knew that there would be an exile, as had been told to Avraham. Yosef wanted to question the comfortable life of the family and challenge them to rethink the status quo of life in Cana'an in preparation for the inevitable trials ahead. The brothers rejected this. They judged Yosef guilty of treason for even suggesting it; they were happy with life in Cana'an, comfortable, settled and secure. The divine voice rang out that Yosef was right. Yosef's visions proved true and he eventually ended up as viceroy over all of Egypt, able to guide them safely to Egypt and soften the blow of exile. The Rav explained that the Mizrachi of 1902 represented Yosef Hatzadik and Agudah represented the other brothers. Mizrachi wanted to reevaluate Jewish life in Europe, to prepare for the Jewish future and ensure Jewish continuity, whereas Agudah were content with the status quo. Mizrachi fought and dreamed, and without them there would have been no place for refugees to go to following the war. Without the *yishuv*, Hitler would have killed Judaism. The Rav saw this as a full retroactive justification of Mizrachi philosophy.

## Activism—Ya'akov and Eisav

The second component of the Rav's Religious Zionism was activism, the necessity for Jews to take a stand in world affairs, to be people of deeds as well as of books. He developed this philosophy building within the tradition of his father and grandfather. The essence of the Brisk conception of Torah is the mandate of *imitatio Dei*, intellectual creativity of man emulating the creativity of G-d through the study of Torah. The Rav felt that this creative power must also be actualized beyond the realm of the intellect and carried into the outside world. To substantiate this message, the Rav drew from the episode in which Rivkah engineers a deception of Yitzchak to give the *brachot* (blessings) to Yaakov. He described Yitzchak as the epitome of holiness and sanctity, the *korban shelamim* who never left the Land of Israel. According to Yitzchak's worldview, the best possible path for Ya'akov was to be as an "*ish yoshev ohalim*" (a man who dwelled in tents), insulated from the outside world, shielded from mundane physical, economic and political realities and able to focus solely on the study of Torah. According to Yitzchak's vision, if Ya'akov was ever in need of assistance in practical matters, he could turn to his brother Eisav, the worldly industrialist. That was the view of Yitzchak. Rivkah, however, thought differently; she told Ya'akov to go out into the field, to fight for the blessings of heaven and earth and to gain a foothold in the outside world. She realized that this was the only viable way in which the tent of Torah could survive. The Rav believed that the vision of Mizrachi was to extend beyond the tent of Torah, to establish the ownership of the Jewish people of the Land of Israel in the way that the returning exiles did in the times of Ezra, through weeding and plowing, digging wells and fortifying borders. The Rav came to believe with a full heart that the true achievement of the State of Israel was the creation of a people with a Gemarah in one hand and a plowshare in the other. This activism was at the heart of his Zionism and at the focus of his entire worldview.

## The knock of opportunity—*Kol Dodi Dofek*

Activism comes with obligation. If G-d gave us the power to act, we have a responsibility to do so. The Rav elucidated this beautifully in his 1956 speech at Yeshiva University entitled "*Kol Dodi Dofek*." He told Shir Hashirim's tragic story of a couple deeply in love. One night the young lover knocks on his beloved's door, but she is too tired and tells him sleepily to go away and come back tomorrow. She awakens the next day and goes to look for him; she searches but eventually realizes that he is gone forever, lost to her for all time because she missed her opportunity. The Rav argued that each of us is given a chance to reach for something, to become great and to actualize our potential. We learn from Shir HaShirim that we must not let our apathy, feelings of inadequacy or laziness spoil this opportunity. The Rav spoke of six knocks on the collective door of the Jewish people, six awakenings to call us to awaken and reach for greatness. These six knocks were the six miraculous events accompanying the establishment of the State of Israel:

- The first knock was political; the alliance of the United States and USSR to vote for the existence of the Jewish State.
- The second was military; the victory of the tiny Jewish forces, handicapped by an arms embargo and massively outnumbered.
- The third was theological; the refutation of Christian doctrine by demonstrating that the Jewish people will again be a vibrant player on the world stage.
- The fourth was sociological; the fact that Jews from around the world felt proud to be Jewish and free to re-engage with their Jewish identity.
- The fifth was an international change of attitude due to the birth of the State of Israel; the fact that Jews had a position of power and a homeland meant that Jewish blood could no longer be spilt freely and without fear of retribution.
- The sixth and final knock was the influx of exiles; the return to Israel of Jews from across the world.

This speech became the most famous exposition of Religious Zionist thought given in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and the philosophy it contained was a result of the Rav's personal journey over the previous decades.

## Brisker Zionism

The Religious Zionist thought developed by Rav Soloveitchik was significantly different to that of other 20<sup>th</sup>-century thinkers. For both Rav Soloveitchik and Rav Kook, Zionism was connected to Torah. For Rav Kook, however, Zionism was an *a priori* reflection of his Torah perspective, as obvious as *tefillah*, Shabbat or *kashrut*. For the Rav, Zionism was a *posteriori*, a position adopted after tumult and struggle. The Rav, therefore, did not grant Zionism an independent mandate in religious life. He rejected the position of Nachmanides, elucidated in his commentary on *Acharei Mot* (18:25), that mitzvot can only be properly fulfilled in Israel and that, therefore, *yishuv Eretz Yisrael* (settling the Land of Israel) is more important than all the other commandments combined. This position would lead to the conclusion that Zionism is more important than every other aspect of Torah life. The Rav whole-heartedly rejected this; he believed that Zionism, as with every other *hashkafah*, must be actualized solely within the bounds of a rigid

halachic framework. This position often put the Rav at odds with other Mizrahi thinkers who followed the teachings of Rav Kook and saw Zionism as of supreme importance within religious life.

The Rav often quoted the Mishnah in *Yoma* 8:5, which states that if a person is ill on Yom Kippur, then we ask a doctor whether they must eat; the rabbi has no say in the matter. The Rav felt adamant that *yishuv Eretz Yisrael* is similar to Yom Kippur. Just as Yom Kippur is disregarded to save a life, so too is *yishuv Eretz Yisrael*. Thus, when the question of land for peace arose in the 1970s, he felt that the military and political experts ought to determine the best course of action.

## Conclusion

Rav Soloveitchik was arguably the greatest exponent of Religious Zionism in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and he travelled a long path to reach this position. By the 1930s, the Rav had become a fervent Agudist. This position stemmed from his family background and formative experiences in Europe and America. It took the war and subsequent establishment of the State of Israel to force the Rav to reevaluate his approach and come to the belief that the Agudah worldview was no longer tenable. He constructed a majestic Religious Zionism built on activism and the passionate desire to seek out G-d's guiding hand in the world. He became an ardent Zionist and a member of Mizrahi yet always maintained his independent view. Each decision he made was subjected to rigorous analysis and halachah was never subjugated in favor of Zionist sentiment.

His switch from Agudah to Mizrahi was a testament to his intellectual honesty and personal conviction. It was hard for the Rav to differ from his family, change his associations and uproot his worldview, yet he came to see this as a fulfillment of two fundamental religious obligations; the drive to attune with the will of G-d and the mandate to emulate G-d's creativity, to be an activist and make an impact in the wider world. Both the content and context of his Zionist philosophy have beautiful and powerful messages for us all.

# An Optimistic Zionist

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גדול יהיה כבוד הבית הזה האחרון מן הראשון.

*The glory of this house, the latter, will be greater than the glory of the first.<sup>1</sup>*

## The Optimism of Zecharyah and Chaggai

In the early years of the second Beit haMikdash, the prophets Chaggai and Zecharyah were charged with inspiring a ragtag group of 42,000 refugees to restore the Jewish community, reestablish a Jewish commonwealth, and build the second Beit haMikdash. Many of Zecharyah's prophecies were delivered in visions, and one of his best-known visions includes the following dialogue, between Zecharyah and a malach:

*And he [a malach] said to me: What do you see? And I said: I have seen a menorah formed entirely of gold, with its bowl on its head and seven lamps upon it, seven and seven channels to the lamps upon its head, and two olive trees upon it, one on the right of the bowl and one on its left.*

*And I declared and said to the malach who spoke to me: What are these, my master? And the malach who spoke to me declared and replied to me: You know what these are! And I said: No, my master.*

*And he declared and said to me: This is the word of G-d to Zerubavel, saying: Not with might and not with strength, but with My spirit, declares G-d, Lord of Hosts.*

**Zecharyah 4:2-6**

ויאמר אלי מה אתה ראה ואמר  
ראיתי והנה מנורת זהב כלה וגלה  
על ראשה ושבעה נרתיה עליה  
שבעה ושבעה מוצקות לנרות אשר  
על ראשה: ושנים זיתים עליה אחד  
מימין הגלה ואחד על שמאלה: ואען  
ואמר אל המלאך הדבר בי לאמר מה  
אלה אדני: ויען המלאך הדבר בי  
ויאמר אלי הלוא ידעת מה המה אלה  
ואמר לא אדני: ויען ויאמר אלי  
לאמר זה דבר ד' אל זרבבל לאמר  
לא בחיל ולא בכח כי אם ברוחי אמר  
ד' צבקות:  
זכריה ד:ב-ו

The dialogue between prophet and malach caught the sensitive ear of Rabbi Chaim Soloveitchik. The malach would later explain the particular images of the vision, but how did his response address the question? And if a malach—whose word to a prophet must be truth—declared that Zecharyah understood the vision, how could Zecharyah contradict it? And by what right was his denial enshrined as prophetic truth as well?

Rabbi Chaim Soloveitchik explained<sup>2</sup> that the malach was correct: Zecharyah did comprehend the symbols displayed to him. The prophet recognized the two olive trees as representatives of the monarchy and the kehunah [priesthood], and he realized that the olive oil represented the

<sup>1</sup> Chaggai 2:8

<sup>2</sup> *Chiddushei Rabbeinu haGriz Soloveitchik* [Stencil] Torah #121, and see *Nefesh haRav*, pp. 76-79

oil of anointing used in the Beit haMikdash. However, Zechariah's declaration of ignorance was also honest: these symbols were incomprehensible in a vision regarding the second Beit haMikdash, for Zechariah knew prophetically that there would be no oil of anointing in this era, and no anointed king or kohen gadol.

The malach then addressed Zechariah's confusion, saying in the name of G-d, "The second Beit haMikdash was built not with might and not with force, but with My spirit." This meant, "I put My spirit into the heart of the kings of the nations, to permit Israel to return to the Land of Israel and build the Beit haMikdash."<sup>3</sup> The Jewish return under the Persians was not established by Jewish conquest, and therefore would not be voided by the later Roman conquest.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, the sanctity of the land would persist, and the holiness of the third Beit haMikdash would be a direct extension of the holiness invested in the second Beit haMikdash, established by Zechariah's generation.

Rabbi Chaim Soloveitchik explained that this answered Zechariah's question: the oil of anointing, the anointed king and the kohen gadol were appropriate visions even for his day, for their Beit haMikdash would be a product of the current structure. Zechariah and his generation could be heartened by the news that their efforts would ultimately lead to a grand Beit haMikdash and a full redemption.

This message may be discerned in a prophecy of Chaggai, too. The Jews of Chaggai's day claimed that the Beit haMikdash they were building was entirely unworthy of succeeding the first Beit haMikdash. In response to this national depression, Chaggai prophesied, "The glory of this house, the latter, will be greater than the glory of the first."<sup>5</sup> As Rabbi Hershel Schachter has explained,<sup>6</sup> "this house" referred to the second Beit haMikdash, and "the latter" referred to the third Beit haMikdash, which would be an extension of the second. The national frustration was justified, but if they would persevere in their efforts then they would yet see a Beit haMikdash worthy of its name.

## Modern Frustration

The disappointment of 2,500 years ago has been echoed in our own day, regarding the aspirations of Religious Zionists for a full restoration of halachic Judaism to our ancient land. In the face of these challenges, many have questioned the wisdom of partnering with secular Zionists. Separatists cite the biblical criticism of the righteous King Yehoshaphat for joining forces with the wicked King Achazyahu,<sup>7</sup> and they quote the lesson of Pirkei Avot,<sup>8</sup> "Do not join with a wicked person." Even before the birth of the state, in 1934, Rav Elchanan Wasserman penned an open letter chastising anyone who would join with secular Zionists "in any form of union."

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<sup>3</sup> Rabbi Hershel Schachter, *B'Inyan Megilat Taanit, Or haMizrach*, Nisan 5734.

<sup>4</sup> Rambam, *Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Beit haBechirah* 6:16

<sup>5</sup> Chaggai 2:8

<sup>6</sup> See note 3 above.

<sup>7</sup> *Divrei haYamim II* 20:37

<sup>8</sup> *Pirkei Avot* 1:7

When addressing his perspective on secular Zionism, Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik counted himself among those questing Religious Zionists. In the concluding portion of his *Kol Dodi Dofek* address, Rabbi Soloveitchik identified two flaws of practical consequence in the thinking of secular pioneers:

*It seems to me that political, nonreligious Zionism has committed one grave and fundamental error ... With the establishment of the State of Israel, secular Zionism declares, we have become a people like all people, and the notion of "a people that dwells alone" (Numbers 23:29) has lost its validity ... Under the influence of this spirit of indiscriminate amity, this doctrine of the sameness of all peoples, the representatives of the State of Israel have oftentimes displayed an embarrassing naiveté, improperly evaluated particular circumstances and situations, and failed to discern the hidden intentions of certain individuals. As a result of their childlike innocence, they trust the promises of people who promptly proceed to betray us and are overly impressed by flattery and blandishments...*

*However, the error of secular Zionism is more serious than its simply not understanding the true meaning of the covenant in Egypt, the covenant of a camp-people, which takes the form of shared fate and involuntary isolation. Secular Zionism has sinned as well against the covenant at Sinai, the covenant made with a holy congregation-nation, which finds its expression in the shared destiny of a sanctified existence...*

*The mission of the State of Israel is neither the termination of the unique isolation of the Jewish people nor the abrogation of its unique fate— in this it will not succeed! – but the elevation of a camp-people to the rank of a holy congregation-nation and the transformation of shared fate to shared destiny.<sup>9</sup>*

To Rabbi Soloveitchik, secular Zionists and Religious Zionists work at cross-purposes regarding core identity and nation-shaping vision, and the state pays a frustrating, real-world price for the ideological shortcomings of the secular model. Nonetheless, Rabbi Soloveitchik mitigated his criticism, declaring that secularists were subconsciously motivated by a purity of heart that would earn their Zionist efforts favor in Divine eyes. He claimed:<sup>10</sup>

*One may acquire a share in the Creator of the Universe only via construction of an altar, via "And you shall seek... [and you shall find] when you seek Him with your entire heart and with your entire spirit." All of them make this acquisition: The religious—knowingly, the chiloni—without knowledge. We, religious Jewry, believe that the Jew seeks the Creator of the Universe eternally, against his will and willingly, accidentally and intentionally. He seeks Him even at the moment that he cries out that he needs Him not. ... Therefore, all of the parties built altars, from the Mizrachi-HaPoel Mizrachi to the Mapai and Mapam, and brought*

את הקנין בבורא העולם אפשר להשיג רק על ידי בנין מזבח, על ידי 'ובקשתם... [ומצאת] כי תדרשנו בכל לבבך ובכל נפשך'. ואת הקנין הזה עושים כולם: הדתי – מדעת, החילוני – שלא מדעת. אנו, היהודים הדתיים, מאמינים כי היהודי מבקש תמיד את בורא העולם, באונס וברצון, בשוגג ובכוונה. הוא מבקש אותו אף בשעה שהוא צועק כי איננו זקוק לו... לפיכך בנו מזבחות כל המפלגות, ממזרחי-הפרועל המזרחי עד מפא"י ומפ"ם, והקריבו

<sup>9</sup> *Kol Dodi Dofek*, Reflections on the Holocaust (1992) pp. 100-101, translated from Hebrew to English by Lawrence Kaplan.

<sup>10</sup> *Chamesh Derashot: Vayachalom* Yosef, translated from Yiddish to Hebrew by David Telzner.

*korbanot upon them. (And the korban of a Jew is always accepted, even when the person bringing it does not intend for the sake of Heaven.) ... Yes, rabbotai! Even the new, chiloni settlement executed the second acquisition of the land, a permanent acquisition, in heroic fashion, and in an indirect, unwitting way acquired not only a portion of the land of Israel, but also of the G-d of Israel.*<sup>11</sup>

קרבנות עליהם. (וקרבן יהודי הוא לעולם לרצון, אף אם המקריב איננו מתכוון לשם שמים.) ... כן, רבותי! אף הישוב החדש החילוני ביצע את הקנין השני של הארץ לצמיתות באופן הירוואי, ובאורה בלתי-ישיר ובלתי-מודע זכה לא רק בארץ ישראל, אלא גם באלקי ישראל.

Despite the challenges and disappointments of secularisms, the vision of a grand future did not fade from Rabbi Soloveitchik's eyes.

## Engagement

Rather than preach a withdrawal of our hands, Rabbi Soloveitchik promoted the engagement of the halachic idealist with the secular reality. He envisioned a world in which Torah and halachah were applied and honored in the modern, public sphere. Toward that end, he articulated a fourteenth "Ani Maamin" declaration of faith, modeled upon the 13 identified in Rambam's teachings:<sup>12</sup>

*What is this "Ani Maamin"? It is expressed in a simple declaration, "I believe, with complete faith, that this Torah is to be fulfilled, actualized and fully executed in every place and every era, in all social, financial and cultural circumstances, in all technological circumstances and political conditions." Torah is to be actualized, whether in the simple society and homogeneous market of the ghetto, in which the Jews existed in the manner of "consumers of manna" and the environment was saturated with Judaism and the street was an extension of the home, or in the modern, scientifically developed and designed society, in which the Jew is an integral part of his environs beyond any connection with his personal domain. Torah is to be actualized whether in exile, where it relates to the personal life of the Jew, or in the Jewish state, where it is required to*

מהו ה"אני מאמין" הזה? הוא מתבטא בהצהרה פשוטה: "אני מאמין באמונה שלימה שזאת התורה ניתנת לקיום, לגישום ולביצוע מלא בכל מקום ובכל זמן, בכל המערכות החברתיות, הכלכליות והתרבותיות, בכל הנסיבות הטכנולוגיות ובכל התנאים הפוליטיים". התורה ניתנת להגשמה בין בחברה הפשוטה והמשק ההומגני של הגישו בו היו היהודים בבחינת "אוכלי מן" וכל הסביבה היתה רוויה יהדות, כשהרחוב היה המשכו של הבית; ובין בחברה המודרנית המפותחת והמתוכנן באופן מדעי, שבהם היהודי הנהו חלק אניטגרלי של סביבתו, ללא שום קשר עם רשות היחיד שלו. התורה ניתנת להגשמה בין בגלות, שם היא מתייחסת לחייו הפרטיים של היהודי, ובין במדינה יהודית,

<sup>11</sup> See, too, Rabbi Soloveitchik's address to a Mizrahi gathering in 1954, as cited by Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein in a lecture transcribed and published at [www.vbm-torah.org/alei/14-02ral-zionism.htm](http://www.vbm-torah.org/alei/14-02ral-zionism.htm). Rabbi Soloveitchik cited Melachim II 14:23, which depicts the sins and triumphs of Yeravam son of Yoash, wicked king of Yisrael: "Yerav'am son of Yoash 'did not turn away from all the sins of Yerav'am son of Nevat, who had led Israel astray.' Nevertheless, the Rav banged loudly on the table and continued, he 'restored the border of Israel from Levo Chamat to the sea of Arava, as the Lord, God of Israel, had spoken by the hand of his servant, Yona son of Amitai, the prophet from Gat-Chefer!' He concluded that indeed 'God had seen the affliction of Israel.' This expressed not the passive appreciation of a bystander, but rather the Rav's readiness to cooperate with the general community, proceeding from a sense of joint fate and—up to a certain level—even joint destiny."

<sup>12</sup> *Chamesh Derashot: miTal haShamayim*, translated from Yiddish to Hebrew by David Telzner. See also Rabbi Soloveitchik's eulogy for his uncle, Rabbi Yitzchak Zev Soloveitchik, published under the title, "*Mah dodeich midod*."

address novel challenges and to encompass, as well, the structures of communal life.

שם עליה לטפל בבעיות חדשות ולהקיף גם צורות חיים ציבוריים.

Rabbi Soloveitchik took great pride in the steps taken toward fulfilling this ambition. As he declaimed before the 57<sup>th</sup> Mizrahi convention, Religious Zionism could point to significant, concrete achievements with pride:<sup>13</sup>

*We have merited exhaustion, a constructive, creative exhaustion, due to our great labors of the 18 years since the founding of the state, when our movement—and only our movement and no other—fought tirelessly for a religious land of Israel. We achieved much through our battle: more than 200,000 students in religious schools, laws of marriage and family in the hands of rabbis and judges, a well-organized Chief Rabbinate, kashrut in the military, and also—relatively—public Shabbat observance.*

זכאים אנו ליגיעה, ליגיעה קונסטרוקטיבית- יוצרת עקב פעולתנו העצומה במשך 18 שנים מאז תקומת המדינה, כאשר תנועתנו – ורק תנועתנו ולא תנועה אחרת – מאבקה ללא-ליאות בעד ארץ ישראל דתית. הרבה השגנו הודות למלחמתנו: למעלה ממאתיים אלף תלמידים בבתי ספר דתיים, דיני אישות וענינו משפחה בידי רבנים ויושבי על מדין, רבנות ראשית מאורגנת היטב, כשרות בצבא, וגם – במידה רלטיבית – שמירת שבת בפרהסיא.

Like the contemporaries of Zechariah and Chaggai, Rabbi Soloveitchik witnessed and recognized the flaws and deficiencies of his era's struggle to build a Beit haMikdash. Nonetheless, Rabbi Soloveitchik embodied the optimism his grandfather, Rabbi Chaim Soloveitchik, saw in the malach's words to Zechariah. Understanding the purity in the secular Zionist's activities, committed to the ability of halachah to encompass the modern world, and valuing the religious achievements of his day, Rabbi Soloveitchik recognized that from this modern state, however troubled, could come greatness.

<sup>13</sup> *Chamesh Derashot: Simchat haYetzirah*, translated from Yiddish to Hebrew by David Telzner.

# Rav Soloveitchik on the Significance of the State of Israel

Rabbi Reuven Ziegler, '90YC<sup>1</sup>

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## The Two Covenants and the State of Israel

In 1935, on his only trip to Eretz Yisrael, Rav Soloveitchik submitted his candidacy for the chief rabbinate of Tel Aviv as the representative of Agudath Israel, a non-Zionist, perhaps even anti-Zionist, political-religious organization. By 1944, he was chairman of the Central Committee of the Religious Zionists of America. He testifies that his move to Mizrachi was not an easy one, as it entailed a break with his family's position and rejection by his rabbinic peers:

*I was not born into a Zionist household. My parents' ancestors, my father's house, my teachers and colleagues were far from the Mizrachi religious Zionists ... My links with the Mizrachi grew gradually; I had my doubts about the validity of the Mizrachi approach ...*

*I built an altar upon which I sacrificed sleepless nights, doubts and reservations. Regardless, the years of the Hitlerian Holocaust, the establishment of the State of Israel, and the accomplishments of the Mizrachi in the land of Israel, convinced me of the correctness of our movement's path. The altar still stands today, with smoke rising from the sacrifice upon it ... Jews like me ... are required to sacrifice on this altar their peace of mind as well as their social relationships and friendships. (Five Addresses, 34, 36)<sup>2</sup>*

A variety of factors—some related to fate and some to destiny—contributed to the Rav's support for Mizrachi and to his personal commitment to the State of Israel.

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<sup>2</sup> Actually, the Rav's father had earlier associated himself with Mizrachi when, in 1920, he became head of religious studies at the Mizrachi-affiliated Takhkemoni Rabbinical Seminary in Warsaw. The question of the exact timing of the Rav's move from Agudah to Mizrachi has been raised by R. Shlomo Pick, "The Rav: Biography and Bibliography," *B.D.D.* 6 (1998), 31–37. However, what interests us here is the Rav's self-perception. The above-cited testimony was delivered in an address to the Religious Zionists of America in 1962.

**I. Fate:** The last three of the famous “six knocks” described in *Kol Dodi Dofek* all deal with the State of Israel’s contribution to Jewish survival. The State of Israel is a refuge for persecuted Jews; it establishes the principle of Jewish self-defense; and it serves as a bulwark against assimilation for Diaspora Jews, many of whom maintain their sense of Jewish identity through identification with Israel and concern for its welfare.

**II. Destiny:** The State of Israel aids in the attainment of Jewish spiritual goals in several ways. First, by settling the land and exercising sovereignty in it, the Jewish community fulfills one of the 613 biblical mitzvot, “You shall possess the land and dwell therein” (Num. 33:53).<sup>3</sup> Second, the Jewish state is a natural and congenial environment for Torah study, a land in which the Jewish people can transplant and rebuild the destroyed Torah centers of Europe.<sup>4</sup> By helping establish Jewish sovereignty in the Land of Israel and building Torah institutions there, the Mizrachi paved the way for Jewish spiritual continuity following the eclipse of traditional European Jewish society in the Enlightenment and its destruction in the Holocaust. In this, the Mizrachi followed the path of Joseph, who, foreseeing the winds of change that would challenge his father’s traditional existence in the backwaters of an undeveloped country, prepared the way for Jewish spiritual continuity even in the sophisticated society of imperial Egypt. Like Joseph, the Mizrachi leaders were also shunned by their more short-sighted brothers for their convictions and actions.

Third, the State of Israel can benefit not only the study of Torah but its application as well, for within the state it is possible to apply Halakhah to a broad range of issues, including modern technology and public life. Others, whether Reform or Haredi, may feel that the Torah cannot survive a confrontation with modern society, and therefore, it must either change in accordance with the times or retreat into isolation. The Rav strongly identified with the Mizrachi’s position that Torah can and should engage the world, that it can meet any challenge and be applied in any circumstance.<sup>5</sup> Thus, ideally, the State of Israel can provide a framework within which to realize the covenant of destiny by fostering Torah values and applying Halakhah to the full range of human endeavors.<sup>6</sup>

The Rav strongly felt the eternal connection of the Jew to the Land of Israel, and testified on many occasions that he had imbibed from his father and grandfather a love for the land and its sanctity.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, he believed that divine providence had decreed that in the dispute between Religious Zionists and anti-Zionists, the Religious Zionists had been correct.<sup>8</sup> Yet when we ask ourselves which elements of Jewish destiny can be attained *only* in the Land of Israel, we see that it is just the first of them—the specific mitzvah of settlement. The Rav felt that the broader elements of destiny—building Torah institutions, striving for *kedushah*, applying Halakhah to modern society and engaging the world—were equally relevant to the Diaspora and could be achieved there as well.

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<sup>3</sup> “*Al Ahavat ha-Torah u-Geulat Nefesh ha-Dor*,” 424–25; *Five Addresses*, 137–38. See also For Further Reference, #1.

<sup>4</sup> *Five Addresses*, 31–33.

<sup>5</sup> *Five Addresses*, 152–57, 174–75, and “*Mah Dodekh mi-Dod*,” 90–91 (the position that the Rav cites as “some say” seems to be his own, in contrast to that of his illustrious uncle R. Velvel).

<sup>6</sup> *Kol Dodi Dofek*, 70–71.

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, “*Al Ahavat ha-Torah*,” 422–23; *Five Addresses*, 34–35; *Community, Covenant and Commitment*, 239.

<sup>8</sup> *Five Addresses*, 31–36. This point is also apparent from the Rav’s discussion of the six knocks.

His identification with Mizrachi was based not only on its support for religious life in the State of Israel, but on broad philosophical principles with universal application: belief in anti-isolationism, human activism and creativity, and the Torah's ability to purify man and society.<sup>9</sup>

In *Kol Dodi Dofek* and elsewhere, the Rav expresses his strong belief that God's hand was manifest in the founding of the State of Israel.<sup>10</sup> Yet the fact of *yad Hashem* being present in Israel's creation does not necessarily mean that the State of Israel is "the first flowering of our redemption." Nor does the fact that the State is a gift from God mean that it is a value in itself. Rather, the Rav believes that it is an opportunity—an *important* opportunity but not the *only* one—for the Jewish people to protect its existence and pursue its destiny. The goal of combining the two covenants and thereby raising a people of fate to a holy nation of destiny is not limited to the Land of Israel. The State is an instrument that serves (or should serve) the larger values of the Jewish people and the Jewish faith.

## The Third Way

In short, the Rav believed that the State of Israel is nothing less than a gift from God that plays an important role in safeguarding Jews' physical survival and identity, and that has the potential to serve as a basis for attaining their destiny. Yet it is also *no more* than that. In a letter written in 1957, the Rav stakes out his position against two other Orthodox approaches:

*I agree with you that there is a third halakhic approach which is neither parallel to the position of those "whose eyes are shut" and reject [the significance of the State] nor the belief of those dreamers who adopt a completely positive stance to the point where they identify the State with the [fulfillment] of the highest goal of our historical and meta-historical destiny. This third approach (which is the normative one in all areas), I would allow myself to guess, would be positively inclined toward the State, and would express gratitude for its establishment out of a sense of love and devotion, but would not attach [to it] excessive value to the point of its glorification and deification.<sup>11</sup>*

Those "whose eyes are shut" are the Haredim, whom Rav Soloveitchik faults for refusing to

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<sup>9</sup> See also *Community, Covenant and Commitment*, 201–02:

*I see two elements in the Mizrachi: (1) An Israeli political party that deserves credit for most of the achievements of the religious community in Israel ... (2) A large movement committed to a specific ideology and worldview whose impact is significant both in Israel and in the Diaspora. This movement holds within its hand the answer to a serious dilemma: How can we insert our eternal [values] into the splendor of the modern world? How can we remain steadfast and strong in the very center of the modern society and sanctify the new and that which is occurring on a daily basis with utmost holiness? I cannot join up to any group or association that has emblazoned on its banner [the call]: "Separate from the vast world [and go] into dark caves and set yourselves apart from the world and the rest of the Jewish people." This retreat from the battle is the beginning of defeat and reflects a lack of faith in the eternity of Judaism and its ability to dominate the new world with its powerful currents and changing forms. According to the worldview of our movement, Judaism is immensely powerful and capable of achieving anything. The most developed society too, [even one] leaping and conquering new areas of the natural order, also requires our Torah, and only in it will it find satisfaction.*

<sup>10</sup> See, e.g., *Five Addresses*, 170–73. Regarding the question of whether to recite Hallel in response to this miracle, see *For Further Reference*, #2.

<sup>11</sup> *Community, Covenant and Commitment*, 163–64.

acknowledge the miraculous nature of the State's founding, denying its historical significance, and showing no interest in taking part in its development. The "dreamers" are the followers of Rav Kook, who regard the State as possessing inherent spiritual value and assign it an overwhelmingly important role in the unfolding of Jewish destiny. Before pinpointing where Rav Soloveitchik parts ways with them, we must first understand Rav Kook's overall approach to the significance of the State of Israel—a State that in his day was yet to be born.

Rav Kook believes that Judaism comprises two "ideas," the national and the spiritual.<sup>12</sup> These are not identical to fate and destiny. First, fate and destiny exist in a hierarchical relationship, while this is not so clear regarding the national and spiritual ideas. Second, the national idea means that the Jewish nation can express its inner essence only by exercising political sovereignty in the Land of Israel, while fate is a dimension of Jewish existence in all places and under all sovereignties. During the two thousand years of exile, Rav Kook believes, Judaism itself was deficient, for it lacked the national half of its identity. Secular Jewish nationalists, therefore, are to be regarded as "holy rebels," for although they reject the spiritual idea, they are helping foster a renaissance of Judaism itself through their restoration of the national idea. By reestablishing Jewish sovereignty in the Holy Land, they reconnect the Jewish nation to one of its two sources of vitality, hitherto missing, and thereby initiate an inexorable process of messianic redemption. Whether its founders are aware of it or not, the nascent State of Israel contains inherent spiritual value as "the foundation of God's seat in the world," and therefore, it constitutes "man's ultimate happiness."<sup>13</sup>

All such talk of deterministic historical processes, inborn essences, and holy rebellions is foreign to Rav Soloveitchik. He does not perceive any *inherent* value in sovereignty, other than fulfilling the specific mitzvah of settlement, nor does he assign any *inherent* spiritual value to the State, seeing it rather as a base from which to attain *other* objectives.<sup>14</sup> These objectives, fate and destiny, are the same ones Jews pursued during their long exile, since they can be attained in the Diaspora as well. Professor Gerald Blidstein points out that, unlike Rav Kook, Rav Soloveitchik does not accept the Zionist critique of Diaspora Jewish life. Therefore the Rav sees no need for a renaissance of Judaism, nor does he regard the secular Zionist rebellion against religion as a necessary stage in the dialectical unfolding of the Jewish essence.<sup>15</sup>

Furthermore, I would add, the Rav believes that if one can speak of a Jewish national character, it is not one that is inborn and essential, but rather one shaped by the nation's historical experiences. Not only does the Rav not speak of the "essence" of the Jewish people, he does not

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<sup>12</sup> For a succinct presentation of Rav Kook's views on this subject, see his essay, "*Le-Mahalakh ha-Ide'ot be-Yisrael*," in *Orot* (Jerusalem, 1985), 102–18.

<sup>13</sup> *Orot Yisrael* 6:7, in *Orot*, 160.

<sup>14</sup> In "*Yarhei Kallah*" lectures delivered in the summers of 1978 and 1981, Rav Soloveitchik suggested that the mitzvot of appointing judges in every city in Eretz Yisrael and eradicating idolatry in Eretz Yisrael are both fulfillments of the commandment of "possession and settlement" of the land. Based on these insights, R. Yair Kahn suggests that these two mitzvot are not merely additions to the literal fulfillment of "possession and settlement," but rather define its essence. In other words, mere sovereignty is not enough, but is instead a stepping-stone, or a *hekhsher mitzvah*, to the attainment of the larger goals of justice and divine worship. See his article, "*Leha'avir Gilulim min ha-Aretz*," *Alon Shevut* 145 (5755), 13–23.

<sup>15</sup> "On the Jewish People in the Writings of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik," in *Exploring the Thought of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik*, ed. R. Marc Angel (Hoboken, 1997), 307–08.

even speak of the sanctity of Eretz Yisrael as an inherent metaphysical property. Professor Blidstein reports that Rav Soloveitchik considered such thinking mythological: “I recall his developing the theme that the holiness of the land was not ‘mythological’ but a function of its providing the context for a holy society—again a fundamentally Maimonidean orientation.”<sup>16</sup> In a striking passage, the Rav writes that the idea of inherent sanctity approaches fetishism, the belief in the supernatural powers of physical objects:

*For [R. Yehudah Halevi and the Ramban], the attribute of kedushah, holiness, ascribed to the Land of Israel is an objective metaphysical quality inherent in the land. With all my respect for the Rishonim, I must disagree with such an opinion. I do not believe that it is halakhically cogent. Kedushah, under a halakhic aspect, is man-made; more accurately, it is a historical category. A soil is sanctified by historical deeds performed by a sacred people, never by any primordial superiority. The halakhic term kedushat ha-aretz, the sanctity of the land, denotes the consequence of a human act, either conquest (heroic deeds) or the mere presence of the people in that land (intimacy of man and nature). Kedushah is identical with man’s association with Mother Earth. Nothing should be attributed a priori to dead matter. Objective kedushah smacks of fetishism.*<sup>17</sup>

Clearly, Rav Kook and Rav Soloveitchik are working with very different sets of assumptions. Yet even within Rav Soloveitchik’s own school of thought, some have questioned the scant attention he paid to certain values that are consistent with and even congenial to his philosophy, and others have developed Rav Soloveitchik’s line of thought further than he himself may have. For example, one of his preeminent disciples, Rav Aharon Lichtenstein, discerns in Israel the possibility of leading a more organic and integrated existence, as opposed to the fragmented nature of life in the Diaspora. Even the mundane aspects of one’s life in Israel attain social and religious value by contributing to the stability and flourishing of the Jewish state, thereby lending one’s life a greater sense of wholeness. Furthermore, without denying the validity or value of Diaspora Jewish life, Rav Lichtenstein views Israel as the epicenter of Jewish life and the locus of the Jewish future. Above all, the sanctity of the land, even when understood in halakhic and not mythological terms, lends a special quality to religious observance in Eretz Yisrael and fosters a sense of being nestled within the divine presence. Indeed, these dimensions of Eretz Yisrael and of Jewish national life within it exerted a powerful pull on Rav Lichtenstein, to which he responded by making *aliyah*.<sup>18</sup> These elements are not foreign to Rav Soloveitchik, but neither does he highlight them. Professor Blidstein aptly comments:

*This image of the State of Israel as a potential embodiment of the broadest ethical and societal*

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 309.

<sup>17</sup> *The Emergence of Ethical Man*, 150. See also *Family Redeemed*, 64.

<sup>18</sup> See his “On *Aliya*: The Uniqueness of Living in *Eretz Yisrael*,” *Alei Etzion* 12 (5764), 15–22, available online at [www.haretzion.org/alei.htm](http://www.haretzion.org/alei.htm). In an essay exemplifying the Rav’s demand that his students think for themselves, that they be *talmidim* and not *hasidim*, R. Nathaniel Helfgot goes on to enumerate other components of Jewish national existence undeveloped by the Rav: Jewish autonomy as expressing *malkhut Yisrael*, the ability to apply Halakhah to national issues on all levels of governmental responsibility, the potential to develop a polity guided by Jewish values, and the consequent ability to serve as a “light to the nations.” See his “On the Shoulders of a Giant: Looking Back, Yet Looking Forward,” *Tradition* 39:3 (Fall 2006), 31–37.

*vocation of Judaism, a vocation based on a broad covenantal commitment, is perceived by many students of the Rav to be implicit in his teaching. Curiously (and regrettably?), this positive and challenging image does not recur frequently in the published texts available to us.*<sup>19</sup>

Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik saw himself in light of the biblical Joseph. The latter's constant preoccupation was to safeguard the continuity of Abraham's tradition when relocated into a different civilization. In the Rav's reading, Canaan and Egypt are not just locations but cultures—the simple and old vs. the sophisticated and new. In our day, the Rav felt, the tasks of perpetuating and applying the Torah within new environments would inevitably need to be pursued in both Israel and the Diaspora. He devoted his untiring efforts and creative energies to pursuing these tasks in the leading country of the West. At the same time, he involved himself and expended great concern in ensuring the Torah's continuity in the State of Israel and in shaping the character and future of the young state. It is now up to the next generation to carry forward his work in both centers of Jewish life.

## For Further Reference

1. **The mitzvah of settling the Land of Israel:** Rambam does not include this commandment in his *Sefer ha-Mitzvot*, but Rambam counts it as one of the mitzvot that should be added to Rambam's list (#4). While Rav Kook's followers make much of this Rambam, seeing it as a guiding factor for their socio-political activities and as a cornerstone of their worldview, Rav Yehuda Amital points out (in his book *Commitment and Complexity* [Jersey City, 2008], 106) that Rav Kook mentions it only once in his voluminous writings. It would seem that neither Rav Kook nor Rav Soloveitchik regards this as more than a mitzvah among mitzvot; therefore, Rav Kook bases his extraordinarily high evaluation of Jewish sovereignty upon other considerations, while Rav Soloveitchik does not assign sovereignty a privileged position among Jewish values. However, Rav Kook's disciples, with a narrower halakhic focus than their master, tethered their understanding of the overriding significance of Jewish sovereignty to this mitzvah (whose status is disputed among *Rishonim*) and thereby elevated "possession and settlement" to a preeminent place among mitzvot.

**Hallel on Yom ha-Atzma'ut:** There are various reports as to the Rav's position regarding the recitation of Hallel on Yom ha-Atzma'ut. However, even if we were to assume that Rav Soloveitchik opposed its recitation, Rav Aharon Lichtenstein cogently points out that one cannot derive from this ritual question any conclusions regarding the Rav's attitude toward Zionism or the State of Israel (see his "Rav Soloveitchik's Approach to Zionism," *Alei Etzion* 14 [5766], 21–24). He compares this to the opinion of the "eighty-five elders, among them several prophets," who regrettably felt that, for halakhic reasons, they could not acquiesce to Mordecai's and Esther's request to establish a new mitzvah of reading the *megillah* (*Yerushalmi, Megillah* 1:7). Does this mean that they denied that a miracle had taken place in Shushan, or that the great salvation of the Jews from Haman's plot had been unimportant? Analogously, Rav Lichtenstein suggests that Rav

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<sup>19</sup> Blidstein, *op cit.*

Soloveitchik recognized the magnitude of the miracle in his day, but did not necessarily feel that Halakhah warranted the creation of new rituals. Note also that Rav Soloveitchik felt that the true meaning and significance of events would become apparent only with the passage of time. Therefore, just as the Sages waited some time before declaring Hanukkah a holiday (*Shabbat* 21b), so too we should not be hasty in formulating new rituals after Israel's founding or after its astonishing victory in the Six Day War (reported by R. David Hartman, *Conflicting Visions* [New York, 1990], 23, 158; and *Nefesh ha-Rav*, 94)..

# Afterword

## Memorializing the Rav: Time and the *Masorah*

Rabbi Dr. David Shatz

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Editor, MeOtzar HoRav Series

*Editor's note: This essay by Dr. Shatz is reprinted, with minor modifications, from Memories of a Giant, a collection of eulogies for the Rav edited by Michael A. Bierman and originally published by the Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik Institute and Urim Publications in 2003, in commemoration of the 10th yahrzeit of the Rav. We publish the essay to mark the 20th yahrzeit as well. Memories of a Giant is being republished by Maimonides School and Urim Publications in 2013 in commemoration of the 20th yahrzeit. We thank Maimonides School for permission to reprint the essay.*

The death of a great individual often leads to exaggerated expressions of his virtues and inflated assertions of irreplaceability. With time the sense of loss is lifted, as new leaders emerge to take the person's place. Yet looking back at the eulogies delivered for the Rav זת"ל with the benefit of much hindsight, what is striking is that if delivered today they would be expressed with the very same pathos and sense of irreplaceability.

Today, a considerable time after the Rav's death, our sense of loss is every bit as acute as it was then—maybe even more so. Orthodoxy in America, while in some respects stronger today than in the Rav's time, suffers every day from his absence. Issue after issue inflames passions and divides the community, while no voice speaks as the final authority for his constituency. Over the years, different people proclaim what the Rav did or did not stand for, drawing from their perceptions various lessons for decisions confronting Orthodoxy today. There is thus an intense struggle to keep the Rav alive so that he may continue to be our guide. I offer here some reflections on that struggle. Whereas the eulogies in the book [*Mentor of Generations*—Ed.] are retrospective, focusing on what the Rav was, this essay is prospective, as it focuses on what the future holds.

Many devotees of the Rav harbor a worry. To those who knew him or of him in his lifetime, the Rav, for all that he seemed larger than life, was a tangible, accessible and extraordinarily vivid presence. Memories of his voice, his dynamism, and the aura radiating from his *shiurim* are seared into our consciousness. It is very natural for us to wish that the next generation of students and leaders will maintain the same level of reverence, affection and attentiveness to the Rav as we do. But lacking the first-hand exposure we had, will they?

A very short time ago, to present someone as a 20<sup>th</sup>-century figure was to confer an aura of contemporaneousness, of relevance, of vibrancy and vitality, even if (like Rav Kook) the thinker had died well before mid-century. But what happens in 2020 or 2050? At that point, saying that someone lived in the twentieth century will date him, freeze him in time, rendering him a figure of a bygone era. A person who was a vibrant force in the recent past may hold but marginal influence in the near future. In my generation, what the Rav said and did was *news*. For the next generation, it will be *history*. It will be a generation “*asher lo yada et yosef*—who did not know Joseph” (Ex. 1: 8) in the personal, experiential sense. They will not have a memory of the living presence we knew. Can we convey to another generation what the great figures of our generation represent?

This concern can only be exacerbated by the oft-heard claim that only those who knew the Rav on a personal level can understand what he stood for and how he thought. By stressing that the only way to understand him is through memories of his living presence, one implies that future generations cannot know him at all—surely a disheartening thought.

Such pessimism can and must be combatted. To begin with a small point, audio, video tapes and vivid photographs will help future generations relate to the past. But there is something far more fundamental. In truth, making personal contact a condition for understanding, appreciating and relating to a great figure contradicts one of the foundations of the Rav’s understanding of time and of the *masorah*.

The Rav distinguishes two ways a person can approach the past. One is to treat the past as dead and frozen, as no longer here. The other is to treat the past as something vital, flowing into the future, as a dimension that can come alive if we use it creatively. Time is not an insuperable barrier to knowing the sages of the tradition; with the right attitude, consciousness and sensibility, the past can be recovered.

The Rav often emphasized that despite the Halakhah’s emphasis on precise measurements of time, as in, for example, constructing the calendar and setting *zemannei tefillah* (times for prayer), our concept of a *masorah* is of a legacy that bursts through barriers of time.

*The consciousness of halakhic man ... embraces the entire company of the Sages of the masorah. He lives in their midst, discusses and argues questions of Halakhah with them, delves into and analyzes fundamental halakhic principles in their company. All of them merge into one time experience. He walks alongside Rambam, listens to R. Akiva, senses the presence of Abbaye and Rava. ... ein mitah u-geviyyah be-haburat hakhmei ha-kabbalah, there can be no death and expiration among the company of the Sages of the tradition. ... Both past and future become, in such circumstances, ever present realities.<sup>1</sup>*

Who cannot learn from the Rav’s endearing memory of his days as a little boy, hearing his father give *shiur* in his home, when the Rambam would be surrounded by “enemies,” *rishonim* wielding weapons of logic to refute him? R. Moshe Soloveitchik would come to the rescue with a powerful *sevara*, to the delight of young Yosef Dov: “Father saved the Rambam!!”<sup>2</sup> Look how

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<sup>1</sup> *Halakhic Man*, trans. Lawrence J. Kaplan (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1983), 120.

<sup>2</sup> See “U-Vikkashtem Mi-sham,” in *Ish ha-Halakhah: Galuy ve-Nistar* (Jerusalem, 1979), 230-32.

alive Rambam was for him then and in all his later years. “Now too we are friends. ... All the Sages of the masorah from Moses till today became my close friends. ...” We know next to nothing of the Rambam’s one-on-one conversations, but we live with him through his writings. How could we engage Hillel or R. Akiva or Ramban or Rashba or R. Akiva Eiger as we do, if first-hand physical acquaintance were a prerequisite? Which individual who learned in the Rav’s *shiur* can forget how he brought *rishonim* and *aharonim* alive, so they were sitting right there, in that world unto itself, his classroom? The concept that temporal and spatial distances can be overcome lies at the heart of our *masorah*. The choice to leap across those distances, to bring the past into the present, to engage the writings of past masters so as to keep them alive—that choice is in our hands and those of our descendants.

*Divreihem hen hen zikhronam*—the words of the righteous are their memorial, says R. Shimon ben Gamliel (*Yerushalmi Shekalim* 2:5). If we keep the Rav’s teachings alive, both his halakhic thought and his philosophy, we keep him alive for centuries to come. Disseminated with ardor, those teachings will keep him in the company of future generations. Realizing the nature of *masorah* as bursting through time can thus dissipate pessimism and lead to an energetic vitalization of the Rav in both Halakhah and mahashavah (philosophy).

The passage of time poses another challenge to those of us who want to see the Rav’s legacy perpetuated. As I’ve already implied, the Rav has left us two legacies—his Halakhah and his *mahashavah*. (I hasten to add that these must not be separated— he did more than anyone to bring them into a dynamic interaction). Talmudic and halakhic learning thrives today, but the world of *mahashavah* languishes. Already in his own time, the Rav felt that while his halakhic thought was being pursued passionately, his philosophy was largely ignored. It is obvious from the treasure trove of manuscripts that the Rav left at his death that philosophical works are an immense part of his legacy. He cared deeply that his students appreciate religious experience through philosophy.<sup>3</sup>

Rabbi Yitzhak Twersky z”l has made the point that the Rav used philosophy as part of his intellectual capital, as an interpretive tool, and that the philosophy is a *tzurah*, a form, in which he couched his *homer* (lit. matter), i.e., his ideas.<sup>4</sup> But the nature of this interpretive process is clarified in *The Lonely Man of Faith* in a way that might lead us to pessimism:

*When the man of faith interprets his transcendental awareness in cultural categories, he takes advantage of modern interpretive methods and is selective in picking his categories. The cultural message of faith changes, indeed constantly, with the flow of time, the shifting of the spiritual climate, the fluctuations of axiological moods, and the rise of social needs.*<sup>5</sup>

The separation proclaimed in this passage between the faith commitment and its cultural translation gives rise to an unsettling thought. The Rav’s philosophy plunges into intellectual controversies that raged during the 19th and early 20th century, but thereafter quieted, and it alludes often to philosophical schools whose day has passed. Much of his philosophical vocabulary is no longer in vogue. In other words, precisely because the Rav’s philosophy is an act of “cultural

<sup>3</sup> See “Religious Immaturity,” in Aaron Rakeffet-Rothkoff, *The Rav* (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav Publishing, 1999) 2:238-41.

<sup>4</sup> See Yitzhak Twersky, “The Rav,” *Tradition* 30, 4 (Summer 1996): 28-33.

<sup>5</sup> “The Lonely Man of Faith,” *Tradition* 7, 2 (Summer 1965): 64.

translation," precisely because it is so exquisitely sensitive to the spirit of his times, his more technical writings stand in danger of losing, over time, some of their vitality and relevance.

This is a paradox inherent in the genre of *Torah ve-hokhmah* or *Torah u-Madda*. We want thinkers to speak the language of their age. Yet the more a particular thinker's expressions of a Torah viewpoint are verbalized in the idioms and assumptions of his age, the more he takes account of his generation's needs and circumstances, the more he presents a union of Torah and cutting edge *madda*—the greater the danger that these expressions will eventually become dated and their enduring message lost. Add to this the facts that the Rav himself occasionally stresses the personal, subjective nature of his thought, that he prefers phenomenology (the description of religious consciousness) to logical argumentation on behalf of faith, and that he presents ostensibly contradictory viewpoints in different places— and the task of extracting stable and enduring lessons becomes intimidating indeed.

In response let me point out, first, that the concern with obsolescence is about the Rav's more strictly philosophic works and not about those works that are relatively free of technical philosophical vocabulary. The oft-quoted remark of a non-Orthodox admirer that "if I am not mistaken, people will still be reading him in a thousand years,"<sup>6</sup> is true of works like *al ha-Teshuvah*, even if there is a fear that other works may seem dated because of their less accessible vocabulary. More important, some rabbinic figures of the 19th century, for example, R. Samson Raphael Hirsch and R. Abraham Isaac Kook, flourished posthumously in the 20th, proving vibrant and influential even though they too reflected themes and approaches of their times. Rambam is the most enduring writer in Jewish history, yet *Guide of the Perplexed*, and even parts of *Sefer ha-Madda* in the *Mishneh Torah*, are shot through with Aristotelian and Neoplatonic jargon and formulations.

If Rambam traversed the temporal gap, it is because people found in him elements that transcend the particular context in which he wrote, so that those elements could be applied creatively in later times. Just so, what we need to do to perpetuate the Rav's thought is to find its timeless messages. We must feel the duty to expound his works in the idiom of contemporary men and women. Such themes as the dialectical character of religious existence, the need to combine intellect with emotion, the ongoing battle against evil, and the Halakhah as a source of Jewish philosophy— these and many more ideas can be framed in universal terms that give them ongoing relevance.

Historical studies of the Rav can also be of great importance. But we should develop such studies with an awareness of how a good history may address needs of the present. When R. Yitzhak Twersky z"l wrote history about Rambam or about law and spirituality in the sixteenth century in his capacity as a Harvard professor, he excelled at making the history contribute to an ongoing discussion. When a historian is skilled and thoughtful, he can make his subject relevant. It is to be hoped that histories of the Rav will not be written for history's sake alone, but with the larger objective of conveying his teachings and establishing their continuing relevance.

In emphasizing the need for spreading the Rav's teachings, I do not mean to minimize a very different way of memorializing him: stories. He himself often used stories of personalities in the

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<sup>6</sup> Rabbi Arnold Jacob Wolf in *Shema*, September 9, 1975.

thick of his own philosophical explorations.<sup>7</sup> In the period after the Rav died, I was struck by how much of the eulogizing of the Rav took place through storytelling. There were wonderful anecdotes about his charming relationship with first-graders in Maimonides; his concern for one of his *shamashim* (aides) who was going out on a date but didn't have the proper socks; his *hesed* toward the Irish Catholic housekeeper who had come on bad times; his hosting a party for a member of the YU housekeeping staff; and much more.

Why stories? The reason, I suspect, is twofold. First, the Rav was such a towering figure that we needed to remind ourselves of his deep humanity. Second, storytelling does not seek to display everything at once, a task that is simply undoable. Faced with the difficulty of articulating what this prodigious man stood for, we turned to glimpses. I would stress that the stories are valuable, not only because of what they say about the Rav's humility and R. Hayyim-like kindness (R. Hayyim Soloveitchik was—as his *matzevah* attests—*rav ha-hesed*), but also because of the way they illustrate motifs of his philosophy. The story about his helping a first-grader who had been expelled from class because she didn't know the *Humash* assignment illustrates beautifully, and concretizes, his words describing the Torah community: “The teaching community is centered around an adult, the teacher, and a bunch of young vivacious children, with whom he communicates and communes. ‘Yesh lanu av zaken ve-yeled zekunim katan ‘‘ We have an old father and a young child’’” (Gen. 44:20).<sup>8</sup>

Similarly, the many stories of the Rav's own *hesed* reflect a theme that is utterly central to his thought concerning the Jewish value system, from his writings on Zionism to his endorsement of technology to his analysis of the nature of teaching. *Hesed*, he stated in an address to Maimonides school, is the password of the Jew. The stories bring out not only the person but the integrity, the unity, between the teacher and his teaching, *ha-rav u-mishnato*. Storytelling and philosophizing are not mutually exclusive; as the Rav did, we must bring these genres together. Indeed, precisely by fusing personal reminiscences with learned exposition, the eulogies for him brought out many dimensions of the Rav, and ultimately the wholeness of his thought and personality.

The challenge of perpetuating the Rav's legacy is great. But so is the opportunity to enrich the hearts and minds of generations to come. We need to engage his writings, extract the timeless messages in the time-bound parts of his oeuvre, and relate his biography to motifs of his thought. In this way we may see illustrated yet again that great principle of *masorah*: “There is no death and expiration among the company of the Sages of the tradition.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> [Note added in 2013: For analyses of this trend and the reasons behind it, see Alex Sztuden, “Why Are There Stories in *Halakhic Man?*,” in *Rav Shalom Banayikh: Essays Presented to Rabbi Shalom Carmy*, ed. Hayyim Angel and Yitzchak Blau (Jersey City, NJ: Ktav, 2012), 313-329. See also R. Reuven Ziegler, *Majesty and Humility: The Thought of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik* (Jerusalem and New York: Urim Publications, 2012), 96-103, 203-212, and his “Hidden Man, Revealed Man: The Role of Personal Experience in Rav Soloveitchik's Thought,” *Ha-Har Ha-Tov: That Goodly Mountain*, ed. Reuven Ziegler, Shira Schreier, and Yitzhak S. Recanati (Alon Shevut: Yeshivat Har Etzion, 2012), 48-56.]

<sup>8</sup> “The Community,” *Tradition* 17, 2 (Spring 1978): 23.

<sup>9</sup> I thank Dr. Joel Wolowelsky and Rabbi Reuven Ziegler for their comments.

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**9 – 9:30 a.m.**

Exhibit Viewing

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**9:30 a.m.**

**Welcome and Introductory Remarks**

Rabbi Joel Schreiber

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**9:45 – 11:30 a.m.**

Presentation

**"Multiple Faces of the Rav"**

Moderator: Rabbi Yona Reiss

*Max and Marion Grill Dean, RIETS*

Dr. Atarah Twersky

*Former Chair of School Committee  
at Maimonides School, daughter  
of Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik zt"l*

Rabbi Hershel Schachter

*Rosh Yeshiva, RIETS*

Dr. David Shatz

*Faculty, Stern College for Women*

Rabbi Kenneth Brander

*The David Mitzner Dean, CJF*

**11:45 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.**

Keynote Lecture

**Mesorah and Modernity:**

**The Role of the Rav**

Rabbi Mayer Twersky

*Rosh Yeshiva, RIETS*

**12:45 – 1:45 p.m. Lunch**

Lunch option available

Please see website for details

Remarks by Rabbi Marvin Bienenfeld, Event Chair

**2 – 3:45 p.m.**

**Breakout Sessions I and II**

See below for details

**4 p.m. Mincha**

**Morning Plenary Broadcast Live at yutorah.org**

**2 – 2:45 p.m.**

Breakout Session I

**Derech Halimud  
of the Rav**

Rabbi Hershel Schachter

Rabbi Menachem

Genack

*Roshei Yeshiva, RIETS*

**Rav Soloveitchik On Interfaith Relations:  
Guidelines, Limitations and Controversies**

Dr. David Berger

*Dean and Ruth and I. Lewis Gordon Professor of Jewish  
History, Bernard Revel Graduate School of Jewish Studies*

Dr. David Shatz

*Faculty, Stern College for Women*

**The Importance of the Rav's  
Teachings in Modern Society**

Rabbi Dr. Jacob J. Schacter

*University Professor of Jewish History and Jewish  
Thought*

*Senior Scholar, CJF*

**3 – 3:45 p.m.**

Breakout Session II

**Prayer: Privilege and Practice**

Rabbi Shalom Carmy

*Assistant Professor of Jewish Philosophy and Bible, Yeshiva College*

Rabbi Michael Taubes

*Rosh Yeshiva and Head of School at the Marsha Stern Talmudical Academy -  
Yeshiva University High School for Boys*

**Relating to Non-Orthodox: Engaging  
the Reform and Conservative**

Rabbi Fabian Schonfeld

*Rabbi Emeritus, Young Israel of Kew Gardens Hills*

Rabbi Julius Berman

*Chairman Emeritus, RIETS Board of Trustees*

Registration required, please visit [www.yu.edu/the-rav](http://www.yu.edu/the-rav)

\*Please note: Parking is available to those who register for the event online  
For more information about this event, please contact [rav-tribute@yu.edu](mailto:rav-tribute@yu.edu)

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לזכר נשמת הרבנית טוביא בת שבת הלוי ע"ה



ישיבת רבנו יצחק אלחנן

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