My Story  
By Sarah Bracha Shuraytz

“Yesterday, I woke up at 6:59 and I was so tired, so I pressed snooze, and then I didn’t get up until 8:23, and then it took a while until I decided to wear my blue shirt—you know, the one with the sparkly lines—and then I davened, and after that I was so hungry because I hadn’t eaten anything since 10:00 the night before, so I quickly had coffee and a granola bar, and then I ran to my 9:00 class and ....”

When you tell a story about yourself, you put in all the details. It is personal. When you are telling a story about someone else, even if it is a close friend, you do not spend nearly as much time on all the fine points. Perhaps you do not know them. Perhaps they are just less relevant to you.

On Seder night, we proclaim about the mitzvah of maggid, “The more one tells of the story, the more praiseworthy it is.” There are other commandments about which we might think “the more the better,” such as Torah study, giving charity, and visiting the sick.

Why then do we only discuss quantity in relation to telling the story of yetzias Mitzrayim? Rabbi Immanuel Bernstein in Darkness to Destiny explains that expounding the story of our redemption is not just doing more of the mitzvah; it is accomplishing the mitzvah on an entirely different level.

The essence of our mission on Seder night is for each person to see himself as if he personally came out of Mitzrayim. When we share more details about the story of our salvation, we show that this is our personal story. This is the most praiseworthy way of fulfilling the mitzvah. In the same paragraph discussed above, we also say that even if we are all very intelligent, we are obligated to repeat the story. The Hagaddah presents several excuses why we would not feel that we need to talk about the Exodus: we are all wise and familiar with the story, we are all understanding and able to infer the implied meaning of the literal text, we all know the entire Torah. Nevertheless, the Hagaddah states that even if all of these statements are true, we would still be obligated to talk about yetzias Mitzrayim. Why is this so?

The reason is because it is not about us. It is not about making sure that we know the story. We retell the events to ensure that future generations know all the details. We are fulfilling the command, “And you shall relate to your child on that
day, saying…” (Shemos 13:8). The essence of the mitzvah is to share the story with the next generation, so they too can be grateful to Hashem for redeeming us.

As discussed above, sharing a story is so much more effective when it is personal. Think about your life. When your parents share stories about their childhood, you listen more attentively when they tell you about how they were naughty in school and about their Purim costumes than when they speak about the general political issues of the time. When they talk about some distant ancestor, perhaps eight generations back, it does not draw your attention nearly as much as hearing the personal tales of the parent you live with, know, and love. So, let us make it personal. Let us delve into the details to ensure we can relate the story of the Exodus with the enthusiasm of someone talking about an incident that actually happened to him.

A large section of Maggid consists of verses from the Torah that highlight different parts of the story. After each major quote, we recite other verses that explain the main idea. One of the quotes is, “The Egyptians did evil to us.” But the verses that follow, which are about Pharaoh plotting to outsmart the Jews so they would not overrun Egypt, do not seem to provide much explanation. These verses make it sound like Pharaoh is afraid of the Jews, so how do they illustrate the evil that the Egyptians did to us?

The literal translation of the verse is actually, “the Egyptians made us evil.” Pharaoh knew that if he suddenly told his people to persecute the Jews, they might be unnerved. He, therefore, needed to create a setting that would make his people agree that the Jews deserved persecution. Consequently, Pharaoh made the Jews look bad by spreading the belief that they were using Egyptian resources to grow strong, with the eventual goal of rising up and taking over the land. Thus, it can be said that Pharaoh made us evil. Then, when Pharaoh started mistreating the Jews, everyone assumed he was merely doing everything he could to protect his people from them.

Rabbi Shlomo Kluger also comments on the wording of the phrase, “the Egyptians made us evil.” He notes that the unusual structure adds emphasis to the root of the word, which, aside from meaning “evil,” also means a “fellow man.” This is because Pharaoh viewed the Jews as “fellow men” who were on the same page as he was. He knew that if he were in the Jews’ position, in terms of numbers and strength, he would certainly plan to overthrow the ruler and take over the land. In other words, the Egyptians acted on the assumption that we were their equals, their fellow men, and that we would act the same way that they would.

Thus, they afflicted us terribly, crushing our spirit to the extent that we would not even dream of fighting back. They did not have us build storage cities because they needed them—they did so to “afflict us with the burdens.” The Talmud says they had us build the cities on unstable ground, so that after the Jews put in days of
backbreaking labor, the buildings would collapse, and they would have to start building all over again the next day. The Egyptians hoped this would discourage us and destroy our spirit.

“And then we cried out to Hashem.” According to the actual verses in Sefer Shemos (2:24-26), we did not even cry out. We merely groaned because of the terrible labor. Hashem, with His infinite mercy, accepted our groans as prayers and responded by redeeming us.

These are just some of the details of the story that we should discuss at the Seder on Pesach. Human nature is such that we forget details over time, so we must review them in order to fulfill the commandment to tell the story at such length that we can say, “This is my story.” If so, we will accomplish the mitzvah of feeling that we personally were taken out of Egypt and of effectively transmitting the story to future generations.

Based on Darkness to Destiny by Rabbi Immanuel Bernstein and Midrash Haggadah—The Malbim Haggadah.

Seeing *Kriyas Yam Suf* Every Day

By Zahava Pfeifer and Dina Resnick

*Ketzias Mitzrayim* is an event that is full of miracles. One of them is the neis of *Kriyas Yam Suf*. However, with most people focused on the makkos, this amazing wonder of Hashem does not get the attention it deserves. Perhaps, a mashal from Rabbai Chaggai Vilosky can help us properly appreciate the neis of *Kriyas Yam Suf* as well as teach us a powerful lesson for life.

There once was a king who wanted to show his love for his people. He decided to make an exquisite statue of a horse and place it in the center of town. By doing so, he hoped the people would realize that he truly appreciated them. The king went to the finest sculptor, who was known for his precision and his ability to make a statue look as authentic as possible. After much time, money, and effort, the finished statue was put out on display in the center of the city. It looked as real and as beautiful as an actual horse. Day after day, the townspeople passed by without seeming to even notice or mention its beauty. The king was very upset; he had invested so much in order to create this horse as a gift for his people and they ignored it. How could this be? One of the king’s advisors suggested an explanation: perhaps no one had acknowledged the statue’s appearance because it looked so real. Perhaps, the people could not even tell it was a sculpture because its features were so exact. The advisor suggested that the king split the statue in half, so that, when the people would pass by, they would realize that it was not actually a horse, but rather a masterpiece of art given to them as a gift from their king. The king had the statue split and, as expected, the people passing the horse were now awestruck. The masterpiece now drew their attention. It was now clear that the horse was not living, rather a symbol of the king’s love for them.
We must work to be able to recognize our Creator in the ordinary, not merely in the miraculous.

- Zahava Pfeifer and Dina Resnick

The same principle applies to Kriyas Yam Suf. Hashem created a magnificent world with intricate wonders collectively known as nature. We tend to just sail through life, without noticing the beauty, complexity, and details of this world that Hashem created. We tend to view nature as ordinary instead of acknowledging and appreciating its beauty as His gift. When Hashem split the Yam Suf, the world finally saw that it was He who had made the sea. The One who created nature had shown His hand in it. Everything in nature is a wonder created by Hashem. It is our job to recognize and acknowledge its beauty and intricate design, without waiting for something to miraculously split.

The same is true on a spiritual level. There are times in our lives where we see Hashem clearly. We see the Yam Suf splitting, the split horse statue, and it is obvious that He is constantly involved in our lives. Our avodah is to see Hashem in the complete horse statue, in nature, in our day-to-day lives where things get tough and His presence is not obvious. We must work to be able to recognize our Creator in the ordinary, not merely in the miraculous.
From Slavery To Purpose

By Elisheva Marcus

The numerous customs, practices, and halakhos that pertain to Pesach symbolize one of the main underlying themes that characterizes this holiday - namely, the Jewish redemption from Egyptian servitude. A prime example of such a custom is the drinking of four cups of wine, each of which symbolizes one of the four expressions used to describe redemption: והוצאתי, והצלתי, גאלתי, ולקחתי. Regarding this practice, the Talmud (Pesachim 117) teaches us that one may not drink between the third and the fourth cup. The Imrei Emes explains this halakhah by referring back to the corresponding redemptive phrases mentioned above and the connection between them.

When Hashem acted as our Redeemer, redeeming us from Egyptian slavery, He immediately gave us the Torah, thereby taking us as His nation, as the ones who would serve Him in the most optimal way possible.

Hashem did not grant us freedom simply for the sake of freedom itself; in fact, the Torah attributes very little, if any, value to a freedom that comes devoid of an overarching objective or goal. The geulah we were granted was for the purpose of Matan Torah - the first stage of a two-step process. Rav Meir Shapiro insightfully notes that the gematria of יציאת מצרים is 891; the same as the gematria of ונעשה ונשמע, since the whole purpose of מצרים יציאת was ונשמע, the acceptance of the Torah that would concretize our status as a free nation subject only to the will of God. Since the third and fourth cup symbolize two redemptive stages that are truly indivisible, one may not create a hefsek (a pause) between them.

This bond between the Exodus and the giving of the Torah is illustrated in the following interpretation as well. The passuk (Shemos 56:67) states, "וְלֹא יִתְנַן לְמַשְׁחִית לָאו לְבָהוֹרֵס לְגַנָּה" (Yael) when Hashem saw the blood on the Jewish doorposts, He forbade the "משחית" (the "destroyer") from harming those inside. My great-grandfather, Rav Aharon Soloveichik zt"l, understood the משחית as a form of freedom itself. When one is presented with sudden liberty unaccompanied by a broader objective, he is faced with what seems to be a Divine blessing but is really threatening in nature. Indeed, history has demonstrated time and again how national liberation movements were often followed by long periods of intense chaos and violence. Whether it be the French Revolution of the 18th century, the Bolshevik revolution of the 20th century, or the relatively recent Arab Spring, the victims of oppressive regimes overthrew the existing social order and in doing so, many times, abandoned any notion of moral behavior, becoming criminals themselves. Those at the vanguard of what was considered a "liberation" later initiated the mass murder of innocent bystanders, the very people they claimed to be liberating. By יציאת מצרים, however, the Jews were not left with this void that often follows freedom; they were immediately given a few
mitzvot and eventually, the entire Torah. Our freedom was not characterized by a lack of responsibility or obligation; rather, we were blessed with a real cheirus, a cheirus that is realized through a commitment to that which is charus al ha-luchos - the Torah as etched on the luchos.

When studying and contemplating the nature of our redemption, the single object that evokes for many the imagery of salvation is matzah, the unleavened bread Jews hastily prepared as they hurried out of Egypt. Yet, as Rav Mayer Twersky points out, although the matzah acts as the quintessential symbol of salvation, it is simultaneously referred to as “lechem oni”, the bread of our suffering and poverty. How can the matzah itself symbolize two seemingly contradictory symbols? As humans, we are intellectually limited to that which we experience, so to us, salvation and slavery seem like two opposites, in which one negates the other. In reality, however, redemption is not a termination of suffering; rather, it is the culmination of it. Slavery and salvation belong to one indivisible process - the avdus creates the cheirus by shaping us into individuals worthy of freedom. The suffering the Jews underwent in Mitzrayim, in the כור הברזל, molded them into a nation ready and worthy of becoming Hashem’s chosen people.

As one of the first few generations living in a post-World War II world, the concept of liberation is not foreign to us nor is it something we take lightly. Our nation’s collective memory is still seething, still recovering, still rebuilding from the unprecedented blow it was dealt during the Holocaust. We recognize that the liberation Hashem has so graciously bestowed upon us is accompanied by a mission, a national mission that is to be carried out by each one of us as individuals. It is now our responsibility to carry on our mesorah, to preserve that which others attempted to obliterate by re-affirming our unwavering commitment to the Torah, the spiritual guide that assures our eternal existence. As we celebrate our cheirus this Pesach, let us not forget the very nature of our freedom as illustrated by the words of Rav Yehuda Halevi - “Slaves of time - slaves of slaves are they; a slave of The Master of All, he alone is free.”

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- Elisheva Marcus
Learning To Care

By Meira Sheffey

There is a halakhah brought down in the Shulchan Arukh that recommends one begin learning Hilkhos Pesach 30 days before Yom Tov. Presumably, this is because there are so many halakhos involved, it is always helpful to have a reminder. The Rama adds to this halakhah an addendum stating that it is customary for people to buy wheat and distribute it to the poor before Pesach. What is the connection between these two halakhos?

Rav Yaakov Galinsky, the famed maggid from Bnei Brak, sheds light on the connection between these two seemingly unrelated halakhos. In his sefer, he relates a story that happened to him during World War Two. Towards the beginning of the Germans’ conquest of Europe, they made a pact which left Lithuania a free country. This was pure hashgachah pratis, because it created a safe oasis for the Jews in the midst of war-torn Europe. As a result, many seized the opportunity to seek refuge in Lithuania, including Rav Galinsky and many yeshiva students.

Living in the city at the time was the great gadol, Rav Chaim Ozer Grodzinski, the Torah leader of European Jewry. With the help of a friend, Rav Galinsky was able to secure a morning appointment to meet this Torah giant. The night before his appointment, Rav Galinsky did not sleep. He was learning Masekhes Yevamos at the time, and, anticipating that Rav Grodzinski would ask him questions about what he was learning, he spent the whole night reviewing.

When he arrived at Rav Grodzinski’s house the next morning, he found a line of thirty people before him. Each person had a sad look on his face due to all the tzaros of the war, and each wanted to unburden himself to the Rav and ask for advice at this trying time. After waiting on line, Rav Galinsky was called for his turn. He felt elated to be standing in front of the Rav who was a leader of Klal Yisroel.

Rav Galinsky was sure that the Rav would first ask him about what he was learning and what chiddushim he had thought of on the topic. Unexpectedly, the Rav’s first question was about the last time he had contact with his parents. Rav Galinsky answered that he had not heard from his parents in over six months, because they stayed on the Russian side, while he ran to the German side and came to Vilna. Then, Rav Grodzinski continued to ask another surprising question. He asked if Rav Galinsky had a blanket to sleep with. Fortunately, Rav Galinsky had a blanket, and immediately Rav Grodzinski seemed visibly more at ease. Rav Grodzinski then asked a third unexpected question: “Would I be able to see your shoes?” Embarrassed, Rav Ga-
linsky removed his worn-out shoes and showed them to him. Immediately, Rav Grodzinski gave him money to buy a pair of shoes. He reassured Rav Galinsky that his house was open twenty-four hours a day if he ever needed any help. After seeing how much Rav Chaim Ozer cared about him, Rav Galinsky started to cry. He felt loved and cared for.

This story reveals the connection between the halakhah of learning Hilkhos Pesach in advance and helping the poor before Pesach. Rav Grodzinski made it clear that when a person sits down to learn all the intricate halakhos of Pesach, it is very nice. However, something that is “tov ve’yafeh” (even nicer) is to make sure that poor people have what to eat before Pesach.