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New Moon, New You

By Shaindy Greenberg

If you take a look at the middle of *Parshas Bo*, you find *Benei Yisroel* in the midst of a greatly anticipated occasion. Right before *makas bechoros*, which the nation knows will lead to its redemption, Hashem tells Moshe and Aharon to tell *Benei Yisroel* that it is incumbent upon them to declare the new moon. Why? Why does Hashem choose this moment to give them their first *mitzvah*? They have not been redeemed yet; they are still in Egypt under Pharaoh's rule. Why didn't Hashem wait until they were free? Furthermore, what is the significance of this *mitzvah*? Why does it merit

to be the very first commandment given to *Benei Yisroel*?

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch gives meaning to this seemingly misplaced *mitzvah*. Up until now, Rav Hirsch explains, Moshe and Aharon were entrusted with the job of executing the *makos*. These great miracles made it known to the Egyptians that Hashem runs the world. The *makos* were performed, in part, to show Pharaoh who is really in charge and to get him to humble himself before the Creator of the Universe and His people. Nonetheless, despite the

overt miracles, Pharaoh remained stubborn and refused to recognize Hashem. To deter *Benei Yisroel* from adopting this terrible trait of Pharaoh's, Hashem gave them their first *mitzvah*. This *mitzvah* of *kiddush hachodesh* serves to train *Benei Yisroel* to refocus their thoughts and their actions upon Hashem, upon His constant creation and renewal, and to reconnect to the truth. Hashem could not delay in redeeming *Benei Yisroel* from the hands of the stubborn, egocentric Pharaoh. *Benei Yisroel* saw that someone was capable of ignoring outstanding wonders, so Hashem did not wait to give this *mitzvah* to serve as a reminder of the Creator and His omnipotence.



In order to declare a new moon and therefore the beginning of a new month, two witnesses need to approach *beis din* to tell them they saw the new moon. The witnesses are thoroughly questioned about its appearance, and then *beis din* decides if it is indeed *Rosh Chodesh*. However, if there is a reason, the *beis din* is allowed to intimidate the witnesses not to give

testimony to the new moon or they could try to disqualify them. For example, this would occur if the *beis din* did not want *Yom Kippur* to fall out on Shabbos. From these laws we see that Hashem really gave *Benei Yisroel* the power to determine the beginning of the month. It is not solely dependent on the sun and moon's positions in the sky, but rather it is up to the Jewish court to decide and anytime when it appears that the moon is again getting its light from

“Hashem wants us to find the light that He shines onto this world, despite the darkness that may be found...”

the sun is considered valid according to Jewish law. Just like two witnesses and the *beis din* find the sun's light on the moon and thereby determine *Rosh Chodesh*, so, too, Hashem wants us to find the light that He shines onto this world, despite the darkness that may be found in Jewish history.

The *mitzvah* of *kiddush hachodesh* teaches us many lessons. The time frame that Hashem chose to give it to us serves to counteract any negative lessons we may have learned from Pharaoh, who chose to ignore Hashem's obvious presence in the world. *Kiddush hachodesh* reminds us every month of the truths of this world, of Hashem's omnipotence and constant intervention, and it serves as an impetus for change. Seeing these truths can help us become renewed people. Also, remember that Hashem wants us to determine *Rosh Chodesh*. He wants us to find Him every month, even if we are experiencing darkness, and to remember that He is always there.

A Feast of Thanks

By Shira Kosowsky

Sippur yetzias mitzrayim. One of only two *mitzvos* from the *Torah* which we are obligated to fulfill on *seder* night, and the reason for the entire production. It is the recounting of the tale of how we were saved from Egypt, taken out in a blaze of glory to become Hashem's chosen nation over three-thousand years ago. When considering the structure of the night, however, one may notice that the goal of storytelling is not accomplished in a normal manner. In fact, the storytelling part of the *seder*, *maggid*, begins with paragraphs unrelated to *yetzias mitzrayim* and the story itself is told in a pretty strange way, going through each *passuk* and *darshening* it. How does the reality of the *seder* fit with its supposed goal?

There is another explanation for what the true goal of *seder* night is. The Rambam says that the purpose of the *seder* is *hoda'ah*, giving thanks



to Hashem for rescuing us from slavery in Egypt, and that is the goal of the *mitzvah*. Examining the events of seder night through this lens sheds light on many areas that would otherwise be confusing. For example, in the “*ma nishtana*” we say that on all other nights we eat *chametz* and



matzah, when, in reality, we generally only have *chametz*. The reason we say both is to be reminiscent of the *korban todah*, for which one had to bring loaves of both bread and *matzah* and have a *seudas hoda'ah* with friends and family to publicize the miracle that he or she had experienced. Seder night is essentially a *seudas hoda'ah* thanking Hashem for taking us out of Egypt, and the *korban pesach* was like a *korban todah*, hence the question of why this night we have only *matzah*.

This also explains the strange way we recount the story itself in *maggid*. Since the seder is a celebration of our gratitude to Hashem, we give a recap of the events that are worthy of our thanks, and take the *pesukim* from *bikkurim*, as both the seder and *bikkurim* are about giving thanks to Hashem. In “*avadim hayinu*,” we say that even if we were all wise and learned we would be obligated to tell over the story of *yetzias mitzrayim* at the seder, and the reason for that is also *hoda'ah*. We are telling over the story to help us appreciate all that Hashem did for us and to fuel our gratitude, making it a necessity for everyone, regardless of intelligence or prior knowledge.

“We are telling over the story... to fuel our gratitude”

In the crazy times that we are living through, it is more important than ever to be thankful for all that Hashem does for us. Seder night is a time for us to show our gratitude to Hashem, not only for the miracles He performed for us as a nation when leaving Egypt, but also for the miracles He has blessed us with every day since. No matter what our *sedarim* look like this year, we need to appreciate everything Hashem gives us, the big miracles and the ones we no longer

perceive as miraculous. And *be'ezras Hashem*, we will have our *se'udas hoda'ah* in *Yerushalayim*, *be-meherah be-yamenu*, amen.

Based on a class given by Rav Immanuel Bernstein

Achieving Liberation Through Limitation

By Ariella Azizi

Every year we recount our redemption from Egypt by celebrating *Pesach*. On *Pesach*, we abstain from eating leavened bread and instead we eat *matzah*, in order to recognize this miraculous historical event. This all seems strange, doesn't it? As we approach the holiday of *Pesach*, we must ask ourselves: Why, on the holiday in which we celebrate our freedom, do we restrict ourselves to "the bread of our affliction?" Shouldn't the symbol of our freedom be expressed by the ability to feast on any delicacy rather than just *matzah*?



“true freedom is... one’s ability to limit oneself rather than being controlled by physical impulses and desires.”

In a lecture, Shmuel Reichman addresses this question in delineating the difference between restriction under slavery as compared to that of freedom. He conveys the idea that limitation is a key piece in both slavery and freedom. The distinguishing factor between the two is that while slavery entails forceful limitation, true freedom is characterized by one’s ability to limit oneself rather than being controlled by physical impulses and desires. Additionally, an article published by Hidabroot, cites the Maharal [who] explains that “a person

is enslaved, in an existential sense, when he is attached to things that are external to his essence [...] In contrast, a free person is one who recognizes that his true essence is his soul, accordingly, he is in no danger of becoming bound by his possessions.” The external powers mentioned by the Maharal may range from physical items to one’s own emotions. This idea may be illustrated further by a concept expressed by the Vilna Gaon. In classical society, he explains, the person of greatest status was the ruler, the king. Yet, such a title was not restricted to only one who wears a crown and bears a scepter. Rather, the Vilna Gaon uses the Hebrew word for king, *melech*, as an acronym for one who is truly befitting of such a high status in society: A *melech* is one who allows his *mo’ach*, brain, to reign over his *lev*, heart, which then dictates to his *kaved*, liver, which represents physical behavior. This idea is meant to teach that the one who is most powerful is he who inverts the natural order: instead of man being controlled by his base physical tendencies, he labors to live a life dictated by logic. This idea is mirrored by the *mishnah* in *Avot* that states, “Who is mighty? One who conquers his inclination.” Thus, the greatest exhibition of strength is found in one who displays willpower. Such a person allows his mind to free him from the shackles of his base inclinations.

“...the greatest exhibition of strength is found in one who displays willpower.”



Self-restraint is what ultimately makes us Hashem’s people. The verses in *kiddush* substantiate this idea. After mentioning the remembrance of the Exodus, we recall that Hashem has sanctified us. In juxtaposing the two, we draw a causal relationship between the two concepts: freedom from Egypt is linked to Hashem making us *kadosh*.

Every week, we say *kiddush* over wine to show that we are elevating a drink to a spiritual entity because even such a physical object has tremendous potential for *kedushah* and likewise, the opposite. In Ruchi Koval’s *Conversations with God*, she writes, “We declare on *Shabbat* that the entire world and everything in it is yours, and that we use it all week

and step back on *Shabbat*— to remember what it's all about and use it for a higher purpose.” If we understand the Ramchal’s definition of *kedushah*, in which one links the mundane to the holy, then this order of *kiddush* expresses the profound idea that it is through our ability to uplift the physical that we are deemed worthy of redemption and of being called Hashem’s nation.

On *Pesach*, we express our royalty by exercising self-control. Only once we commit to eight days of *perishut* (self-restraint) will we be able to attain true *kedushah*. This is true freedom, true *cherut*. Dr. Judith Mishell clearly expresses this idea, writing that while the secular world believes that freedom is defined as a lack of limitations, the *Torah* view is that, “Freedom means being led by the rider, not by the horse, that is, by the soul, not the body” (Mishell, *Beyond Your Ego*, 374). With this lesson in mind, perhaps we can actually enjoy the *matzah* this *Pesach* instead of just waiting longingly for the time when we can finally eat *challah* again. May this *Pesach* be an incredible experience where separation will ultimately breed true connection, true *kedushah*, as we gain the title of Hashem’s holy nation.

“...what is the goal of the *Pesach Seder*?”

Making the Memories a Reality

By Rivqua Levin

Imagine you are in *mitzrayim*. You were a slave for 210 years, and now you are standing right before the Red Sea. You have just experienced the ten plagues and you are about to go free. The excitement is real and tangible; yet this true excitement is very difficult to feel now. The Exodus happened many years ago and even if we let

the memory drift through our minds, we do not always feel the excitement. The question we have to ask ourselves is: what is the goal of the *Pesach seder*? What are we trying to achieve? Are we just sitting at the *seder* to learn a new interpretation on the *haggadah* or discover a new *gematria*? Or is there something deeper and more intricate that we are trying to achieve?

There is a fascinating Ramban at the end of *Parshas Bo* that explains that there are many non-believers that say that the world existed forever, and therefore there is no creator. Many



also suggest that there *is* a creator, but the creator is not actively involved in the world. Alternatively, one could say there is a creator that is aware of the happenings in the world, but the creator chooses not to get involved, or maybe the creator does get involved but has limited capability. The

Ramban explains that the whole story of *Benei Yisrael* leaving *mitzrayim* contradicts all of these possibilities. The fact that there were so many wonders and miracles prove that there has to be a creator who is aware of what is going on in this world. He has the capability to interfere with the laws of nature to redeem His nation. He performed remarkable miracles to show He is limitless. Because of this, the memory of leaving Egypt had to be preserved for future generations. *Tefillin*, *kiddush* on *Shabbos*, and the recitation of *shema* three times a day all serve as reminders for the Exodus from Egypt. The Ramban says that the reason why we need these reminders is to remind us that even though open miracles do not happen every day, at the time of *yetzias mitzrayim* it was very clear that Hashem was actively involved in the world. The splitting of the sea was obviously not by chance; it was very clear that G-d was involved.

The whole goal of the *Pesach seder* is to see ourselves as if we left Egypt. We have to re-experience that *emunah* that we had when we were standing before the *Yam Suf* along with the complete faith that Hashem is in control. *Pesach* is an eight-day convention of *emunah*. The whole point of *Pesach* is to see and feel how Hashem is actively involved in our lives. The Sefas Emes explains that if one

“Our job is to remove all of the doubt... and recognize that Hashem has the ultimate power.”

was to write “leaving Egypt” in Hebrew it would be written as “*yetziah mi-mitzrayim*”, yet we call it *yetzias mitzrayim* which he interprets to mean “removing the *mitzrayim* from within you”! Our job is to remove all of the doubt within ourselves, including the arrogance that tells us that we are in control, and recognize that Hashem has the ultimate power.

The whole point of going through *mitzrayim* was to redefine our relationship with this world and with Hashem. When you go through a hardship your mindset changes. By eating the *matzah*, we are internalizing

“The Seder... is the time to introspect and tap into the holy power of the night.”

the message of *emunah* trying to ingrain it into our souls. The Zohar explains that *matzah* is bread of *emunah*. The only time of the year we have a *mitzvah* to eat something specific is on the seder night. This year on seder night, when everyone is quiet and chomping on their *matzah*,

use the opportunity to think about what it means to be free. This is the time to introspect and tap into the holy power of the night.

After we internalize where we come from, we talk about the future. The whole second half of the *seder* is talking about the *geulah* because it teaches us that we were freed from *mitzrayim* to bring about the *geulah*. It is a night that discusses history and a night of destiny. We must internalize what we are doing and become real with our *emunah*. May we have the *ko'ach* this year to tap into the *kedushah* of the night, connect and enjoy the wonderful power of freedom, and bring about the redemption speedily in our days.

Adapted from the words of Rav Yonoson Roodyn.

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**CHAG
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VESAME'ACH!**