



RABBI SHALOM

ROSNER

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The Significance of Karpas

At the beginning of the Seder, we have a *minhag* to dip Karpas into salt water. What is the definition of Karpas? It is some sort of vegetable. Some people have a tradition to use a potato, others celery or some other green leaf. Is it not significant which vegetable is used? Apparently not! Rav Asher Weiss (*Minchas Asher Hagadda*) suggests that the act of dipping the Karpas into salt water symbolizes when the brothers dipped Yosef's multicolored coat into the blood of a goat and presented it to their father as proof that Yosef was killed. We do this symbolic act of dipping at the beginning of the Seder to set the tone and declare –

before we tell the story of what transpired in Egypt – we should be aware of what originally got us into exile in Egypt. It was the hatred between Yaakov's sons.

Why do we use the term Karpas, and how does that tie us to the story of Yosef and his brothers? In parshas Vayeshev, when Yaakov gifts Yosef with a *ketones passim* (multicolored garment) Rashi describes the garment as similar to the one described in Megillat Esther- using the terms **hur, karpas, tehelles, v'argaman...** It was a majestic item. We take a vegetable, the specific type is less significant, and dip it into salt water symbolizing the brother's dipping Yosef's Karpas – his majestic garment into blood to indicate to their father that he was indeed killed by a wild animal.

Rav Weiss expands upon this idea from the entire episode of Yaakov and his sons. When Yaakov Avinu is told by his mother



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to “trick” his father so he could obtain the blessing of the first-born son, Yaakov feared that Yitzhak would recognize that he was disguised as Esav. Rivkah reassured him that he had nothing to fear. Rivkah told him: *alai kilelaskha beni* – “your curse will be upon me” (*Bereshit 27:13*). The Gaon explains: the intention is that Rivkah informed Yaakov that trouble will only come to Yaakov from three areas, which are hinted to from the acronym *alai* – Esav, Lavan, and Yosef.

Rivkah was expressing to Yaakov that he had nothing to fear with respect to tricking Yitzhak because only three specific troubles were supposed to affect Yaakov in his life: Esav, Lavan, and Yosef, represented by the *rashei teivos* of the word *alai* (עלי = עשו לבן (יוסף)). Later, when the brothers requested to take Binyamin to Egypt, Yaakov responds with the identical acronym עלי – stating: עלי היו כלנה – (all these troubles have come upon me, *Bereshit 42:36*). In other words, “I am only supposed to agonize due to three people: Esav, Lavan, and Yosef. Not Binyamin. You can’t take Binyamin. This is not meant to be.” That’s how the Gaon understands the *remez* (hint) connecting the words in these two *pesukim*.

Rav Asher Weiss develops this idea further, suggesting that these three troubles of Yaakov represent something much larger. Since *maase avos siman l’banim* – the deeds of our forefathers prefigure the history of the Jewish people – these three troubles represent the three types of troubles that Klal Yisrael suffer throughout exile. The troubles that haunted Yaakov are that haunt us, his



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descendants as well.

Esav represents those who want to annihilate us physically, like Esav wanted to physically kill Yaakov. There are “Esavs” throughout the generations that want to annihilate the Jewish people: Hamans and Hitlers, *yemach shemam*.

The second type of trouble is that of Lavan. His goal was not to kill Yaakov; rather, Lavan wanted to destroy Yaakov spiritually. Thus, Lavan represents our enemies who wish to do the same, people like Antiochus and Stalin, *yemach shemam*.

Then we have the troubles of Yosef, which is the problem of *sinas hinam*, the inner fighting within Klal Yisrael. That’s the worst trouble, the one we still suffer from today. It is the trouble that we bring upon ourselves out of a lack of respect for our fellow Jew. The actions of the Esav’s and Lavan’s are not in our control. We just react to them. However, the trouble of Yosef is one that we can prevent. Each and every individual has to do his part to spread *ahavas Yisrael* so that we can bring an end to the difficulty of Yosef, the *sinas hinam* that caused our exile and prevents our redemption.

Before we discuss the *geula* from Egypt at the *Seder*, we first need to understand what brought us into exile. We dip the karpas – less important which vegetable. What is important – is that we understand what caused the first exile and the exile that still exists today. It is the hatred between Jews that we need to avoid in order to once again achieve our salvation. May we learn our lesson and unite so we can be worthy of a complete redemption. ■