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Rav Yaakov Moshe Charlop: Mei Marom Haggadah Highlights

FAMILY CLOSENESS

The Haggadah comments and analyzes the verses which describe the enslavement in Egypt. Regarding the phrase “And God saw...our *amaleinu* (our burden)...” the Haggadah states that this refers to “the sons” (*eilu habanim*). How are we to understand this cryptic comment of the Haggadah?

Rav Charlop suggests that this refers to one of the devils plans of the Egyptians. The Egyptians noted a treasured quality in the Jewish nation, Namely, their unique familial closeness and tight bond which characterized the Jewish nation.

By drowning the first born sons they intended to degrade and disrupt family life. It is noteworthy that the Talmud (Sota 12a) relates that Amram and Yocheved separated from each other in order not to bring another child into a wretched world. Our *amaleinu*, our ‘burden’ or our ‘efforts’ to maintain a healthy family life seemed almost futile in this harsh environment. And yet, somehow the Jewish people held strong and refused to give up. Amram and Yocheved remarry and

bring Moshe into the world.

Thus, Rav Charlop says, that the central mitzvah of the night reflects the family bond. We are to take a lamb “for the family” - “...buy for yourselves one of the flock for your families and slaughter the pesach-offering” (*Shemot* 12:21).

Rarely if not ever do we find a mitzvah

that is directed specifically to the *mishpacha* (family). This is intentional. It is meant to highlight the distinctiveness of the Jewish family and to emphasize from the very outset of forming a nation that Judaism places a supreme value on inter-family relationships and closeness.



Rav Yaakov Moshe Charlop zt"l

The central mitzvah of the *Pesach* night is for parents to personally and directly relay the story to their children, *v'higadeta levincha*, another example of the central motif of family closeness and that every child should feel valued, supported and embraced. (*Haggadah Mei Marom*, p. 41)

Rav Charlop takes note that toward the end of the Seder we once again spotlight the beauty of family closeness. Eliyahu's arrival at the end of the Seder is undoubtedly one of the most inspiring parts of

Pesach night. It should be noted, says Rav Charlop, that Eliyahu the prophet is celebrated for the role he will play as we enter the time of redemption “to bring the heart of the father to his children and the hearts of children to their fathers” (*Mala-chi* 3:24). The love of family members for one another and their close bond is one of the most celebrated and beautiful qualities of our people. (Ibid. pp. 1-2)

MIGHTILY BOUND TO THE LAND

The text of the Pesach Haggada cites the Torah’s very first mention of the exile in Egypt. It comes in a message from God to Avraham: “He said to Avraham, ‘You shall know that your seed will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and they will enslave them and make them suffer...’” (Bereshit 15:13). Rav Charlop points out that embedded in this verse that describes the darkness of enslavement is also the eternal promise that *any other land* is foreign to the Jew. Only the Land of Israel is home. The Jew will have one dream, one vision, one aspiration, one hope: to get back to the Land of Israel. “Next year in Yerushalayim!”

Rav Charlop adds a crucial addendum. This verse which describes the Egyptian servitude hints at a broader experience of the Jew in foreign lands. As long as the Jew maintains a clear cognizance that they live in a foreign land, they will not need the reminders of suffering imposed by the gentile world which surrounds them. Lest the Jew begin to forget that they are to feel fully at home in any land, “the enslavement and suffering” of a foreign culture and people may suddenly emerge to call to mind the eternal love of

the Land. (*Mei Marom Haggadah*, p. 35)

In a similar vein, Rav Charlop comments on the Haggadah’s description of the matza being the food that slaves ate ‘because they rushed out of Egypt.’ The Haggadah states: “They couldn’t tarry any longer” (*lo yachlu le’hitmameah*). This sense of immediacy was felt by Jew because they finally discerned that they no longer had a place in Egypt. They realized that living in such an environment was simply no longer viable. Rav Charlop writes: “And this will also be the sign [of the redemption] in the future - when the Jew will feel that they no longer have a place in exile, and feel it necessary to leave and arrive in the Land of Israel.” (Ibid., p.50)

In another memorable Pesach teaching of Rav Charlop regarding the uniqueness of Eretz Yisrael, Rav Charlop turns to Haggadah’s description of the *Rasha* (wicked child). The text states that must we relay to the *Rasha* that were he had been in Egypt he would not have been redeemed. *Reshaim* at that time actually died during the plague of darkness and we emphasize that this would have been your demise as well. Rav Charlop comments that although the wicked among the Jews would have been lost in the exile servitude of Egypt, a ‘wicked Jew’ will surely not to be lost when living in the Land of Israel. The bonds of the nation when living in the Land are so strong that even a Jew who is on the fringe is held tightly to the nation and will eventually find a path that will direct him to *teshuva* and commitment to Torah.

Rav Charlop cites Rashi (Shemot 12:27)

who teaches that the people of Israel were joyful when they heard of the redemption from Egypt “and bowed in gratitude” not only for the freedom but due to the fact that “they will have future generations of children.” Although the child just described to them in the verse (12:26) is a reference to the *Rasha*, ‘wicked child,’ knowing that this child will make his home in the Land of Israel he will remain connected and surely will find the path that will bring him to a commitment to Torah and mitzvot. (*Haggadah Mei Marom*, p. 32)

Seder night in particular, says Rav Charlop, inspires a deep longing and connection of a Jew to Eretz Yisrael. “On this night the Jewish people are crowned with the majestic crown of the holy atmosphere of Eretz Yisrael and with the holy light of the *makom Hamikdash* (the place of the Holy Temple)...one senses the holiness of Eretz Yisrael no matter where one is located.” (*Haggadah Mei Marom*, p. 2).

Seemingly Rav Charlop is alluding to the many *halachot* and symbols of the Seder night specifically awakens within a Jew and longing for the Holy Land and the Beit Hamikdash. We wash our hands

for the vegetables (*karpas*) the way it was done when Beit Hamikdash stood. An egg and shank bone sitting on the Seder plate reminds us of the loss of the Beit Hamikdash and a Jews yearning to bring the *korban Pesach* once again. The Seder ends with the beloved words: “Next Year in a rebuilt Jerusalem.” These are only a few examples of prominent places throughout the Seder where our yearnings for redemption and the return of our nation to the Land is expressed and should be wholly felt at the Seder.

SPEECH IN EXILE

Rav Charlop cites an evocative passage from the work of the *Zohar* which states: “The exile in Egypt was an exile of speech.” (*Zohar Parshat Va'era* p. 25b). This cryptic statement requires elucidation. Is there a source for this idea in the Torah’s description of the Israelite enslavement? Noteworthy is the fact that Moshe is described as being “heavy of lip and heavy of speech.” With the giving of Torah Moshe becomes the “speaker,” communicator and teacher of Torah.

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik was also intrigued by this teaching in the *Zohar* (‘Redemption, Prayer, Talmud Torah’ in Tradition 1978) and cited this teaching as the basis for one of his classic teachings in regard to Pesach and the meaning of redemption. Both masters suggest that a slave who is forced to engage in harsh labor and has no freedom to choose for himself - however the slave, on a psychological level, tragically also loses something most precious - namely, his sense of self. He no longer believes that his own convictions and ideas have any



relevance. There is no need to speak because he has nothing to contribute - he has no confidence in himself and he surely believes that he cannot make a difference - "his speech is in exile." Freedom from slavery is not only a physical freedom from servitude it is new self awareness that expressing my thoughts, sharing words for others to hear is of great import.

Mount Sinai was a place of words. The Ten commandments are known as the *Asert Adibrot*, literally translated: 'The Ten Statements.' The study of Torah and its wisdom invest man with the gift to communicate a message. The Jewish nation accepting the Torah was an act of "redeeming speech." (*Haggadah Mei Marom*, p.33)

The night of Pesach is celebrated especially as a night of speech. *Ve'higadeat le'vincha*, "Tell your child." The central mitzvah of the night highlights the fact that we have a unique story and an enthralling message to pass on to the next generation. The Ari'zal (*Pri Eitz Chaim, Shaar Mikrah Kodosh*, ch. 4) suggested that the name of the festival contains an exquisite hint to the power of speech - "*Peh Sach*" - a mouth converses. The path to redemption is when we as Jews make use of the precious and powerful gift of prayer and Talmud Torah which are expressions of speech.

THE AROMA OF REDEMPTION

Rav Charlop shares an intriguing midrash which tells a more detailed account of what transpired on the final night the Jews were in Egypt prior to being freed (*Shemot Rabah* ch. 19). According to the

midrashic telling, God asked the Jewish people to first undergo the procedure of circumcision so that you will have the requisite merit in order to be redeemed.

The majority of the people pushed back and refused to go through with this difficult and painful task. God then told Moshe to prepare his Paschal offering and along with the aroma of the meat being cooked, God attached the sweet aroma of the Garden of Eden. At this point the people could not restrain themselves from desiring the taste of the meat of the pesach-offering and begged Moshe for a taste. Moshe said, "Unless you are circumcised I cannot allow you to eat the meat."

The Jewish men quickly agreed to circumcision and astoundingly, says the midrash, the blood of sacrificial lamb mixed with the blood of the circumcision. God then passed through the camp and placed a kiss on the forehead of each Jew and gave a blessing. The midrash concludes: This is the meaning of the verse in Yechezkel which described God's redemption of the Israel from Egypt, "Then I passed you and saw you wallowing in your blood, and I said, "By your blood you shall live; and I said to you, "By the blood you shall live"

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(*Yechezkel* 16:6). The repeated phrase, ‘By the blood you shall live’ means: ‘You shall live’ by the blood of the pesach-offering and ‘you shall live’ by the blood of the circumcision.”

Rav Charlop explains that there was a purity in scent or the aroma that the Jew, even under the harshest conditions, was able to discern. When they tapped into their sincere feelings in their heart and souls and discovered the true longing they had for redemption which had been a promise of God to their forefather Avraham, they immediately came to Moshe and were able to garner the strength, courage and determination to sacrifice what was needed (the blood of circumcision) in order to embark on the path which would direct them to fulfill the grand vision of Redemption. (*Haggadah Mei Marom*, pp. 39-40)

THE EXHILARATING SEVENTH NIGHT

On the seventh night of Pesach, *Shevii Shel Pesach*, Rav Charlop would host each year a large gathering at his home late in the night around the midnight hour, where he would present a shiur on the *Shirat Hayam* (‘Song of the Sea’) which is of course the reading of the Torah the morning in the seventh day of Pesach celebrating the wondrous event that took place on date. Torah scholars would flock to listen to his expounding on this passage, which included halacha and the deeper teachings of kabbalah.

Following his celebrated discourse, Rav Chalop would stand and recite the *Shirat Hayam* verse by verse with immense feeling and in a special tune, a melody that Rav Chalop composed himself. All who

gathered would then sing and dance with great exuberance. (‘The Seventh Night of Pesach with Rabbi Yaakov Moshe Charlop,’ Samson Arutz Sheva)

It is noteworthy that the events of the splitting of the Sea served as the culmination of the redemption from Egypt. Until that point the Jewish people were not completely safe and completely emancipated. That final miracle of crossing the sea was the highpoint of redemption.

Surely this night had special relevance for Rav Charlop in that he perceived the miracles of the modern State of Israel as a high point in the redemptive process for *Am Yisrael* in modern times.

In one of the talks he gave on the seventh night of Pesach recorded in his Haggada, he emphasis the love shared between the Almighty and His beloved people and submits that this love is evident in our day as we are experiencing the Jews longing and the miraculous return to the Land of Israel. The love of God for his people in the ancient days of Egypt and the splitting of the sea is being revealed once again before very eyes in modern times. (*Haggadah Mei Marom*, pp.89-95) [It is noteworthy that Chabad chassidim have the custom to learn Torah the entire seventh night of Pesach. Special emphasis is placed on the seventh day of the Pesach in the writings of the Alter Rebbe in *Likutie Torah*, parshat Tzav 15, 1-4] ■



Rabbi Goldscheider's most recent OU Press Publication, "Torah United" on the weekly Parsha, can be ordered directly from Rabbi Goldscheider at arong@ouisrael.org at a special price for Torah Tidbits readers.