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From all of us at TAL, CHAG KASHER VESAMEACH!!

This special edition is dedicated Lehatzlach Moshe Ben Rav Yitschak Hakohen Vechol Mishpachto

RABBI JONATHAN TAWIL

DIRECTOR
TAL



FREEDOM!

It was a momentous occasion; Simon was finally under the Chupa with his dear bride Sarah. Hundreds of people eagerly looked on as the final smash of the glass occurred accompanied by music and large chants of Mazal Tov!

The Rabbi stood there and said “I pronounce you man and wife”. Both Simon and Sarah raced their hands to their pockets.

As they took out their phones, the Rabbi continued – “you can now update your Facebook status!”

This is the year 2019!

In October 2014 research was carried out showing that there were more mobile devices in the world than people, and that they were multiplying five times faster than us! No other technology has impacted us like the mobile phone. It's the fastest growing manmade phenomenon ever – from zero to 6.5 billion in three decades.

Out of the world's estimated 7.2 billion people, 6.5 billion have access to

mobile phones. Far fewer — only 4.5 billion people — have access to working toilets.

In a blessed generation of technological advance the question has to be asked, how do we feel? I am sure you feel blessed with the affluence of this generation, but living in this generation comes with its baggage, are we really free, or are we subservient to our surroundings and the ever increasing techno advance?

It was the custom of ancient Royalty to recline on their left (since one holds food with their right hand, or alternatively to prevent the epiglottis from covering the trachea) when indulging in delicacies.

On Pesach we consider ourselves as not only a free nation, but a nation of Royalty. Thus our Sages enacted that on Pesach when participating in the Mitzvot of the night one should lean like Royalty.

Rabbi David Yosef Shlita (son of Rabbi Ovadia Z'l) told me of a case where a person had been a prisoner for many years. He was still in prison and asked the Rabbi whether he should also lean on Pesach. On the one hand Pesach and particularly the leaning is a celebration of freedom, yet in reality he was not free. Was it really necessary for him to lean?

Rabbi David Yosef answered that he was still obligated to lean. ▶

> TIMES

19TH - 21ST APRIL

YOM TOV 1ST NIGHT (FRI NIGHT) : 19:45
YOM TOV 2ND NIGHT (MOZEI SHABBAT) : 21:00
YOM TOV ENDS (SUN NIGHT) : 21:02

25TH - 27TH APRIL

YOM TOV 1ST NIGHT (THURS NIGHT) : 19:45
YOM TOV 2ND NIGHT (FRI NIGHT) : 19:57
YOM TOV ENDS (MOZEI SHABBAT) : 21:13



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This newsletter contains Divrei Torah and may contain Shemot - Please dispose of accordingly

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Although he was physically in prison, that did not impede on his mental freedom and celebration of Pesach.

Freedom is a choice of mind. If you are in control of your mind, you have the ability to be free even in the most daunting of places.

However, 'Freedom' itself has different dimensions, a point reflected in the two Hebrew words used to describe it - Chofesh and Cherut. Chofesh is 'freedom from' and Cherut is 'freedom to'.

Chofesh is what a slave acquires when released from slavery. He or she is free from being subject to someone else's will. But this kind of liberty is not enough to create a free society. A world in which everyone is free to do what they like begins in anarchy and ends in tyranny. That is why Chofesh is only the beginning of freedom, not its ultimate destination. One only needs look around at the world and in particular the Middle East to understand that 'freedom from' is not the end game.

Conversely, Cherut is collective freedom, a society in which my freedom respects yours. A free society is always a moral achievement. It rests on self-restraint and regard for others. The ultimate aim of Torah is to fashion a society on the foundations of justice and compassion, both of which depend on recognising the sovereignty of G-d and the integrity of creation. It is for this reason that we say, 'Next year may we all be Bnei Chorin, rather than Bnei Chofshim. We are stating, 'May we be free in a way that honours the freedom of all'.

In January 1945, fearing the Russian advance, all prisoners of Auschwitz who could walk were taken on the brutal 'death marches'. The only people left in the camps were those who were too ill to move. Those remaining were liberated on January 27 1945, a day now commemorated as International Holocaust Remembrance Day.

Primo Levi was a survivor of Auschwitz. In his book 'If This is a Man', he describes how the worst time of all was the last ten days that they were left alone with only scraps of food and fuel. One day he managed to light a fire and bring some warmth to his fellow prisoners, many of them slowly dying. He writes, "When the broken window was repaired and the stove began to spread its heat, something seemed to relax everyone and at that moment Towarowski (a Franco-Pole of twenty-three) proposed to the others that each of them offer a slice of bread to the three of us who had been working. And so it was agreed. Only a day before, a similar event would have been inconceivable. The law of the Lager said, 'eat your own bread and if you can, that of your neighbour,' and left no room for gratitude. It really meant that the law of the lager was dead. It was the first human gesture that occurred amongst us. I believe that that moment can be dated as the beginning of the change by which we who had not died slowly changed from prisoners to men again."

The sharing of food was the first act through which slaves became human beings. That was the time they were able to attach themselves to humanity, enabling their free will, conquering their 'natural tendencies' in order to give of themselves to become Bnei Chorin.

The Midrash has a fascinating commentary on the location of the first meeting between G-d and Moshe. It was at the Sneh (the burning bush), that Moshe was delegated to deliver the Jews from the slavery of Egypt. Our Sages relate it was because of the Sneh that the very spot would eventually be called Sinai. The place where the mission began defined its purpose. The goal was not simply to get the Jews out of Egypt, but rather to bring them to the mountain where they would receive the Law. Freedom without Torah (law) is inconceivable.

That is why Moshe subsequently told Pharaoh not only to "let my people go", but added the all-important phrase "so that they may serve Me." This is the freedom of Pesach, wedded to the moral covenant of the Torah.

From a Jewish perspective, to speak only of the ideal of freedom – while ignoring its necessary partner of responsibility – is to pervert its true meaning.

This is what Abraham Lincoln understood so well in his famous words, "Freedom is not the right to do what we want, but what we ought."

And this is the real message of Pesach; G-d granted us the gift of physical freedom, so that we might become truly free to be guided by our spiritual selves.

The Hebrew word for Egypt is Mitzrayim, the root of which is Metzar, meaning constriction, narrowness, and limitation. Spiritually, as Pesach approaches, the same energy of freedom that existed at the time of the Exodus is available for us to tap into. It's the ideal time to ask ourselves: What am I enslaved to that is holding me back from achieving my potential? What are the blockages, constrictions and limitations that stand in the way of accomplishing my goals in any area of my life? Am I a slave to my physical appetites, to social media and devices?

At the Pesach Seder we read, "In every generation we must each regard ourselves as though we personally had just left Egypt." The goal is to use the tools we have been given to make this happen in the context of our own lives.

Chag Sameach! ■

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THE WEEKLY QUOTE

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RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

PASSOVER TELLS US: TEACH YOUR CHILDREN WELL

As one nation after another in Africa and the Middle East engages in a fight for freedom, Passover, which begins this week, still has much to teach us about the nature of that fight.

The Jewish festival of freedom is the oldest continuously observed religious ritual in the world. Across the centuries, Passover has never lost its power to inspire the imagination of successive generations of Jews with its annually re-enacted drama of slavery and liberation.

It is vivid, replete with direct experiences like eating matza, the unleavened bread of affliction, and tasting maror, the bitter herbs of oppression. It is a ritual performed not in the synagogue but at home, in the midst of the family, reminding us that, in Alexis de Tocqueville's words, "As long as family feeling is kept alive, the opponent of oppression is never alone." Perhaps its single most striking innovation is that from beginning to end, it is designed to engage and enthrall the mind of a child.

The rabbis who developed the ritual were guided by the Bible itself and the highly counterintuitive narrative it tells in the 12th and 13th chapters of Exodus. Here is the scene: Moses has assembled the people to tell them they are about to go free. Exiled, enslaved, threatened by a Pharaoh who has commanded that every male Israelite child shall be killed, the people have witnessed a series of wonders performed on their behalf. Moses is now about to tell them that soon they will leave and begin their long walk to freedom.

I sometimes ask people what they would speak about if they were in Moses' shoes? Some say they would talk about freedom, others that they would speak about the destination that lay ahead: the "land flowing with milk and honey." Yet others, made of sterner stuff, propose talking about the arduous journey that lay ahead, the march across the wilderness with all its hazards.

Any of these would have been a great speech by a great leader. Moses did none of these things. That is what made him a unique leader. If you examine the text in Exodus carefully, you will see that three times he reverted to the same theme: children, education

and the distant future. "And when your children ask you, What does this ceremony mean to you?" (Exodus 12:26). "On that day tell your son, I do this because of what the Lord did for me when I came out of Egypt" (13:8). "In days to come, when your son asks you, What does this mean?" (13:14).

Moses spoke not about freedom but about education. He fixed his vision not on the immediate but on the distant future, and not on adults but children. In so doing he was making a fundamental point. It may be hard to escape from tyranny but it is harder still to build and sustain a free society.

In the long run there is only one way of doing so. To defend a country you need an army, but to defend a civilisation you need education. That is why Moses, according to Rousseau, the world's greatest architect of a free society, spoke about the duty of parents in every generation to educate their children about why freedom matters and how it was achieved.

Freedom is not won by merely overthrowing a tyrannical ruler or an oppressive regime. That is usually only the prelude to a new tyranny, a new oppression. The faces change, but not the script. True freedom requires the rule of law and justice, and a judicial system in which the rights of some are not secured by the denial of rights to others.

Freedom begins with what we teach our children. That is why Jews became a people whose passion is education, whose heroes are teachers and whose citadels are schools. Nowhere is this more evident than on Passover, when the entire ritual of handing on our story to the next generation is set in motion by the questions asked by a child. In every generation we need to cultivate afresh the habits of the heart that Tocqueville called "the apprenticeship of liberty."

The message of Passover remains as powerful as ever. Freedom is won not on the battlefield but in the classroom and the home. Teach your children the history of freedom if you want them never to lose it. ■

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CHIEF RABBI EPHRAIM MIRVIS
MARCH 2019 · NISAN 5779

THE CHIEF RABBI'S PESACH MESSAGE 5779

The two central themes of Pesach – peoplehood and freedom – have the potential to either provide great blessing or pose great danger to our society.

The Exodus from Egypt paved the way for the Israelites to become a people. Upon deliverance from slavery, we were, for the first time, a “kingdom of priests and holy people” - a nation with a shared history and common destiny.

The Exodus also provided us with freedom from oppressive Egyptian rule. After 210 bitter years of enslavement, self-determination was finally within our grasp.

Like many blessings in life, even these wonderful gifts of peoplehood and freedom can be squandered, distorted and even exploited if we are not wary of a force which is increasingly a feature of our political and social discourse.

Peoplehood provides us with our group identity - a sense that we are not alone; we feel valued as members of a worthy collective. But it can also be used to create a distrust of the other – a poisonous ‘them and us’ narrative. Recent years have seen the emergence of ‘identity politics’ – the formation of exclusive alliances based upon group identity. When used to exclude and scapegoat others, it takes a positive force to its most extreme, thereby transforming it into a negative.

Similarly, freedom is an essential value for any civilised society. But, as Holocaust survivor Victor Frankl said, “freedom is in danger of becoming arbitrary unless it is lived in terms of responsibility”.

At the very dawn of creation, the Torah describes how, on each day, Hashem saw what He had created and declared it to be ‘tov’ – it was ‘good’.

But on the sixth day, when Hashem created humankind, He observed that it was ‘tov me’od’ – ‘very good’.

A fascinating but challenging Midrash states, “Instead of reading ‘me’od’ read ‘mavet’ – death.” What could be the connection between ‘very’ and ‘death’?

This Midrash is surely warning us against ‘very-ness’; a type of zealotry which takes what we believe to such an extreme that it can cause death and destruction.

We live in an increasingly polarised world. Religious, political and social strands of zealotry, which were once confined to the fringes of our society are now entering the mainstream. Across the globe, far left and far right politics are finding a degree of influence that was once unthinkable. Similarly, aggressive secularism and religious fundamentalism are finding their expression in crucial areas of public policy and creating significant challenges which will affect our society for generations to come.

The classic mistake is to respond to the ‘me’od’ – the ‘very-ness’ of others, with zealotry of our own. The Jewish way, which provides a timely model for our society, is for us to seek freedom tempered by responsibility and to celebrate our peoplehood, whilst respecting the right of others to do the same.

The shank-bone on our Seder plates represents the ‘Korban’, the special Pesach sacrifice. ‘Korban’ comes from the word ‘karov’ (close), indicating that it facilitates closeness to Hashem. This Pesach, let us recall a fundamental truth, too often overlooked: If we wish to come close to Hashem, we must first come closer to one another. ■

Valerie and I wish you a Chag Kasher Vesameach.



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THE VALUE OF A MOMENT

During the plague of Barad – Hail, Pharaoh finally acknowledged and said ‘This time I have sinned, Hashem is the righteous One and I and my people have sinned’ (Shemos 9,36). At that precise moment Pharaoh repented and he told Moshe that the Jews could leave Egypt. As we all know, he soon changed his mind and refused to let the Jews actually leave, yet for that short moment he recognised Hashem and was totally sincere in his teshuvah. Chazal teach us that in the merit of those two words ‘HASHEM HATZADIK’ the Egyptians merited burial. (*Rashi Shemos 15, 12*)

Reb Mottele Slonimer zt”l said that there are three things that a person prays for by their demise, namely a minyan present at the moment when their soul leaves their body, to be immersed in a mikva prior to burial, and that their money should go to good causes. The Egyptians earned all three, at their death there were at least 600,000 Jews present, they were immersed in a mikva as they drowned in the sea and their money went to the Jewish people - a good cause! All this was in the merit

of Pharaoh saying those two words ‘HASHEM HATZADIK’.

We can learn from here the power of repentance as well as the amazing things a person can accomplish in just one moment of time. The king Pharaoh, during a moment of challenge and difficulty repented and recognised Hashem, even though the inspiration did not last and he went back to his previous ways, the moment was not erased or forgotten.

A similar idea is seen with Eisav. The Torah elaborates on his many descendents (Vayishlach 36) and Chazal explain that this is because when Eisav met Yaakov ‘VAYESHKAYHU’ he kissed him. Rashi comments that it is a well-known fact that Eisav hates Yaakov, yet at that precise moment his compassion was aroused and he kissed Yaakov with a full heart. In the merit of that one kiss he earned his large and powerful family.

Rabbi Mechel Yehuda Lefkowitz zt”l related a story of the time when Rav Naftoli Trop- Rosh Yeshivas Radin

was very sick and on his deathbed, his students wanted to do something special for their beloved Rebbi. They each decided to donate time from their lives as a gift for Rav Naftoli, this one donated one month another gave two, others gave a year and some even two. They approached the Chofetz Chaim to inform him of their mission and asked him if he was willing to contribute. The Chofetz Chaim sat thinking and finally replied that he was willing to donate ONE MINUTE of his life to R’ Naftoli. When the talmidim heard the Chofetz Chaim’s reply they were shaken to the core, at the value of just ONE MINUTE. They went back to their studies and learnt with enthusiasm and passion like never before.

Pharaoh and Eisav were rewarded greatly for their great moment, how much more so us Jews who devote time to Torah and Mitzvot. May we take this message to utilise our moments until the final redemption, may it happen speedily in our days. ■

Chag Kasher V’esamech



AHARON GABBAY - KOLLEL ZICHRON CHANA VERACHEL - JERUSALEM

WE ARE A MIRACLE

The chag of Pesach is accompanied by a grand feast where not only do we dine like kings, but we also conduct many traditions and re-enactments of the past. The famous Seder that almost every Jewish house conducts requires certain order that cannot be rearranged or cut short. It is imperative to follow these rules in order to fulfil some of the obligations. This explains the name 'Seder' which literally means order. However, the irony is that while we spend most of our night bound by order we do nothing but describe the miraculous and supernatural story of the Jewish people. The story of Egypt tells of how the Jewish people are completely against regular order. The Jewish people undermined the most powerful nation around and proceeded to plunge them into sea. Everyone knew of the people of G-d who defied all natural occurrences. Why, then is it so important for us to have such an ordered evening when we are the people of no order?

After the Jews left slavery in Egypt, they were chased by Paroh and his men till the seashore with nowhere to go. The Kli Yakar says that when they approached the sea, the Jewish people were presented with a grand test of faith in Hashem. The Kli Yakar continues that there were two types of Emunah which people adopted at the sea: some would wait till the sea split and then proceed. And some would begin to walk into the sea and then it split. The Kli Yakar expands that, obviously, the second is the better approach to emunah in Hashem. This means that when one knows when something is the right thing to do and that it's the will of Hashem, they should not procrastinate. Rather, they should advance ahead with confidence that Hashem will hold their hand. Then,

because you have done your bit and devoted yourself to Hashem, he will then preform the impossible for you.

We see a very similar idea when the story began in Egypt. Moshe, a new born baby, was floating down the river Nile in a basket. The daughter of Paroh, who converted to Judaism, wanted to retrieve the basket and so she reached her hand out. The Gemara in Sotah (12b) says that her hand outstretched to an unusual length in order to reach the baby's basket. Paroh's daughter put in her own efforts and Hashem performed the impossible.

The Jewish people hold a key that carries them through history. That is that they put in their effort and contributions that Hashem requires from them and then, because of that contribution, Hashem preforms the rest, which is unattainable by human ability. Because of this, the natural order of the Jewish people is to be miraculous. The Jewish people are notorious for their supernatural reputation and that only comes from their natural contribution. It is only appropriate that our telling of miracles and wonders be bound by order.

For this very same reason, following pesach we count 50 days until shavout, 50 being the highest level of purity. However, we only count 49, because once we do our part, Hashem will lift us up to the highest level of purity.

The Jewish people are a nation whose mere natural presence is miraculous and we merit to be part of that. On Seder night, we relate to that idea and relive it and tell on the story to our future generations, to implant into them that it is natural for us to be supernatural. ■

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HEROES IN THE SAND

And gave us the Torah, and brought us into the Land of Israel" (Dayeinu, Pesach Hagaddah)

There is a famous question, asked year after year at almost every Seder table. Why did the Holy One, Blessed is He, give us the Torah in the desert? Why did He not give it to us after He brought us to the Land of Israel? I mean, don't get me wrong – I like sand. And I like sun. But if you're going to receive the 10 commandments, wouldn't you rather be in Herzeliyah Pituach?

Rav Yosef Haim from Baghdad, otherwise known as the Ben Ish Chai, spins us a wonderful yarn, as only he could do. The hero of our story is a young man who came from a rich family. As soon as he came of age, his family tried to set up a shidduch for him with a girl from a wealthy home. But the young man saw that she was foolish and stupid. He refused to marry her and fled to a different town, to avoid being pressured by his relatives into an arranged marriage [some things never change].

When he arrived in the new town, the word spread that there was a single man who had arrived who was a big catch for any girl of marriageable age. He was offered all sorts of potential matches. Ignoring all requests, our hero hears about a girl from a poor home, who was said to be wise, talented and gifted with every virtue. He went to her father and asked permission to meet with his daughter, adding, "If she is suitable for me, I will marry her and make her very rich!"

The father agreed, the two met, and the daughter pleased the young man greatly with her appearance and grace, her wisdom and her intelligence.

He told her father, "Let me marry your daughter, and she will lack for nothing. You too can come with us, and we will support you with dignity in your old age!"

The father silenced him, saying, "Your relatives will never agree to let you marry the daughter of poor people, nor to let you bring me to your estate!"

The young man declared, "If that is so, I will agree to abandon all my wealth and property, and to live together with you in your simple hut!"

The father responded, "Let's see if you really are ready to do so. Take off your expensive clothes and wear simple garments like ours, and be satisfied with our modest meals."

The young man hurried to do as he was bid, and stayed with the family for a week. The father conversed with him at length, and found him to be a wise young man of refined character. At the week's end, he took the young man to the shed outside his house, whereupon he opened the door. Sitting in the corner, full of cobwebs and looking as old as Methuselah, was a rusty old chest. "Since you chose to be with us and to be counted as one of our family, take this key and open the case that stands there."

The young man approached the case, opened it, and to his utter surprise, found it to be overflowing with diamonds!

The father said to him, "In truth, I am hugely rich. All of these jewels now belong to you. Take them all, and marry my daughter! All my money is reserved for my only daughter. But I concealed my wealth, so that no greedy suitor would pursue her because of her fortune. But you, who valued her

true qualities, and were prepared to live a life of poverty for her sake — you deserve to marry her and to gain all of her riches!"

The parable can be explained as follows: The nation of Israel was in Egypt, which was the hub of materialism, secularism, and idolatry. But Israel separated herself from Egyptian culture, refusing to cling to it.

Hashem wished to bestow his holy Torah upon his beloved Klal Yisrael. It is of course well known, that the Torah brings every good blessing of happiness and wealth. But Hashem first wished to test the children of Israel, to see if they desired the Torah for its own sake or for its accompanying blessings.

Therefore, He gave the Torah in the desolate wilderness, where the children of Israel were tent-dwellers without a homeland. When they showed their willingness to accept the Torah and to cling to it with all their heart and soul - then Hashem brought them to the Land of Israel and bestowed upon them every blessing! (Ben Ish Chayil, Section 1, 319)

During this holy festival of freedom, may we all feel gratitude to Hashem Yitbarach, which is the ultimate message of the Seder. When drinking the Four Cups, bear in mind a wonderful saying that I heard recently: Don't worry about whether your cup is half full or half empty – just be grateful that you have a cup, and that you have something in it! ■

Chag kasher vesameach!



CAESAREANS AND PESACH

Some time ago, a woman I know gave birth for the first time to a baby boy through a Caesarean-Section. Following the Brit I was asked to calculate when the Pidyon HaBen would fall. My attempt to explain to the mother that her baby could not experience a Pidyon HaBen because she had not given birth 'naturally' was not exactly well received. The fact that her baby could not have a Pidyon HaBen was described as 'discriminatory'. And it got me thinking: why indeed does the Torah mandate a Pidyon HaBen ritual only for a baby boy born through a 'peter rehem', opening of the womb, and not through a Caesarean?

If we consider the process of a woman bringing a child into this world we will find something quite paradoxical. One who walks past a delivery room hearing all the screams and shouts and not knowing that this is a room in which women bring babies into the world, would think that the person inside is about to die. And in truth, a woman giving birth is close to death. Although today it is relatively rare for a woman to die during childbirth, historically it was not uncommon. But this is the way the human body has been incredibly designed. What looks and sounds like death is actually life. A woman who looks and sounds like she is experiencing the pangs of death is actually bringing life in to this world.

Indeed, this is a microcosm of the natural history of the world. Often the very same thing that looks like destruction and devastation ends up being the very same force that generates life. Pesach is a classic example. Egypt is described as being the 'Iron Crucible'. The first mention in the Torah of us as a nation is at the beginning of the book of Shemot introducing us to the Israelite persecution at the hands of the Egyptians. It was all gloom and darkness. It seemed there was no hope. But from that very same darkness sprouted redemption: leaving Egypt, becoming a nation of G-d and experiencing the Divine Revelation at Sinai. A few weeks ago we celebrated on Purim the fact that from the clutches of annihilation we were transferred overnight to have immense political clout in Persia. But perhaps the greatest example of this concept in Jewish history is the Holocaust. It was easy to write off Jewish continuity in 1945. But astonishingly, just three years later, after being exiled for over two millennia, the Jewish people returned to their homeland.

This is the reality of the world we live in. A seed is sown in the ground. In order to sprout, it must first rot. But then miraculously it grows into a budding tree; a source of life of new fruit. Thomas Kuhn in his book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* demonstrates this point with science. Scientific Discovery, he argues, begins with the awareness of an anomaly - the recognition that nature has violated the expectations that govern normal science. The emergence of a new theory is generated by the persistent failure of the puzzles of normal science to be solved as they should. The failure of existing rules is the prelude to a search for new

ones. When everything makes sense and there are no anomalies then there is no need for scientific discovery.

The rite of Pidyon HaBen is to commemorate G-d's intervention in Egypt in ensuring that although the Egyptians firstborns were killed, the Jewish firstborns were spared. How were the Egyptian firstborns punished and the Israelite firstborns saved? This, we read in the Hagadah, was not through any emissary but directly through G-d. There was a clear manifestation of G-d's involvement in the tenth plague, the plague through which our redemption began. This was G-d Himself behind the 'natural miracle' of life. G-d Himself transforming a century of slavery and servitude into the beginning of a new nation, free to worship G-d.

A natural birth through the womb without human intervention represents the natural miracle and lifecycle of life. The mother was so close to dying and yet she was spared, and from that near death experience more life was created. That is Egypt: G-d's direct and immediate involvement in transforming darkness into light. Any other form of birth that involves human intervention breaks the 'natural miracle' of birth. Such a child's birth is an expression of nature not working as it was supposed to and human beings saving the day. As such it does not express the same direct connection to the miracle of 'birth' that we experienced on Pesach night in which G-d Himself brought about the Redemption without the instrumentality of men.

To be sure, I am in no way suggesting that a Caesarean birth is in any way less special than a natural birth. But it certainly is a different type of birth. It is one that requires human instrumentality as opposed to a complete natural order of birth. In a way, the birth of such a child expresses something deeper and more powerful: that G-d granted the miracle of healing to humans to varying degrees. But that is not Pesach but Shavuot which celebrates human achievement. And so perhaps this is why Pidyon HaBen, which is to remind us of Egypt, only applies to a baby born through a natural birth. This is a powerful idea and one we should think of during the course of Pesach. Pesach essentially is G-d gratuitously taking darkness and transforming it into light. It is the light that one sees from the sunrise, where the sun appears in the horizon extinguishing the doubts and dangers of the night.

And this is why the festival of Pesach gives us such hope. Pesach reminds us, exactly as we say in the Hagadah, that in every generation attempts are made to destroy us. Anti-Semitism is nothing new. But, as history has proven time and time again, it is from these dark moments in history that redemption sprouts and we see that the darkness itself was the beginning of something new. And that out of uncertainty, fragility, difficulty and despair, emerge redemption, liberation and freedom. ■

Hag Sameach



OUR CHACHAMIM

RABBI ABDALLAH SOMECH

Enormously knowledgeable, never compromising, and conducting himself with humility that was proverbial, Rabbi Abdallah Somech was the teacher of the Ben Ish Hai. He was also the teacher of Rabbi Yaakov Chaim Sofer, the author of the famous work Kaf HaChayim, that monumental Shulchan Aruch and necessary reference book in all yeshivas and sacred study centers in Israel and throughout the world.

Rabbi Abdallah Somech was, without doubt, a Torah giant that the Jewish people can be proud of. The teacher of the Ben Ish Hai, he is part of the inestimable and everlasting dynasty of Babylonian Sages, whose wisdom clarifies every page of the Talmud.

Rabbi Abdallah Somech -"7" was born in Baghdad in 1813. He was the son of Rabbi Abraham Somech, himself a descendant of Rabbi Nissim Gaon, head of the famous Babylonian yeshiva at Nehardea, as well as the author of the Vidui (confessional) prayers for Yom Kippur. The sons of Rabbi Nissim Gaon were Yehoshua, Yosef, and Yehezkel. Yehoshua named his first and second sons Abraham and Abdallah, respectively, names that one finds in the family from generation to generation, including today. As for the family name Somech, in Hebrew it means "support", "backing", and it probably comes from the fact that one member of the family, Yehezkel, was a Somech (assistant) of the synagogue's Chazan (Cantor) during Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

From his earliest youth, Rabbi Abdallah Somech had been entrusted by his father to one of the greatest teachers of the era, namely Rabbi Yaakov Harofeh. He therefore didn't stop studying Torah day and night, year after year, until he himself became an uncontested teacher for generations of students. One among them, Rabbi Shlomo Bechor Chotsin, wrote as follows: "If I were to praise him, even just the slightest bit, all the pages in the world would be insufficient. What's more, this would no doubt displease him, for he was extremely humble and wanted nothing less than fame."

Besides the Shulchan Aruch of his student, Rabbi Yaakov Chaim Sofer, we owe to Rabbi Abdallah Somech a great number of rulings, particularly in matters of Shechita (ritual slaughter) and Treifot. All these rulings have been published in the work Zivchei Tzedek. As soon as they were disseminated, no one dared to turn aside from them by one iota, exactly as if they had come from Mount Sinai.

As we have seen above, Rabbi Abdallah Somech was the teacher of Rabbi Yosef Haim, the Ben Ish Hai. When the latter began to give public lessons in the great synagogue of Baghdad, Rabbi Abdallah Somech would come and attend, each time that he could, specifically to hear his student. Another mark of this Torah giant was that when his student, the Ben Ish Hai, made his entry into the synagogue,

he would rise before him, just as all present would. Because of the manner of the teacher, everyone understood the greatness of the student.

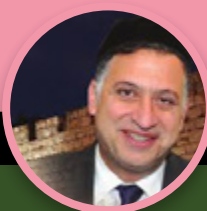
One day, policemen came to bring him to the walli (governor), who desired to speak with him after he had dismissed a dayan (rabbinic judge) who had proven to be unsuitable for his position. Yet when the policemen had hardly entered Rabbi Somech's home, they froze in seeing him seated among bearded scholars who were listening to his teachings. He himself appeared to them like an incarnation of an angel come from heaven, and this sight impressed them so much that they hastened to turn around and leave the premises. To the governor who asked them why they had not brought Rabbi Somech, the policemen replied, "Do you know who you sent us to get? The prophet Moses himself!"

The governor therefore dispatched persons of honor to Rabbi Abdallah to persuade him to go back on his decision. Rabbi Abdallah replied, "My decision was made in accordance with the Torah of Moses. I therefore cannot change it."

The governor perfectly understood this point of view and agreed. It goes without saying that this incident only added to Rabbi Abdallah's prestige.

It was on the eve of Shabbat on the 18th of Elul, 1889 that Rabbi Abdallah Somech left this world. However, astonishing events weren't late in occurring around his tomb, events whose echoes rang out not only in Iraq, but all the way to Constantinople (modern-day Istanbul) and even to London and Paris. For example, following an outbreak of leprosy, the mayor of El Krach decided to forbid the burial of Rabbi Abdallah next to Rabbi Yehoshua ben Yehotzedek, who had been a Kohen Gadol (High Priest). Infuriated, the Jewish community (who, naturally, disregarded the prohibition) requested the help of Baghdad's mayor, a man who didn't hide his sympathy for the Jews. This had the result of dividing the population into two camps: Jewish and Arab. Certain Muslims had, in fact, falsely accused the Jews of having struck them. The anti-Semitic mayor of El Krach took advantage of the situation to imprison several Chachamim (Sages), and the local Jewish community therefore sent delegations to influential people in Constantinople (to the Sassoon family), to London, and to the Alliance Israélite Universelle in Paris. At the end of it all, the anti-Semitic mayor was fired from his position. All this took about a month. Nevertheless, in order to ease people's nerves, the Jewish community resigned itself to exhuming the remains of the deceased illustrious Rabbi. Several Rabbis descended into the tomb and asked mechila (forgiveness) from Rabbi Abdallah. However, they were utterly astonished when they noticed that the body of their revered teacher had remained completely intact, exactly as on the day he died. ■

His Hilloula is Elul 18.



HALACHOT

RABBI ELI MANSOUR

PESAH - BREAKING OFF UNDESIRABLE PIECES OF MATZA

It occasionally happens that as the Masa bakes in the oven, parts of the Masa fold and do not remain flat. This phenomenon is called in Halacha "Masa Kefula" ("folded Masa"). Some people make a point not to eat the folded parts of the Masa, given the concern that the dough in those areas did not fully bake, and thus became Hametz. Those who follow this practice break off the folded pieces of Masa from the rest of the Masa.

Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv (contemporary) rules that breaking off a folded piece of Masa is forbidden on Shabbat. The Shabbat prohibition of "Borer" ("selecting") forbids separating "Pesoleit" (undesirable matter) from "Ochel" (desirable matter). Breaking off a folded part of the Masa constitutes separating "Pesoleit" from "Ochel," which transgresses the Shabbat prohibition of "Borer."

The prohibition of "Borer" applies on Yom Tob, as well, though in more lenient fashion. It is permissible to separate "Pesoleit" from "Ochel" on Yom Tob (when it does not fall on Shabbat) if this can be done easily, without too much effort or exertion. Therefore, breaking off a piece of folded Masa, which entails one quick and simple motion, is permissible on Yom Tob. On Shabbat, however, "Borer" is forbidden regardless of the amount of exertion entailed, and therefore on Shabbat it is forbidden to break off a piece of folded Masa.

This would apply as well to breaking off burnt pieces of Masa. If a person does not want to eat part of the piece of Masa which was burnt, he may not break off that part of the Masa on Shabbat. Once again, this would be permissible on Yom Tob, since little effort is entailed, but on Shabbat one may not break off a piece of undesirable Masa.

Rav Elyashiv notes that it is permissible - even on Shabbat - to remove broken pieces of Masa from the box as one searches for whole pieces. For the Shabbat and Yom Tob meals, one is required to use only whole Masot, and often the box of Masa contains both broken and whole pieces of Masa. Rav Elyashiv writes that one may separate the broken pieces from the whole pieces, as this is not considered removing "Pesoleit" from "Ochel." All the Masa is edible, and one removes the broken pieces not because they are undesirable, but rather because he is searching for a whole Masa as required by Halacha. Therefore, he may separate the broken pieces from the whole pieces, even on Shabbat, and this does not violate the prohibition of "Borer."

Summary: It is forbidden on Shabbat to break off from a piece of Masa part of the Masa which one deems undesirable, such as parts that have been folded or have been burnt. This is permissible on Yom Tob. It is permissible - even on Shabbat - to separate broken pieces of Masa from whole pieces of Masa. ■



YOSHI & Co.



STORIES



SLAVERY

Here I am in Egypt, facing another day of slavery. I did not even sleep in my house last night. Paroh made me sleep in the field so I could begin to work gathering the straw as soon as I woke up. No matter how much straw I gather I still cannot make enough bricks. One of my own fellow Jews watches over me, counting the bricks I make. If there are not enough bricks, they hit me. Ouch,

stop beating me, it really hurts. Worse than that, I have seen them put a baby in the wall that we are building in place of the missing bricks. We do not even have any satisfaction from our work. As soon as we build something, it falls down. I am so tired; I need to take a break. However, I am a slave, and a slave never gets a break. I want to be home tending to the children, instead

of out here making bricks. My husband is taking care of the home. Yesterday, my friend gave birth to a baby boy and they threw him in the Nile River. They say that Paroh has a skin disease and needs to bathe in blood twice each day. They kill 150 of our children to make a bath of blood for him. This slavery is terrible. How can we ever escape?

FREEDOM

Those cruel Egyptians have no water to drink. The entire Nile River turned to blood. They are so thirsty. I saw them trying to draw water from a barrel. It had also turned to blood. We, the Jews, are the only ones who have water here in Egypt. An Egyptian tried to take water from my barrel. For me it was water but

for him it was blood. They have no power over us. We control all of the water. If they buy water from us, it does not turn to blood. We can ask whatever price we want for the water. They have no choice but to pay it. They are at our mercy.

There they are, washed up on the shores of the Red Sea. All of those Egyptians who oppressed us are now dead. I see the one who used to beat me so cruelly. He died a terrible death. He was tossed up and down in the water many times before he drowned. We are free from their oppression at last.

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