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אלימלך מרדיכי בן שלמית

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A Guide to Seder Night

*Infuse your seder with depth,
meaning, and relevance!*

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קדש

Straight to the Top!

We are each plagued by unique emotional, intellectual, spiritual, and circumstantial “Meitzarim”-constraints; our own personal *Mitzrayim*. The spiritual energy packed into seder night grants us the ability to break out of those bonds, to taste the freedom of being carried by the Master of the world. We begin the seder with *Kadesh* to express that although on other nights of the year we may need to proceed slowly and carefully toward our spiritual goals, tonight we are able to jump right to the top, to the loftiest levels of *kedusha*, holiness. Tonight, like the Jews in Egypt, we escape our inner servitude “*b'chipazon*”, going cold turkey on anxiety, anger, cynicism, worry, lust, egoism, jealousy, and all other forms of lowliness. In fact, this mindset, rooted in the belief that it is in fact possible to jump from the bottommost rung of impurity to the most elevated levels of holiness, is already an expression of the greatest freedom.

When we believe that we can reach the highest levels in no time at all, we realize that our children can reach those levels in a flash as well. During the rest of the year, we often speak to our children with an exile mentality, limiting their ability to soar by conversing with them only in a way that is appropriate for their stage of education and spiritual awareness. But on seder night, we begin with *Kadesh*. We make our children and their *divrei Torah* the central focus of the seder, proclaiming that no matter their age, tonight they are able to reach the highest, the deepest, the most profound levels of *kedusha*. It is because we look at them with “*Kadesh eyes*” that there is such closeness between parents and children on seder night. This is the one night a year they feel comfortable emerging from the bonds of societal expectation to express the soaring depth of their unlimited capacity to feel and understand.

On seder night, we instantly reach the highest levels.



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ורחץ

Purifying Our Emotions

Urchatz is the only of the seder stages that begins with the connective “vav”. There are various opinions as to the simple meaning of the “vav”, most of which center around the question of whether *netillas yadayim* for food dipped in a liquid (the next stage, *Karpas*) is a halachic requirement. However, there is a deeper message here as well. In the deeper texts, the letter “vav” of the *Shem Havaya* represents the six emotional traits with which Hashem relates to the world. (The numerical value of the letter “vav” is six.) Created in the image of this general structure, we each contain this “vav” within our personality as well, the emotions we use to manifest ourselves in the six directions of the physical world. Most of our personal servitude is a product of emotions left unchecked by the rational guidance of the intellect. When the “spirit of folly” which precedes all sin grants the emotions free reign over our inner world, instead of using these emotions for holiness and spirituality, they become enslaved to the baser elements of our nature. The spiritual energy of the seder is that of “*Mochin D’Gadlus*”, a blinding flash of expanded consciousness and elevated *Da’as*. Indeed, the fifteen stages of the seder correspond to the “*Yud*” and “*Hei*” of Hashem’s essential name which are numerically equivalent to fifteen. These two letters symbolize the intellectual capacities of *Chochmah*-wisdom and *Binah*-understanding. On Seder night, surrounded by the mighty waves of intellect (as the verse states, “*and the world will be filled with the knowledge of Hashem like water...*”), we are able to purify our emotions and break free from the bonds of lowliness. The word “*Urchatz*” may be read “*Vav Rachatz*”; we wash our six emotional traits in the waters of glorious God - consciousness.

On seder night, we cleanse our emotions with the life-giving waters of God-consciousness.



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כרפס

Words of Comfort and Unity

In a comment on the verse in which the *kesones passim* was gifted by Yaakov to Yosef, his most precious son, Rashi states that the garment was made of fine material, “like *karpas*.” In Aramaic, the word “*karpas*” can mean “wool”. Rabbeinu Manoach draws a connection between this *karpas* and the *Karpas* of seder night, teaching that dipping the vegetable in saltwater alludes to the manner in which the *shevatim* dipped Yosef’s special cloak (*karpas*) in blood. The tzaddik explains that this symbol is needed to further bolster the spirit of communal harmony the seder embodies by contrasting this atmosphere with the terrible act of disunity and hatred that ultimately led to the Egyptian exile. *Karpas* sees vegetables usually eaten as a side dish elevated to the level of a primary starter; on seder night, even the most sidelined and excluded Jew is cherished and respected by all. We open our door to the public, inviting the pitiful and impoverished to partake in the seder as a member of our family. Multiple generations sit around the table in sweetness and unity, bound together by the spirit of love and holiness that hovers above them all. By acting with such openness, benevolence, and love, we are rectifying the terrible scourge of hatred represented by the dipping of *Karpas*.

But there is another expression of giving, perhaps even more important, to which *Karpas* alludes.

In the Hebrew language, letters do not simply make up words. Rather, each letter may be seen as intimating a word in and of itself. Thus, the five letters that make up the word “*Karpas*” may be read as an entire phrase: “*Kaf*” – Palm. “*Reish*” – Pauper. “*Pei*” – Mouth. “*Samach*” – Support. These words hold an important message: even when we are unable to give physically with our hands (“*kaf reish*”), there is another form of charity: loving words of encouragement and support (“*pei samech*”). Words of empathy and understanding can lift the spirits of a Jew who is struggling with financial or emotional woes in a way that even a generous



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כרפס

Words of Comfort and Unity

donation often cannot. Yes, Karpas hints to the problem of baseless hatred, the shevatim dipping Yosef's coat in blood after casting him into the pit. But it also hints at the ability to rectify this rift with soft words of love, encouragement, and support.

On seder night, we rectify hatred and disunity by creating an atmosphere of charity, support, and love.



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יחץ

The Blessing of a Broken Heart

Despite what today's price tag may suggest, *matzah* is “poor man's bread”; flat, lowly, and humbled, made with the simplest of ingredients. The pinnacle of this unique personality comes to expression in *Yachatz*, when we break the middle *matzah*. This action demonstrates the extent of the pauper's misery – desperation to the point of utter brokenness. However, be it a result of financial, emotional, or spiritual troubles, this situation (like all possible challenges) represents a unique opportunity. In a moment of humble brokenness, we open the windows of our soul to allow Hashem's light in. Rav Hutner is credited as having declared, “Prayer is not to get a Jew out of trouble. Trouble is to get a Jew into prayer.” Faced with the inability to save ourselves, we are forced to rely solely on the Master of the world. In this vein, Chazal tell us that “*Pharaoh hikriv*”; the harsh servitude to which the Jews were subjected under Pharaoh ultimately brought them closer to their Father in heaven. And so it is in the life of each individual. Oftentimes, the bitter taste of brokenness and defeat represents the first step in a glorious and miraculous process of growth and inner development. As David HaMelech sings, “A broken and subdued heart is not shamed by G-d.” Or as the Kotzker once declared, “There is nothing as whole as a broken heart.”

The middle of the three *matzos*, which correspond to the three *avos hakedoshim*, represents Yitzchak Avinu. As is well-known, Yitzchak Avinu embodied *Gevurah*, the divine trait of harsh judgement. When we break the middle *matzah* by *Yachatz*, we are symbolizing the idea that at the very moment a Jewish heart is broken and humbled before Hashem, the harshness of *Gevurah* is shattered as well, opening the door for an infinite show of the greatest miracles.

On seder night, we recognize that brokenness is the ultimate wholeness.



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מגיד

The Redemption of Speech

The tzaddikim reveal that *galus Mitzrayim* is deeply associated with a lack of speech, "*galus haddibur*". This theme manifests in a number of ways. Moshe Rabbeinu, our redeemer, had a terrible stutter. The letters of "Pharaoh" also spell "HaOreph"; the nape of the neck from which no speech can derive. The word "Mitzrayim" is associated with "Meitzar haGaron", as it affected the throat which is the narrowest segment of the human body. One of the more profound messages of this concept is fairly simple to express: The severest form of spiritual slavery involves the inability of a Jew to say "Thank you Hashem for all of Your miracles", and to sing His praise. In a number of places, Rebbe Nachman of Breslov stresses that exile is a matter of perspective, dependent entirely upon our state of mind. When the difficulties of life cause the great blessings which abound in the simplest functions of living to become obscured, stealing away one's expressions of gratitude and faith, this is the harshest possible exile. On seder night, a redemptive spirit of optimism and recognition of all the blessings in our lives grants us back our speech. The word "Pesach" is a conjugation of two words: "Peh sach", a speaking mouth. We trade out *chametz* for *matzah*, two words whose only difference is the "open mouth" of the letter "heh" in the word "matzah", in contrast with the closed up "ches" of the word "chametz". Chazal interpret "Lechem Oni" as "Lechem Sheonim alav Devarim Harbei" - bread upon which many words are spoken. The verse states, "I am Hashem who elevated you from the land of Egypt, "harcheiv picha" - open your mouth..." Finally, our sages declared, "Anyone who increases in telling the story of the exodus from Egypt is praised".

During *Maggid*, we rectify all of the expressions of thanks and praise that have been stolen away by the Pharaohs of fear, pessimism, and spiritual tunnel vision. During *Maggid*, we talk, and talk, and talk some more – allowing our many words, newly redeemed, to express the overwhelming gratitude we feel toward our Father in heaven for the multifarious wonders, miracles, and



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The Redemption of Speech

blessings He constantly showers upon us in every situation. We tell the story of our exile and subsequent freedom, but in truth, the telling is itself the greatest expression of freedom. To be able to recognize Hashem's love in every situation, no matter how dark, and express our gratitude for His awesome gifts which inundate our lives even in the most trying times is the truest spirit of redemption which washes away the bonds of every exile. This is what it means to be a Jew, a "Yehudi" – one who constantly gives "hoda'ah", thanks. "Am zu yetzartah li, tehillasi yesapeiru", "I have created this nation to recount My praise."

On seder night, we rectify our speech by thanking Hashem for His abundant gifts and the many miracles which fill our lives.



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רחצה

Purifying Our Actions

We have completed *Maggid*, recounting all the miracles of the past and present with redemptive speech of gratitude, wonder, and praise. At this stage, *Rachtzah*, we wash our hands a second time. The word “*Rachtzah*”, washing, can also refer to *bitachon*, as in the Aramaic phrase “*bei ana rachitz*”, “I trust in Him”. Having used the expanded consciousness of the seder mentality to recognize the extent to which our lives are lived in the loving embrace of our Father in heaven, we walk away from *Maggid* with the conclusion that “*rachztah*”, it is only sensible to cast our burden onto Hashem and trust in Him wholeheartedly.

In our comment on *Urchatz* we explained that the intellectual energies of *Chochmah* and *Binah*, (alluded to by the first two letters of Hashem’s Name, “*Yud*” and “*Hei*”) are revealed on Seder night in the most powerful way, allowing us to purify our six emotional traits (alluded to by the third letter of Hashem’s Name, “*Vav*”). Thus, we explained that the word “*Urchatz*” may be read “*Vav Rachatz*”, referring to our ability, on this glorious night, to wash off and purify our fiery emotions with the cool, life-giving waters of God-consciousness. The final letter of Hashem’s Name, the letter “*Hei*”, alludes to the manner in which we manifest our desires, thoughts, and emotions in the physical world by way of concrete action. On the one hand, as the lowest link in a glorious chain of which ethereal thought and feeling are a part, this final level of our personality may appear to be the lowliest and most insignificant. But in truth, despite their corporeality, actions speak louder than words, feelings, thoughts, and even desires. After the great rush of emotion, nostalgia, feeling, thought, song, and speech that is *Maggid*, we perform “*Rachtzah*”, which may be read “*Rachatz Hei*”, the purification of the letter “*Hei*” – resolving to practically apply the clarity we feel in this moment of spiritual exaltation to our lives and our mundane, day to day actions. While this physical world may appear inconsequential when held up to the brilliant light of the spiritual worlds beyond, in truth, the focal



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Purifying Our Actions

point of creation is human life within a world of concealment; "Hashem desired a dwelling place in the lower realms." The purpose of creation was for you and me to refine our actions so that the mundanity of our everydayness may be transformed into a chariot for the divine Presence.

On seder night, we refine our actions and behaviors so they can begin to reflect our expanded awareness of Hashem's Mercy and Justice.



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מוציא

The Unlikely Process of Growth

The familiar *beracha* of “*hamotzi*” is one that is made throughout the year. Yet on Seder night, it becomes elevated to a lofty pedestal, joining ranks with unique and singular *avodahs* to occupy a special stage in the Pesach seder. In truth, this glorification of the simple reflects the remarkable journey of the *matzah* over which this very *beracha* is made. Although it may not be readily apparent, the *matzah* we hold is the product of a long and arduous process, beginning with seeds buried in darkness deep beneath the ground. Before they can take root, these seeds must decompose, completely losing their original form in an excruciating process of rot and decay. But soon after this painful inner storm, a remarkable miracle occurs: the seeds come alive and begin to sprout and grow. As spring arrives, they push their way above the earth to find the warm rays of the sun, and then bear their fruits for the world. After the grain is harvested, a long process commences to produce flour. Finally, this flour is mixed with water and baked to become the delicious *matzah* we use to fulfill an exceedingly exalted *mitzvah*. Seen in this manner, the very existence of *matzah* bespeaks simplicity lifted up to the loftiest levels of remarkability.

This journey from simplicity to remarkability is in fact the central message of Pesach. On seder night, we recall our humble beginnings as a nation of battered and broken slaves in Egypt, decomposing under the smothering earth of spiritual impurity and physical anguish. We tell of our near hopelessness, teetering precariously on the edge of the 49th level of impurity, one step away from the abyss. But with hearts bursting with joy and gratitude we remember our cry to the Master of the world from the depths of our pain and His answer in a deluge of infinite love and concern. With the most glorious display of miracles, Hashem set us apart, redeeming us from the bonds of our oppression and elevating us to the status of His chosen nation – the nation that would receive the Torah. On seder night we remember our journey from a standard *beracha* to miraculously becoming the central

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The Unlikely Process of Growth

stage of Hashem's seder; our journey from a rotting seed buried deep underground to being miraculously transformed into the most exalted food in the world. In doing so, we remember that rotting is the beginning of growth, that challenge is the backdrop of opportunity, that exile is the prerequisite of freedom, and that the most intensely painful contractions signal the approaching miracle of birth. On seder night, we receive the inner strength to believe that from amidst the pain of our current exile, we will soon experience the most miraculous and glorious elevation. Hashem's miracles are ever upon us.

On seder night, we absorb the lesson that the journey to greatness begins with simplicity, and that redemption is rooted in the dark throes of exile.



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מצה

The Ultimate Remedy

It doesn't look like much, the cracker on the table before us. Flat and misshapen, made of the simplest ingredients, and featuring a relatively bland taste, *matzah* appears to be unexciting, perhaps even boring. But it is specifically this cracker about which Rebbe Nachman of Breslov announced one Seder night, "When you hold it, you literally hold Godliness!" This bland and unimpressive food bears two glorious titles granted it by the Zohar HaKadosh shared by no other food: "*Maichlah D'Meheimenusa*", Food of Faith, and "*Maichla D'Asvasa*", Food of Healing. Aside from the deep spiritual rectifications effected by eating the *matzah*, perhaps it is the lesson in faith *matzah* embodies that contains the true healing.

We live in a world where physical magnificence is glorified above all else. A bigger house, a faster car, a shinier watch – these impressive shows of prosperity are what society values and pursues with such alacrity and vigor. But the Torah's value system looks vastly different. Rooted in the perspective of an "*olam hafuch*", a world exactly opposite to our own where the ultimate and objective truth shines for all to see, the Torah guides us beyond the ultimately immature understanding of human beings to enter into the inner nature of living, the effervescent spring of beauty, depth, meaning, vitality, joy, pleasure, sweetness, and eternity. From the Torah's perspective, it is not brute strength that is admired, but self-control; not ostentatiousness that is attractive but modesty; not wealth that is praiseworthy, but *yiras Shomayim*. To the consciousness of secular society, the Torah lifestyle may seem to be lacking in excitement or beauty. Like *matzah*, Yiddishkeit may appear to be bland and tasteless. But those with eyes of faith who can sense that which lies beyond the external façade are able to understand the infinite power, nobility, and wonder packed into our holy tradition.

Matzah, the "Food of Faith", encapsulates the perspective of our holy Torah which reveals the beauty in modesty, the grandeur in simplicity, and the courage in self-mastery. When we allow



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The Ultimate Remedy

ourselves to perceive the Godliness with which *matzah* is permeated, our capacity to appreciate the Torah's spiritual perspective on all of life is refined. To the degree that we are able to approach life using the heuristics of Torah consciousness, we will be able to avoid the manifold pitfalls of a distracted existence and soar above the nausea of opulence to a life that is filled with true goodness, true joy, true honor, true glory, and ultimate goodness – the all-encompassing remedy for the ailments of the human condition. Thus *matzah*, the Food of Faith, is also the Food of Healing.

On seder night, matzah grants us a taste of the ultimate remedy; the infinite beauty of our holy tradition.



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מרור

Finding the Sweetness in Bitterness

On a simple level, we eat *maror* at the Seder to help draw us into the experience of bitterness and discomfort so we can better retell the story of our forefathers' slavery in Egypt. It also marks the pain and sacrifice of our ancestors throughout the generations who suffered terribly so that we could sit here today, triumphantly holding tight to Hashem and the Torah a mere few feet away from the finish line of history. But *maror* carries a deeper message as well, one that is relevant to our inner spiritual servitude and the seeds of redemption found within.

For the most part, bitterness is something we want to avoid as much as we possibly can. But there exists an elevated perspective which casts a certain experience of bitterness in a whole new light. When it comes to spiritual growth, feeling bitter and broken over our distance from Hashem is a very good sign. When living out of touch with our spiritual ideals causes us to feel pained and anguished, it indicates that our heart is still feeling, still alive. It means that we will be able to find the strength to power forward toward the closeness with Hashem we have been dreaming about for so long. In this vein, Rebbe Nachman famously declared: "If you believe you can break, believe you can fix." Reb Nossan explains that the belief in damage caused by sin and the subsequent bitterness a Jew feels is the greatest basis for hope and optimism that there is yet what to save, that although it may appear as if we are deep in a spiritual slumber, "*ani yesheinah*", our heart is yet awake to what is truly important in life, "*v'libi eir*". Seen in this way, we realize that the *maror*-bitterness of "believing we can break" contains the joy of the ensuing redemption, "believing we can fix." *Maror* is numerically equivalent to 446, the value of "Maves", death. It is easy to view the experience of bitterness over spiritual inadequacy as a form of spiritual death and darkness. But when we chew the *maror* with our 32 teeth which correspond to the "*Lamed-Beis Nesivos Chochmah*", the 32 Paths of Wisdom, we sweeten our despair with the illumination of a



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NIRTZAH



מרור

Finding the Sweetness in Bitterness

deeper perspective, understanding that this bitterness itself contains the sweetness of redemption.

On seder night, chewing maror grants us the wisdom to find the sweetness implicit in our perception of spiritual frustration and the pain of Am Yisrael.



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כורך

Sandwich of Paradox, Sandwich of Faith

Having eaten the healing *matzah* and the bitter *maror* separately, we now bring them together in a kind of sandwich – *matzah* on either side and *maror* in the middle. On the surface, we eat this sandwich to commemorate the manner in which Hillel fulfilled the mitzvah in the time of the Beis HaMikdash. But the depth of spiritual meaning and implication packed into this seemingly simple sandwich is truly astounding.

In contrast to Shammai's strict and exacting nature, Hillel is associated with *Chessed*, the energy of loving kindness. Hillel's leniency, tolerance, humility, and love shine through various sayings and opinions attributed to this tzaddik and his beis midrash as well as the stories found throughout the Talmud in which he plays a role. It is no wonder, then, that the *matzah-maror* sandwich we hold in our hands was the brainchild of Hillel HaZakein. If *maror*-death represents the bitterness of physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual suffering, *matzah*-healing implies peace of mind, expanded consciousness, and elevated living. When Hillel covered the bitter *maror* with *matzah* on either side, he was demonstrating that our perception of negativity is necessarily limited, that all suffering is ultimately surrounded by and couched within Hashem's infinite kindness. Surely, this faith does nothing to negate the experience of pain from our human perspective – *maror* is not entirely excluded from the *Koreich*-sandwich. But the understanding that although we may not be able to see it, all the *maror* we experience throughout life is surrounded by life-giving *matzah* grants us the ability to respond to the pain with so much more acceptance, love, and hope for a brighter future that is sure to come - not despite the *maror*, but because of it. Hillel's sandwich embodies our ability to embrace the fearsome paradox of Hashem's ultimate goodness and our palpable experience of evil. Although throughout the year we struggle with the overt presence of evil and the mighty concealment of Hashem's kindness, on seder night we close our physical eyes and view the world through the inner windows of humility and faith. In this exalted consciousness, we see an *olam hafuch* where it is the *maror* that is hidden and the presence of Hashem's *matzah*-kindness that may be readily perceived, embracing us on all sides. This perspective was embodied by the Aron in the Kodesh HaKodashim as well, whose two golden boxes



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Sandwich of Paradox, Sandwich of Faith

surrounded a middle box of plain wood, justifying its simplicity with their awesome splendor. Emunah allows us to perceive a higher reality in which all evil, bitterness, pain, and suffering is for the ultimate good. Indeed, the word “Koreich” is composed of the letters “Chaf-Vav” and the word “Rach”. The letters “**Chaf-Vav**” are numerically equivalent to 26, a value shared by Hashem’s essential Name which is associated with Chessed. The word “**Rach**” implies softness, comfort, and consolation. This is the message of the *Koreich* sandwich. Although we may not be able to readily perceive it with our limited understanding, seder night enables us to lift our tear-filled eyes from the *maror* of life and take in our glorious surroundings – Hashem’s Name of kindness on one side, and His loving consolation on the other. 🤎

On seder night, we conceal the maror with matzah in a paradoxical sandwich to demonstrate our firm emunah that all suffering is ultimately for the best, surrounded on all sides by Hashem’s infinite kindness.



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שֵׁלַח עוֹרֵךְ

Feasting in the Presence of Hashem

It's been a long and glorious night! We have told the story of our redemption, tapped into deep and healing perspectives on life, and planted the seeds of a personal exodus from our inner Pharaohs. "Each and every Jew must consider it as if he himself left *mitzrayim*." Now it's time to (quite literally) taste our newfound freedom. The rest of the year, eating is a spiritually precarious activity, a common trap used by the *yetzer hara* to entice us into engaging with permitted physicality in a lowly manner of self-indulgence, arrogance, egoism, and complete forgetfulness of Hashem. Tonight, nullified in our spiritual rapture before the awesome light of God-consciousness revealed in all the spiritual worlds, we eat like angels. Indeed, the word "*ma'achal*", food, shares the same letters as "*malach*", angel. Every bite we take of the delicious meal is bursting with freedom, holiness, and faith; *avodas Hashem* on the loftiest of levels. The word "*Achilah*", eating, contains two components, the letters "**Yud-Hei**" and the word "**Achal**", ate. An embodiment of the 15 redemptive steps of the Pesach Seder, the *Shulchan Oreich* feast is permeated with the light of "*Yud-Hei*", the expanded perspective of *Chochmah* and *Binah*. Because *Maggid* ends with the beginning of *Hallel* which continues after the *seudah* draws to a close, *Shulchan Oreich* is not simply another Yom Tov meal. Rather, it must be seen as part and parcel of *Hallel*, the greatest expression of our praise to the Master of the world. Indeed, the Rambam is of the opinion that we should try to lean during the entire meal!

At the vision of the burning bush, Hashem commands Moshe: "*Shal n'alecha me'al raglecha*", "Remove your shoes from upon your feet." The commentators explain that shoes are a reference to physicality, and that Hashem was directing Moshe to divest himself of his physical body through total identification with the soul. On seder night, we are able to taste a hint of this elevated level. Our powerful awareness of Hashem's loving presence brings us to complete identification with the soul, allowing even our

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שלה עורך

Feasting in the Presence of Hashem

engagement with the physical act of eating to shed its external layer and burst with the spiritual grace of divine service. All possible negativity rooted in the essentially egotistical act of eating becomes nullified before the revealed presence of Hashem that hovers above our seder table. Remarkably, the title of this stage itself alludes to this idea, as the word **“Shulchan”** contains the words **“Shal”** and **“chein”**, and the word **“Oreich”** contains the word **“Ra”** and the letters **“Chaf-Vav”**. Our awesome level of inspiration allows us to divest our physicality (**“shal”**, remove) so that our eating shines with the grace of *kavvanah*, *ratzon*, and *yiras Shomayim* (**“chein”**, grace). All the spiritual pitfalls of eating (**“Ra”**, negativity) are nullified in this moment before the presence of Hashem (**“Chaf-Vav”**, the numerical value of Hashem's essential Name.)

On seder night, our eating is elevated to the loftiest realms of spirituality, the greatest expression of gratitude.



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צפון

A Taste of the Hidden Master Plan

Remember when we broke the *matzah* all the way back at *Yachatz* and explored the blessing of a broken heart? At that stage, we had to employ our *emunah* to believe that something positive is destined to emerge from the shattering we experience. During *Koreich*, too, we entered into the elevated perspective of understanding that all suffering is surrounded by kindness and for the purpose of ultimate goodness. However, when we bring back the larger piece of that broken *matzah* by *Tzafun*, we actually get to taste the goodness and kindness that underlies all of our failures, mistakes, descents, and brokenness. There comes a stage in life when we are suddenly struck by a deep and hidden awareness ("*tzafun*" means concealed) that not only did we justify our mistakes by learning from them, but something far deeper: *It simply couldn't have happened any other way.* We realize that the ascent did not come despite the descent but because of it, that the experience of rock-bottom was what sparked a journey of recovery that made us into better people we would ever have been otherwise, that without the suffering of our slavery in Egypt we would never have been able to receive the Torah on Har Sinai. In a flash of other-worldly awareness, we understand that our *b'dieved* was Hashem's *l'chatchilah* and that all of our failures were part of the Master Plan.

One of the most powerful *tzafon* moments is when we are able to see how the difficulties of the past enabled us to become better parents to our children. Having tasted the low points of the human experience in our own lives we are so much more understanding, so much more compassionate, so much more relatable to the next generation of strugglers. Perhaps this is why it is our children who return the Afikomen to us, the larger half of our broken heart. This piece of *matzah* they carry in their little hands is the greatest *afikomen* gift of all.

On seder night, we get a taste of an exalted perspective; the difficulties of the past have made us into the people we are today.



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ברך

The Mission Statement of a Jew

We are nearing the end of the seder. The wine, the meal, and the late hour are having their compounded effect as one. But we are not finished just yet. *Boreich* is the opportunity to express our gratitude to Hashem not simply for the food we ate, but for the awesome privilege of being able to rectify physicality through our eating. “*Hashomayim shomayim la'Shem*”, heaven is filled with Hashem's presence and revealed spiritual energy. “*V'ha'aretz nasan l'vnei adam*”, and the earth was given to man, *for the purpose of transforming earth into heaven*. To be a Jew is to enjoy the endless opportunities for lasting impact upon our collective experience of reality. Every aspect of our physical experience, when utilized to further the goal of the soul, is elevated to the highest levels of holiness and brings the entirety of creation closer to its rectification. The letters of “*Boreich*” spell the letter “**Beis**”, an allusion to multiplicity, and “**rach**”, an allusion to the soft, gentle, and ethereal sweetness of spirituality. During *Boreich*, we reflect upon our mission in the world as Jews: to transform the realm of disparate multiplicity that surrounds us into a soft, sweet, gentle, and peaceful place of *hashra'as haShechinah*.

At this stage, having consciously experienced the steps of the seder, the words of the Haggadah, and the concepts underlying the *avodahs* we have merited to perform, we are able to thank Hashem with the greatest love, “*al shehotzeisanu me'erezt mitzrayim*”, “for this that He took **us** out of Egypt”; *us*, not merely our ancestors. For one glorious night we have merited to taste the core of our Jewishness, the awesome depth and sweetness of our holy tradition. For one glorious night we have merited to break free from the smallness and constricted consciousness of daily living to bask in the revealed presence of Hashem. Indeed, our relationship with the exodus from Egypt is now a personal



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ברך

The Mission Statement of a Jew

affair. We have never been freer in our lives. We have never been more absolutely content. And for that, we thank Hashem with all of our heart.

On seder night, we thank Hashem for the mission He has entrusted us with: to transform the human experience into a dwelling place for His Presence.



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הלל

To Infinity and Beyond!

Immediately preceding *Hallel*, we open the door for “*Sh’foch Chamascha*”. We are not foolish enough to believe that the world is perfect. It is clear to us that while we have toiled to eradicate every speck of *chametz* from our homes, the world is still filled with the *chametz* of evil and hate that has yet to be dissolved. But at this point in the seder, after all the *maror* has been cleared from our table and from our hearts, we are entirely drunk with passion and love for Hashem. At this moment we have no vessels left for contending with the evils of the world. All we want is to sing, to praise, to grab our brokenness by the hand and dance around the table. And so we say, “Master of the world, we know there is great evil in the world that must be reckoned with. But tonight we don’t want anything to do with it. Tonight, we are leaving the global Pesach cleaning to you. “Pour out Your wrath on the nations” - but leave us out of it. Our essential Jewishness is shining in all the worlds: “*Am zu yetzarta li tehilasi yesapeiru*”, we were created solely to Praise Your Name. All we want to do is sing. All we want to do is to throw open the doors to our homes and our hearts so that Eliyahu HaNavi can bring us messages of hope, messages of love and unity.” With this, we return to the table and sing the deepest love song to the Infinite One.

The word **Hallel** may be seen as an acronym for “*Harofei I’shevurei Ieiv*”, “He Who heals the broken hearted.” As we sing the beautiful verses of *Hallel* with harmony and grace, Hashem’s Oneness is reflected within the portion of Godliness which sits at the core of our identity, healing our inner wounds and mending our painful scars. He is all there is. His love overwhelms us at every moment. And every breath is the greatest miracle. *Hallel* is the culmination of our redemptive work, a spiritual launch pad which enables us to surrender the ego and blast off into the wondrous reality of *Ein Od Milvado*. To infinity, and beyond! We have reached the pinnacle of our *avodah*. Now, like a flame dancing feverishly on its wick, we desire nothing more than to leap beyond our subjective consciousness to become subsumed by our infinite Source. To infinity, and beyond, indeed.

On seder night, we ask Hashem to rid His world of all evil and malevolence so we may place our entire focus on His praise and His service.



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נרצה

This Year in Yerushalayim

We are now in Hashem's arms. "Nirtzah", we are deeply wanted. Validated. Accepted. Justified. Loved, unconditionally. Free from the boundaries of time and space, we soar across the expanse of our awesome history with its dazzling mountains and devastating valleys, experiencing the miracles Hashem has done for us in every generation, "v'Hakadosh Baruch Hu matzileinu m'yadam". Nirtzah is a taste of the Great Shabbos to come; "K'ilu kol melachtecha asuya", it is as if all that needs to be done has already been accomplished. In this exalted moment, everything is already rectified. All of nature is at peace. We perceive the physicality by which we are surrounded as having its back turned to us, its face illuminated by the Infinite Light of Hashem. The earth is filled with His glory.

The letters of "Nirtzah" spell "Nun Ratzah". Tonight, we have successfully climbed out of the 50th level of impurity to survey the 50 levels of Binah, the 50 stages of *teshuvah* which Hashem so desires. As we dance to the high heavens with our children by our side, the shofar blast of redemption echoes through our consciousness. "L'shana **haba** b'Yerushalayim"? There must be some mistake. *We are already there.* 🤴

On seder night, we arrive at the awareness of the manner in which we are wanted, validated, accepted, justified, and loved unconditionally by our Father in heaven.



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The Great Feast is Just Around the Corner

Rebbe Nachman of Breslov relayed the following *mashal* on Pesach.

There was once a pair of paupers living together in the garbage dumps of Ukraine, close friends and partners in grime. One was a Jewish pauper named Mendel. The other, Ivan, was a local peasant. One spring day, the Mendel approached his friend and related, with boundless joy, that a great night was approaching. "The Jews hold a gigantic feast and everyone is invited!", he said. "I am not such a learned Jew, so I can't really tell you what it's all about, but I just know it is going to be amazing! I'm sure they won't mind if you come along with me. Prepare yourself for the feast of a lifetime!" In his anticipation for this special night, Ivan starved himself for days to build up an enormous appetite for this incredible feast.

Finally, the long-awaited night arrived, and they entered the home of one of the wealthiest Jews in the city. The table was set beautifully with the finest dishes and cutlery fit for royalty. Ivan's mouth began to water. He couldn't believe his tremendous luck! After a few songs, they were ready to begin the meal. A glass of wine was poured for all of the guests and an incantation intoned. Watching carefully so as to remain inconspicuous, Ivan waited until the blessing was completed and drank thirstily, his heart bursting with excitement for the food that surely wouldn't be long in

coming. Next, everyone washed their hands and a small piece of radish was handed out. "Strange", thought Ivan, "But who knows! Maybe this is some kind of fancy appetizer! I'm not such a radish fan myself, but I am sure they are about to roll out the steaks!"

Unfortunately for Ivan, this isn't what happened. Instead, the guests all broke round crackers in half and then began to talk, and talk, and talk, and talk some more. This went on for a few hours; no food, not even more wine was forthcoming. Nothing! Growing a bit antsy, Ivan took a deep breath and resolved to remain a bit longer in the hope that the food (which was emitting a delightful aroma wafting in from the kitchen) would be brought out soon. Finally, everyone was given a new cracker and, after a blessing, began silently and rapidly chewing mouthfuls upon mouthfuls of this dry, cardboard-like substance. While it wasn't the succulent chicken he was waiting for, Ivan partook with gusto. At least it was something to satisfy his terrible hunger! With hopeful eyes, he noticed that now things seemed to be moving a bit more quickly now. Perhaps the meal was finally beginning?

After a few moments, a white substance was brought out in tightly sealed bags. He couldn't exactly make out what it was, but he was sure it was something delicious! Yes! the feast had finally begun! Everyone



received another cracker with this unknown substance on it. Ivan was practically shaking from excitement – he couldn't wait to taste what was surely a rare and expensive delicacy! Finally, after another blessing, everyone dug in. Ivan made sure to take an extra big bite (he deserved it, after all, waiting so patiently). Instantly, his smile disappeared. The shooting sensation of intense heat that erupted in his throat, spreading up his nose and burning his eyes was unlike anything poor Ivan had ever experienced before. Furious, and with tears streaming down his red and swollen face, Ivan spit out the vile substance, jumped from his seat, and ran back to the dump he called home.

A few hours later, he was woken suddenly by a kick in the leg. Blinking, he looked up to see his friend Mendel, the Jewish pauper, standing over him and smiling from ear to ear. "What are you so happy about?" he grumbled. "You Jews are crazy! That was no feast, that was torture!" Mendel shook his head from side to side, his grin stretching even wider. "You fool!" He cried. "If you would have waited just a few minutes more, you would have experienced the most incredible meal of your life! Just a few more minutes of patience and perseverance and you could have had everything you ever dreamed of!"

Friends, the *nimshal* is profound. So often in life, we experience challenges, difficult situations which seem to grow more and more miserable with the passage of time before culminating in a near intolerable

peak of pain and frustration. As we sink further and further into addiction, unhealthy behaviors, sin, despair, shame, guilt, depression, and self-loathing etc. we reach a point where we feel as if we simply can't go on. As the *maror* of life assaults our very essence, we feel as if we have failed our mission. We are ready to let go and surrender to the lowest elements of our being. Rebbe Nachman is teaching us that at moments like these we need to gather all of our strength and find the courage to hold on just a little bit longer. Immediately after *Maror* comes *Shulchan Oreich!* It is following the darkest points in the struggles of life that the dawn of salvation breaks, spreading warmth and brilliant illumination over the entirety of our existence.

Our world has entered into a dark tunnel, the other side of which is entirely uncertain. But we are being called upon by our loving Father in heaven to stand strong, to hold on tight to the promise of redemption and lean into the bitterness with ultimate commitment and perseverance. Armed with the knowledge that we are never given a challenge we cannot handle, let us hold tightly to our trust that the great feast is just around the corner - if we can only hold on for just a few more minutes. May Hashem end our suffering with the coming of Moshiach *tzidkeinu*, speedily and in our days! Wishing all *yidden* everywhere a *chag kosher v'sameach!* 🕎

לזכות רפואה שלמה
אלימולך מרדיכי בן שלמית



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