



פרשת צו/פסח

The genius of Chazal becomes stark and evident as we approach and enter into the glorious Leil Haseder. Chazal designed The Seder to be a long lasting experience that envelops our minds and thoughts almost inevitably. The hustle and bustle before Yom Tov (AND THE NERVES), covering up things you never knew were there and maybe hoping for a better turn out of family members this year, somehow all create a warmth to Yom Tov. Just walking into the room, being bowled over by the pungent, eye-watering "fragrance" of Chrein being grated, transports us to another time, another place and another world. And the other-worldly Seder itself – what genius! The exaltedness of the Seder manages to fuse the past, the present and our prayers for the future into one seamless entity that is magically at once somber and hopeful, dark and illuminating. These moments of special chemistry become the fabric of our future memories, memories that linger and linger.

My own memory really says it all. The Chaya Adam (from Vilna) writes that one should not use raw onions for כרפס. He then asks, but we in Lithuania DO USE IT, only because we don't have anything else (try and imagine the poverty). As a young chil our family, keeping the tradition, used a raw onion. Try and imagine my joy when I found the Chaye Adam and was able to convince my mother to change to a potato. Until then, she would say - nearing the age of ninety - her memory was that "Der Pappa", after eating the raw onion, would start coughing every year. Her childhood memory of a Seder eighty years ago – the genius of Chazal, designing a Seder that remains vivid even after so many years. The child will not forget it. (By the way, the old way had no problem with hungry people wanting to eat more than a כזית of the כרפס!)

The Seder has an interesting requirement, as stated by the Baal Haggadah: בכל דור ודור חייב אדם לראות את עצמו כאילו הוא יצא ממצרים. The Rambam (Chametz U'Matzah 7:6) makes it both easier and harder for us, as he quotes בכל דור ודור חייב אדם לראות את עצמו כאילו הוא בעצמו יצא ממצרים. The בעל הגדה requires us to do the near impossible, TO IMAGINE

as if we just left Mitzrayim. I always tell Talmidim, you couldn't even find Mitzrayim ON A MAP! The Rambam changes לראות into להראות - TO DISPLAY ACTIONS, TO BEHAVE in a way as if you were just freed. But he also adds בעצמו - you yourself, as well as עתה - right now, as part of our "חייב". But let us examine the entire דין - WHY do we have this obligation? There is no such requirement by Sukkah, to imagine as if we are sitting in the ענני הכבוד in the Midbar. There is no obligation to imagine AS IF I'M AT HAR SINAI when the Torah was given (to remember, yes, but not to imagine). Let us try and understand.

The word הגדה itself has numerous interpretations. The Avudraham and others translate it as הודאה, thankfulness. Some beautifully explain (Exalted Evening by Rabbi M. Genack) that הגדת לבנך means a formal act of הגדת, testimony before a Bais Din. Therefore, any עדות is disqualified if it is hearsay, עד מפי עד. It is only עדות if you saw it yourself. Hence, the obligation to imagine, to display actions AS IF it in fact just happened TO YOU, to connect it as much as we can to עדות.

Mefarshim raise another question. Since the Mitzvah of סיפור יציאת מצרים is to relate the story of how we were redeemed from the shackles of Mitzrayim, why does the Baal Haggadah choose to Darshen the Pesukim in the Parsha of Bikurim, in Devarim, while the entire story is in the Parshios of Shemos, Vaeira, Bo and Beshalach?

What an eye-opening Pshat (הגיוני הלכה ח"ג עמ' 171) by Rav Shlomo Kluger, who teaches that the advantage of המרבה כל משובה (Netziv Shemos 6:7), which indicates that THE MAN is משובה, is because when people repeat stories that they heard from others – they will get to the point and the listeners will hopefully pay some kind of attention. But when the story-teller says this happened TO ME, בדידי הו, that authenticates the story – somewhat – and he will elucidate every detail – באריכות - trying to make sure every listener will hear it well. The Halacha asks of us – on this night as the night of ליל שמורים, the night to pass our Minhagim, our לשנה הבאה, our dreams for בטחון, our souls





– DO IT WELL. Tell the story as well as someone who just escaped from captivity because then you will tell it well and then they will listen. He then explains, a very elementary Vort, the Parsha of Bikurim is in FIRST PERSON, where he tells the story AS IF IT HAPPENED TO HIM – as it is written:

ונצעק and ויתנו עלנו עבודה קשה, ויתנו עלינו, וירעו אותנו המצרים and ויציאנו, He took us out etc.. So the Yid tells HIS OWN STORY, so that all the assembled will tune in. The Parshiyos of Shemos etc. tell the story impersonally: Hashem said, Moshe said, Pharaoh said, which does not fit as well for someone telling a personal story that happened to him.

Memories can create emotions that can run the full gamut – from sad to joyous, and sometimes even both of them alongside each other. As we prepare, giving busy a new definition, we must, must think about our memories of last years Pesach. What the מגפה did to us last year Pesach and since. So, so many קרבנות, so much heartbreak, it is almost beyond belief. Years ago, when the beginning of the exodus of Yidden from Russia began, there were those who suggested that everyone should set an extra seat at the Seder table to empathize with the Yidden still in captivity. Hashem Yerachem, there are too many empty seats by the Seder for too many Yidden, ויפקד מקום דוד. On the other hand, if you are reading this, we are here by the great רחמים of Hashem. I recently read an article written by someone who grew up in Washington Heights around the same time I did. I guess I was taken by the article because his description of the neighborhood, circa 1950's, was extraordinary. His pen was ממש on the pulse of zeitgeist of the area. He writes that everyone he knew had a number on their arm – his father, his mother and even his teenage sister. He must have been six or seven years old when he asked his mother “when will I get a number on my arm”, thinking maybe by his Bar-Mitzvah or something. That is how a six-year-old thinks in a neighborhood of survivors.

My mind wandered – I הלילה would not, could not, compare those שרידי חרב, that I grew up with to any other kind of survivor of ANYTHING IN THE WORLD. The not even

half-witted, irresponsible comparing ANYTHING to that חורבן, even using the same terminology, makes me just want to slap them across the face. I'm probably not alone. On the other hand, בזעיר אנפין - in miniature, we also survived our הלואי ווייסער and were spared totally, partially and אי"ה. It's the kind of thing that, despite all the outspoken חכמים who were proven not even to be a שאינו יודע לשאול, nobody knows anything, why or how. All we are able to know is that אי"ה we will be able to have a far superior Seder to our last years, AND for that we all need to be grateful beyond words. The חוקוני explains why even Hashem called Moshe by the name given to him by Bas Pharaoh, because Hashem ALWAYS wanted to remind him – YOU ARE A SURVIVOR. You were in a flimsy basket, floating down the river, and I saved you – מן המים. Every survivor needs to remind themselves: You were saved for a reason, you still have a mission, a תפקיד to accomplish. I think these thoughts are also included in כל המרבה - MY OWN SURVIVAL, up close and personal.

The great people of my Shul know that I always end my שבת with a הגדול דרשה from Rav Shalom Shvadron. If only I could transmit it to you as I heard it. If you walk into a room and see one woman רייבט חריין, grating horseradish and weeping, you figure it must be Erev Pesach. If you find three women grating, you figure there must be a wedding. If you find thirty women grating חריין, you will figure that a Rebbeh is making a Chasuna. The amount of women grating חריין and crying indicates the measure of the great and special Simcha that will follow. Reb Shalom blasted out, as only he could: זאל שוין – גינגו חריין געריבען, ואל שוין! We have all grated ENOUGH חריין, so Hashem, let us finally enjoy the great שמחה of לשנה הבאה of שמחה בירושלים אמן

Among those who are מצפים לישועה.

אמני דאנקה
חיים טובים איתן

