



## We Recite “Ha Lachma Anya” in Aramaic to Teach Us that on the Seder Night We Are Privileged to Be in the Presence of the Shechinah

“הא לחמא עניא די אכלו אבהתנא בארעא דמצרים”—this is the bread of affliction that our forefathers ate in the land of Mitzrayim. These are the opening words of the Haggadah that we read on the night of the Seder. It gives me great pleasure to present a fascinating interpretation from the holy master, Rabbi Yischar Dov of Belz, zy”a. He explains why our esteemed sages, who arranged and compiled the Haggadah, chose to begin the mitzvah of recounting the events of “yetzias Mitzrayim” with a passage in Aramaic. Here is what we are taught in the Gemara (Shabbas 12b):

“אמר רבה בר בר חנה, כי הוה אזלינן בתריה דרבי אלעזר לשיולי בתפיחה זימנין אמר המקום יפקדך לשלום וזימנין אמר, רחמנא ידכרינך לשלום.” “היכי עביד הכי, והאמר רב יהודה, לעולם אל ישאל אדם צרכיו בלשון ארמי, ואמר רבי יוחנן, כל השואל צרכיו בלשון ארמי אין מלאכי השרת נזקקין לו, שאין מלאכי השרת מכירין בלשון ארמי.” “שאני חולה דשכינה עמו, דאמר רב ענן אמר רב, מנין ששכינה סועד את החולה. שנאמר ה' יסעדנו על ערש דוי.”

**Rabbah bar bar Chana said: When we would go with Rabbi Elazar to visit the sick, he would occasionally say (in Hebrew), “May the Omnipresent remember you for peace.” And occasionally, he would say (in Aramaic), “May the Merciful One remember you for peace.”** The Gemara inquires: **How could he have done this** (prayed in Aramaic)? **After all, Rav Yehudah has said: A person should never request his needs (from G-d) in Aramaic. And Rabbi Yochanan said: If anyone requests his needs in Aramaic, the “malachei hashareis” (ministering/guardian angels) do not pay attention to him, because the**

**“malachei hashareis” do not comprehend Aramaic.** The Gemara answers: **A sick person is different, because the Shechinah is with him. As Rav Anan said in the name of Rav: From where do we know that the Shechinah provides for a sick person? For, it says (Tehillim 41, 4): “Hashem will support him on the sick bed.”**

This implies that when the Shechinah is present among us, it is permissible to pray even in Aramaic, because we do not require the malachim to transport our tefilos to the heavens. Rather, HKB”H Himself, in His glory, hears our tefilos directly without the need of an intermediary. Now, concerning the night of Pesach, it is written (Devarim 26, 8): **“ויוציאנו ה' ממצרים: ביד חזקה ובזרוע נטויה ובמורא גדול”—Hashem took us out of Mitzrayim with a strong hand, with an outstretched arm, and with great awesomeness.** They expound on this passuk in the Haggadah: **“ובמורא גדול זו גילוי שכינה”—“and with great awesomeness” refers to the revelation of the Shechinah.** Similarly, on every first night of Pesach, the illumination of “yetzias Mitzrayim” is aroused and we are privileged to experience the revelation of the Shechinah.

Hence, it is for this reason that the compilers of the Haggadah intentionally formulated the opening passage of the Haggadah in Aramaic. They wished to impress upon us that we are privileged to have the Shechinah present with us on the Seder night. Therefore, it is permissible to recite prayers in Aramaic, because we do not require the “malachei hashareis” to be our intermediaries. On the contrary, HKB”H

Himself, in His glory, receives our tefilos pertaining to the future geulah: **השתא הכא לשנה הבאה בארעא דישראל, השתא עבדי** "השתא הכא לשנה הבאה בני חורין"—**now, we are here; but next year, we will be in Eretz Yisrael. Now, we are slaves; but next year, we will be free men.**

### We Say "הא לחמא עניא" in Aramaic so that the Malachim Will Not Be Envious

Additionally, the holy master, the Maharid of Belz, zy" a, provides another explanation for why we recite the passage of **הא לחמא עניא** in Aramaic. According to the Ritva and the Avudraham, it is because we do not want to make the malachim jealous. Therefore, we recite this passage in a language that they do not understand. But why would this passage in particular evoke the envy of the malachim? To answer this question, he refers to the formula we recite to invite guests and those in need to join us: **כל דכפין ייתי** "כל דצריך ייתי ויפסח"—**let whoever is in need come and partake; let all who are in need come and celebrate the Pesach.** This is a very generous and grand invitation, but how can we be so sure that we will have enough to feed everyone that comes to join us?

He explains the matter based on a teaching he heard from his father, the holy master, the Mahari of Belz, zy" a. If a person prepares himself with kedushah and taharah to fulfill the mitzvas asei commanded by the Torah to eat matzah, he will merit tasting the kedushah of the matzos experienced by Yisrael during "yetzias Mitzrayim." Furthermore, we learn in the Gemara (Kiddushin 38a): **עוגות שהוציאו ממצרים טעמו בהם** "עוגות שהוציאו ממצרים טעמו בהם"—**the cakes they brought out of Mitzrayim, they tasted in them the taste of "mahn."** In other words, it is possible for us to taste the taste of "mahn" when consuming our matzos on the night of Pesach.

Now, with regards to the "mahn," we know that it was blessed and, consequently, there was never a shortage. For the passuk states (Shemos 16, 18): **וימדו בעומר ולא העדיף** "וימדו בעומר ולא העדיף"—**they measured in an "omer" and whoever took more had nothing extra and whoever took less was not lacking; everyone according to what he eats had they gathered.** This then is the gist of our declaration: **"הא לחמא עניא די אכלו אבהתנא בארעא דמצרים"**—

if we are meritorious, then our matzah will be just like the matzah that our forefathers ate in Mitzrayim—which possessed the taste of "mahn." Hence, we can proclaim with confidence: **"כל דכפין ייתי ויפסח, כל דצריך ייתי ויפסח"**—**Whoever is hungry, let him come and eat! Whoever is needy, let him come and celebrate Pesach!** For, just like the "mahn," even someone who gathered less was never lacking. This concludes his valuable insight.

### By Means of the "Mahn" Yisrael Were Refined Level after Level

As a loyal servant in the presence of my master, I would like to embellish the sacred idea of the Maharid, zy" a. He asserts that we proclaim **הא לחמא עניא** in Aramaic, so that the malachim will not be envious of us. For, we are consuming the matzos that our forefathers consumed that possess the taste and flavor of the bread that nourishes the "malachei hashareis." Why does our eating the "mahn" that is the food of the malachim make them envious? After all, the King of the Universe can provide enough "mahn" for everyone—both for the heavenly malachim and for Yisrael.

It appears that we can provide clarification by referring to the Divrei Menachem (Beshalach). He presents in the name of the great Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Rimanov, zy" a, an interpretation of the passuk (ibid. 15): **ויאמרו איש אל אחיו מן הוא כי לא ידעו מה הוא**—**they said to one another, "It is mahn!"—for they did not know what it was.** By eating the "mahn," Yisrael were refined and ascended spiritually from one level to the next. As a consequence, they no longer recognized one another. This prompted them to inquire: **מן הוא.** In other words, **"Who is that?"**

Now, we have a passuk that states (Zechariah 3, 7): **ונתתי לך מהלכים בין העומדים האלה**—**I will grant you "mehalchim" (those who can walk) among these "omdim" (those who stand in place).** The Avodas Yisrael (Nitzavim) explains that the malachim are depicted as **"omdim,"** because they are static; they always exist on the same spiritual level, because they cannot advance to the next level. In contrast, tzaddikim are depicted as **"holchim,"** because they are constantly advancing from level to level by performing mitzvos and good deeds.

This clarifies for us the sacred insight of the Maharid of Belz, zy”a. We recite the opening lines of the Haggadah in Aramaic, so that the malachim will not be jealous that we are eating matzos containing the taste and influence of “mahn.” For, upon witnessing the tremendous kedushah of Yisrael on the Seder night—how they consume matzos

with the effects of “mahn,” enabling them to ascend spiritually to higher levels—they are liable to be envious. After all, they also eat “mahn,” and, yet they remain static; they cannot ascend to another spiritual level. Hence, we recite the passage of “הא לחמא עניא” in Aramaic.

## The Intent of Breaking the Middle Matzah according to the Arizal

In honor of the holiday of Pesach that approaches auspiciously—when HKB”H elevates every Jew higher and higher on the spiritual ladder ascending to the heavenly realms—let us delight in a delicacy from our master, the Arizal. He explains the purpose and intent of breaking the middle matzah into two parts. We will endeavor to explain this in a way that is applicable to everyone. We pray that Hashem will guide us along the path of truth.

It says in the Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 473, 6): **He should take the middle matzah and break it in two. He should give one half to one of those in attendance to safeguard it as the “afikoman”; it is placed under the tablecloth. He should place the other half back between the two whole ones (matzos). He should lift the plate containing the matzos and say “Ha lachma anya” until “Ma nishtanah.”** Let us propose a connection between the breaking of the middle matzah and reciting the passage of “**Ha lachma anya**” afterwards.

To begin with, we will introduce what the Magen Avraham (21) writes in the name of the Maharil. The middle matzah is broken into two pieces, a small piece and a large piece; the larger piece is hidden as the “afikoman.” This is also the minhag described by the Arizal in Sha’ar HaKavanos (Pesach 6). He explains that we should imagine that the intact middle matzah represents the shape of the letter “**hei**,” composed of the letters “**dalet**” and “**vav**.” These two letters allude to the perfect unity of HKB”H with the congregation of Yisrael. The “**dalet**” represents the people of Yisrael,

who are “**dalah**”—they are poor and downtrodden and lack (“**d’leit**”) any means of their own.

HKB”H, on the other hand, is like the letter “**vav**,” appearing and interacting with us through the six (the numerical value of the letter “**vav**”) midos (“**chesed**,” “**gevurah**,” “**Tiferes**,” “**netzach**,” “**hod**,” and “**yesod**”). He provides the people of Yisrael abundant means through these six midos. The union of these two letters forms a “**hei**”—a “**dalet**” with a “**vav**” inside it. Thus, it represents the relationship between HKB”H and the people of Yisrael.

This was not the case in Mitzrayim where Yisrael were subjected to harsh enslavement and were mired in the tumah of Mitzrayim. A separation and rift existed between the “**dalet**” and “**vav**”—the connection between HKB”H and the people of Yisrael was incomplete. This is symbolized by the breaking of the middle matzah, viewed as a “**hei**,” into two parts. We hide the larger piece, corresponding to the “**vav**,” to be consumed at the conclusion of the meal as the “afikoman.” The smaller piece, corresponding to the “**dalet**,” is combined with the top, whole matzah—which is round like the dot of the letter “**yud**”; together, they form the word “**די**.” Hence, we say: “**די אכלו אבהתנא בארעא דמצרים**,” because in galus Mitzrayim, the relationship between HKB”H and Bnei Yisrael resembled “**די**” rather than the ideal “**דיו**” that we pray and strive for.

### The Hidden Afikoman Symbolizes the Future Geulah

It is with great pleasure that we can now explain the significance of the “afikoman,” the larger piece of the middle

matzah, corresponding to the letter “vav,” consumed in commemoration of the Korban Pesach. Thus, we indicate that we believe wholeheartedly that HKB”H will return the letter “vav” to us with the arrival of the future geulah, and we will achieve perfect unity with Him. This is the message of the passuk (Hoshea 2, 21): **“וארשתיך לי לעולם, וארשתיך לי באמונה וידעת את ה'—בצדק ובמשפט ובחסד וברחמים, וארשתיך לי באמונה וידעת את ה'—I will betroth you to Me forever; and I will betroth you to Me with righteousness, justice, kindness, and mercy; and I will betroth you to Me with faithfulness, and you shall know Hashem.**

For, le'asid la'vo, we will offer all of the korbanos in the third Beis HaMikdash and will actually consume the Korban Pesach. We express this fact in the Mussaf service we say on the festivals: **“והביאנו לציון עירך ברנה ולירושלים בית מקדשך בשמחה עולם, ושם נעשה לפניך את קרבנות חובותינו תמידים כסדרם ומוספים כהלכתם. Bring us to Tziyon, Your city, in jubilation, and to Yerushalayim, home of Your Sanctuary, with everlasting joy. There we will perform for You our obligatory korbanos—the regular, daily offerings according to their order and the Mussaf offerings according to their law.** This explains why we conceal the larger piece of the middle matzah to be consumed as the “afikoman” commemorating the Korban Pesach. We are signifying that at the time of the future geulah, when we will be privileged once again to consume an actual Korban Pesach, HKB”H will return the letter “vav” to us.

This coincides very nicely with the passuk in parshas Vaeira (Shemos 8, 19): **“ושמתי פדות בין עמי ובין עמך למחר יהיה הזה—I will bring redemption between My people and your people—tomorrow this sign will come about.** Rabeinu Bachayei notes that the word “פדות” appears in this passuk without the letter “vav”; this defective spelling indicates that the geulah from Mitzrayim was not the final, complete geulah; there would be future galuyos to come. Here is what he writes: **“ותמצא מלת פדות חסר וא”ו, מפני שגאולת מצרים גאולה שאחריה שיעבוד, אבל גאולה העתידה אין שיעבוד אחריה כי אם תשועת עולמים, ועל כן תמצא בגאולה העתידה פדות מלא בוא”ו, הוא.”** After the geulah from Mitzrayim, there would be other periods of servitude necessitating future geulahs. The future geulah, however, will be an everlasting salvation. Hence, in the passuk (Tehillim 111, 9) describing

the future geulah, the word “פדות” appears in its complete form—including the letter “vav.”

This concurs beautifully with the interpretation of the Shela hakadosh (Bo 4) of the end of the passuk—**“Tomorrow this ‘אות’ (letter) will come about”**: This passuk is alluding to the letter “vav” that is missing from the word “פדת”. It is informing us that there is a tomorrow in the future related to the final geulah. At that time, HKB”H will restore the missing “vav.”

Thus, we have provided a wonderful explanation for the practice of taking the larger piece of the middle matzah, corresponding to the letter “vav,” to be eaten as the “afikoman.” In this manner, we express our sincere belief that at the time of the future geulah, HKB”H will return the letter “vav” to us by uniting with the people of Yisrael in a perfect unity symbolized by the two letters “dalet-vav.”

### A Fantastic Insight from the Chasam Sofer

I would like to explain the practical significance of the words of the Arizal for each and every one of us. In his Derashos, the Chasam Sofer, zy”a, presents a fantastic idea concerning the shape of the letter “hei.” It behooves us to consider the way the letter “hei” is written in a sefer Torah. The common practice is to draw the leg of the “hei” as a “yud” and not as a “vav.” As we have learned, there are two ways to configure a “hei”—either as a “dalet” with a “vav” inside it or as a “dalet” with a “yud” inside it. The former represents the perfect union of HKB”H with Yisrael, while the latter represents the lack of unity that exists during periods of galus. That being the case, why do draw the leg of the “hei” as a “yud” rather than as a “vav”?

The Chasam Sofer explains the matter based on a teaching in the Gemara (Menachos 29b). The left leg of the “hei” is suspended so that an opening remains between the top of that leg and the top of the “hei.” The purpose of this tiny aperture is to provide an entrance for someone who has sinned and wishes to return to good standing by performing sincere teshuvah to Hashem. So, we can suggest that this is the rationale for writing the letter “hei” in a sefer Torah as a “dalet with a yud” and not as a “dalet with a vav.” We want

to leave an adequate opening for ba'alei-teshuvah to return through. If the leg of the **"hei"** were elongated like a **"vav,"** the opening above it would be very tiny and prohibitive.

In keeping with this idea, we express our praise of HKB"H as follows: **"הפותח י"ד בתשובה לקבל פושעים וחטאים—You Who open a י"ד (hand) for teshuvah, to accept wrongdoers and sinners.** In other words, by designating the form of the letter **"hei"** to be inscribed as a **"yud with a dalet,"** He provided an open pathway suitable for teshuvah. After all, it is His divine will **to accept wrongdoers and sinners** back into good standing by providing them with a larger aperture through which to return. This concludes his wonderful insight.

Incredibly, we can find an allusion to this notion in the statement of Rabbi Avahu (Berachos 34b): **"במקום שבעלי תשובה עומדין אין צדיקים גמורים עומדין"**—**in the place where ba'alei-teshuvah stand, total tzaddikim cannot stand.** We can suggest that he is referring to the place of the opening in the letter **"hei"** that HKB"H provided for ba'alei-teshuvah, between the **"yud"** on the left side and the top of the letter **"dalet."** That place does not exist for consummate tzaddikim, because their union with HKB"H is complete; it resembles the combination of the **"dalet and vav,"** which only has a very tiny aperture.

We can now shed some light on the Arizal's explanation concerning the middle matzah. Initially, it is shaped like a **"dalet and vav,"** symbolizing the perfect unity of HKB"H with the people of Yisrael. During the galus in Mitzrayim, however, Yisrael sank to the 49<sup>th</sup> level of tumah and the union of the **"dalet and vav"** did not exist. To remedy this situation, HKB"H expanded the opening in the letter **"hei,"** transforming it into a **"dalet and yud,"** to make the pathway of teshuvah more accessible to Yisrael.

We demonstrate this symbolically by breaking the middle matzah. By separating the **"dalet"** and the **"vav,"** we allude to the fact that this unity does not exist in galus. Instead, we join the smaller piece of matzah representing the letter **"dalet"** with the whole, upper matzah representing the letter **"yud."** The result is a **"hei"** formed by a **"dalet and yud."** This newly formed **"hei"** provides a wider opening for sinners intent on performing teshuvah. We express this

by announcing: **"הא לחמא עניא ד"י אכלו אבהתנא בארעא דמצרים"**—we acknowledge that in galus Mitzrayim the letter **"hei"** resembled the letters **ד"י**, because HKB"H expanded the opening for teshuvah in order to remove Yisrael from the tumah of Mitzrayim.

After breaking the whole, middle matzah at the beginning of the seder—separating the **"dalet"** and the **"vav"**—and joining the smaller piece with the whole upper matzah—forming a **"dalet and yud"** as explained—we begin the mitzvah of "sipur yetzias Mitzrayim"—recounting the events related to the exodus. Thus, we also enter the doorway of teshuvah ridding ourselves of the tumah of Mitzrayim. In the words of the Haggadah: **"וכל המרבה לספר ביציאת מצרים הרי זה משובח"**—**the more one recounts the events of "yetzias Mitzrayim," the more commendable it is.** According to the Sefas Emes (Pesach 5640), this means that those telling the story become more praiseworthy by ridding themselves of that tumah.

### We Consume Both the "Dalet" and the "Vav" in the Same Meal

Let us continue to embellish the words of the Arizal. In truth, we consume both pieces of the middle matzah in a single meal on the Seder night. We eat the smaller piece corresponding to the **"dalet"** at the beginning of the meal, when we fulfill the mitzvah of eating matzah. We eat the larger piece corresponding to the **"vav,"** at the end of the meal, as the "afikoman" to commemorate the Korban Pesach.

As the Ramban (Bereishis 12, 6) teaches us, before a miracle can be triggered from above, we must perform a symbolic gesture down below. This explains very nicely the protocol we follow at the beginning of the Seder. In the step of "yAchasz," we separate the **"dalet and vav"** of the middle matzah into two pieces. Then, we proceed to tell the story of "yetzias Mitzrayim" over the piece corresponding to the **"dalet."** In this manner, we indicate that during the exile in Egypt, Bnei Yisrael were not connected with the **"vav"** representing HKB"H.

Nevertheless, after fulfilling the mitzvah of "sipur yetzias Mitzrayim," we reach the step of "shulchan oreich"—eating

the festive meal. During that meal, we reunite the two pieces representing the “**dalet and vav.**” Thus, we restore in a single meal the perfect unity of the letter “**hei**” symbolizing the perfect unity of HKB”H and the people of Yisrael.

We can now interpret the entire passage of “**הא לחמא עניא**” according to the Arizal. The middle matzah that we broke in two during “yAchasz” is the bread of affliction that our forefathers ate in Mitzrayim. It symbolizes the separation and lack of unity that existed between the “**dalet**”—the people of Yisrael—and the “**vav**”—HKB”H. Notwithstanding, on the night of Pesach, when we departed from Mitzrayim, we possess the ability to restore that unity by consuming the two respective pieces in the same meal.

Therefore, in relation to the smaller piece representing the “**dalet,**” we say: “**Let whoever is in need come and partake**”—we are inviting them to come a partake of that

piece to fulfill the mitzvah of eating matzah. In relation to the larger piece representing the “**vav,**” we say: “**Let all who are in need come and celebrate the Pesach**”—we are inviting them to come and partake of the “afikoman” commemorating the Korban Pesach. By partaking of these two pieces of matzah in the same meal, we reunite them; thus, on the night of Pesach, we unite the letters “**dalet and vav**” in perfect unity.

Clearly, the essential, complete, perfect union will be achieved with the future geulah. Therefore, we pray: “**Now, we are here; but next year, we will be in Eretz Yisrael. Now, we are slaves; but next year, we will be free men.**” At that time, we will be privileged to be part of the perfect unity of HKB”H and the people of Yisrael, as it is written (Yeshayah 62, 5): “**זמשוש חתן על כלה ישיש עליך אלקיך**”—and like a bridegroom rejoicing over his bride, so will your G-d rejoice over you—swiftly, in our times! Amen.



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