

The Door to Redemption

Rabbi Pinchos Lipschutz

With the arrival of the month of Nissan, yeshivos are going into bein hazemanim, girls are being let out to help their mothers prepare for Pesach, and we are furiously making sure that we have everything we need for Yom Tov.

Our anticipation mounts for the Seder, when we will celebrate our freedom. We will sit like kings, imagining that we were in servitude and were miraculously freed.

We joyously look forward to the Seder's drama, the family resplendent in their Yom Tov finery, gathered around the Yom Tov table, graced by the ke'arah, the Arba Kosos, and the matzos.

There is so much preparation that goes into that evening, from grating the chrein to washing the lettuce and so much else, but there is something more important.

The words we recite at the opening of Maggid, the central part of the Seder, do not pertain to Yetzias Mitzrayim, slavery or redemption. Rather, they address what makes us Jews and our very fiber as a nation. We cannot experience the Seder properly if we did not meet our obligations to others. We cannot celebrate our nationhood if we cut ourselves off from the needs of other members of our nation.

Therefore, as we set out on the grandest trip of the year, we invite anyone who can benefit from our assistance to join. Only after we are content that we have done what we can for our brothers and sisters can we enjoy the Seder: every man a king, every woman a queen, and every child a shining angel.

One of the most resonant proclamations made at the Seder is the one recited right at the beginning of Maggid, when we say, "Kol dichfin yeisei veyeichol kol ditzrich yeisei veyifsach." The sweeping declaration made in homes everywhere invites all those who are hungry to join in the Pesach Seder.

You may ask that by the time we issue this invitation, we are already seated comfortably at our tables. Everyone has their seat and the door is firmly shut. Of what use is it to sit in the privacy of our homes and issue a public invitation that we know will go unheard by anyone outside of our immediate vicinity?

It may be that the statement is an oblique reference to the activities of the previous few weeks. The baal haSeder lets everyone know that even though he sits at the head of a splendid table, feeling every bit the king, he has not forgotten to share the blessings Hashem has given him. As he sets out to relive Geulas Mitzrayim, he affirms that he has participated in the call for ma'os chittim and kimcha depischa, and has done what he can so that those less fortunate than him can also sit comfortably with their families at their Sedorim.

He begins his Seder by reassuring his family that their rejoicing and celebration are complete because they have shared with others. They have been selfless and caring and thus can begin to tell the tale of redemption. The Seder is all about chinuch, and this is a prime lesson for the family.

Sometimes, we envision needy people as in a children's storybook illustration, with tattered clothing and gaunt faces. In truth, all too often, the people who need help making Yom Tov might well have decent suits and respectable jobs. They are people like you, who work hard all week to make ends meet. Yet, they can't get it done without some help. Prices have shot up, and for some mysterious reason, everything costs even more Yom Tov time.

We all know that the economic reality is such that it is a challenge to make ends meet even when both parents work. Daily living expenses are so high that families are increasingly crushed and unable to crawl out from under piles of unpaid bills. The costs of a mortgage, rent, cars, insurance, and tuition, not to mention food, clothing and everything else, are just too much for too many people.

Yom Tov should be a time everyone happily looks forward to, awaiting the brachos associated with the chag hageulah. Alas, too many people worry about how they will be able to afford their family's needs. We, who are able to, must do what we can to help restore the faith and self-respect of people who suffer silently and daven for a yeshuah so that they can hold their heads above water.

Yidden are blessed with heightened instincts. One of them is to give generously and intelligently.

One year, on Erev Pesach in the town of Slonim, Reb Yosef Charif received a distressed-looking woman in his study. The wife of one of the town's successful businessmen, Reb Nota Hirsch, was seriously distraught. She confided that her husband had suffered severe financial setbacks and lost all his money. She had waited for things to work out, but here they were, on Erev Pesach, with not a coin in the house. She had nothing to cook. They were going to starve this Yom Tov. She begged the rov for assistance.

The insightful rov was stunned by the revelation of what happened to this proud family. He had nothing to give her. He had already distributed all the ma'os chittim he had raised and had no money of his own to help the proud family out of their predicament.

He sat there deep in thought and then opened his eyes and spoke, assuring the broken woman that he could help her if she would follow his instructions. "Tell your husband that when he wishes me gut Yom Tov after davening tonight in shul, he should whisper in my ear. Something. Anything. But he should bend over and whisper it to me."

The woman returned home and tearfully recounted the conversation to her husband. After davening on leil Pesach, a line of Slonimer Jews, enveloped by the joy and spirit of Yom Tov, surrounded the rov, wishing him a gut Yom Tov. Then the prominent Reb Nota Hirsch walked up to the rov, leaned over, and whispered into his ear. Reb Yosef jumped, as if bitten by a snake. "Oy!" he loudly lamented, shaking his head to and fro. "That's terrible. It is chometz. Everything is chometz. You can't use any of it. I'm sorry, Reb Nota, but that is the halacha."

The crowd heard the rov's words and everyone drew the same conclusion. Reb Nota had asked about some accident in his kitchen, and the rov had ruled that everything in the house was forbidden. The people in shul were quick to react. Reb Yankel assured Reb Nota that he had extra matzos and Reb Moshe offered wine. Reb Hershel had plenty of soup and boiled chicken, and Reb Boruch's wife had made too much kugel. Reb Berel had extra tzimmiss. This one had maror to spare, while that one had charoses.

That night, from all directions, the good people of Slonim descended on Reb Nota's home bearing boxes, dishes and trays, eager to help a family deprived of Yom Tov necessities. People came throughout the evening, as word of the mishap spread. Thanks to the rov's wisdom, Reb Nota and his family would not go hungry that Yom Tov.

This is not only a story about the rov's wisdom. There is a deeper message. The rov was fully confident that his plan would work. He knew that the people of the town would swiftly and generously react and rush to the aid of the stricken family.

Now is a difficult time of year to ask people for money. Purim, when people opened their hearts and wallets to a stream of mosdos and individuals, is not far behind. Pesach is expensive as well.

In Parshas Ki Sisa, Moshe Rabbeinu was instructed to collect a half-shekel from every man for the bedek habayis of the Mishkon. The Medrash states that Moshe had difficulty comprehending the commandment, so Hashem showed him a coin of fire to explain what was needed. Many ask what lesson the Medrash is imparting.

Why did Moshe have to see the coin? Why was it shown in fire? What was so hard to understand about the mandate to solicit a half-shekel from everyone?

Rav Shlomo Heiman explains that the Jews had just generously donated their possessions towards the construction of the Mishkon. Moshe was hesitant to approach them again for a donation. "They just gave," he protested. "How can I go back to them now and ask for more?"

Hashem showed him a coin of fire to signify that just as fire spreads and lights other materials without losing any of its power, so too, when a Jew donates money for a good cause, he never loses by doing so. "Go back and ask them for the money for the Mishkon," Hashem said, "and let them know that they will only gain by giving."

A candle can ignite other candles, yet the original flame will lack nothing. So too, the Ribbono Shel Olam was teaching that those who are able to can give and not worry about it affecting them negatively. They can give and then give again.

Like a flame that shares its fire without losing anything.

We must share our blessings, secure in the knowledge that we will never lose by doing so.

In Ha Lachma Anya, after we invite the poor to join the Seder, we express the hope that next year, we will celebrate as bnei chorin in Eretz Yisroel. What is the connection between these two ideas?

The posuk in Eicha (1:3) states, "Golsah Yehudah mei'oni – The Jewish people were exiled because of poverty." The Medrash (Eicha 1:28), in one of its explanations, states that the Jews were exiled from Eretz Yisroel because they didn't help the poor. Therefore, as we begin the Seder, celebrating our original redemption, we proclaim that we will feed the poor and hope that, in that merit, we will be redeemed from the present golus.

Is there a better way to expend the effort to make that a reality than by contributing to assist people in celebrating Yom Tov?

We lain Parshas Shekolim as we head into Purim and Pesach to drive home the message. We engage in kimcha depischa campaigns, providing food for those who need assistance feeding their families, because Pesach is the holiday of geulah. At this time of year, when geulah is in the air and the potential for redemption is stronger than ever, we put ourselves out by donating for the poor, accruing added zechuyos to be in Ara D'Yisroel next year.

Chazal say, "B'Nissan nigalu ub'Nissan asidin lehigo'eil" (Rosh Hashanah 11a).
Nissan is the month of geulah.

This is the month in which Yitzchok was born and the Akeidah took place, almost ending his life. The merit of the Akeidah stands by us until this very day. As we say in the tefillos of Rosh Hashanah, "Ve'akeidas Yitzchok hayom berachamim tizkor."

That sanctification of our forefather transpired during the month of Nissan, presaging it as a period of redemption. During Nissan, Yaakov received from Yitzchok the brachos that sustain us until this day.

If we are makdish ourselves and work to make ourselves worthy, we can also earn redemption from that which binds us. A primary mode of preparing ourselves to be worthy of brachos is through tzedakah, and a prime means of attaining that ultimate geulah is through tzedakah. As the posuk famously says, "Tziyon bemishpot tipodeh veshoveha b'tzedokah."

This week, we begin learning Seder Vayikra and learning all about the various korbanos. But doing so causes us to question how we can cleanse ourselves from our sins and rise to higher levels of kedusha and closeness to Hashem.

Rabi Elozor is quoted in the Gemara in Maseches Sukkah (49b) as stating that someone who engages in acts of tzedakah is doing something greater than all the korbanos – "gadol ha'oseh tzedakah mikol hakorbanos."

We don't have the Bais Hamikdosh. We don't have the mekor of kedusha. It is so difficult to draw ourselves closer to Hashem and make ourselves worthy of geulah. tzedakah remains a way for us to achieve that goal. tzedakah presents an

opportunity to tap into the power of geulah. Rich or poor, we can realize it if our hearts are opened wide enough.

The final door to redemption will be opened through generosity, charity, concern and dedication to helping others.

Perhaps this is the connection between the season of giving that precedes Pesach and the Yom Tov itself. Before the hashpa'ah of geulah descends from Heaven, we are granted an opportunity to actualize the geulah through increased tzedakah.

Rav Levi Yitzchok of Berditchev was once told about a situation in which the local matzah bakery was employing local orphan girls, working them throughout the long day and into the night under slave-like conditions. To add insult to injury, the destitute girls were being paid the bare minimum for their hard work.

The rebbe got up in shul and called out, "Throughout the generations, we have been falsely accused of using the blood of gentile children in our matzos. We all know this to be a lie. But something even worse is happening here in our town. The blood in the matzos this year will be that of our own Yiddishe techter!"

Needless to say, the situation was quickly rectified.

We must all do what we can to alleviate the suffering of the good people among us who need some extra help at this time of year.

Chazal say that a metzora is choshuv kemeis. Although he is alive, he is considered dead. Rav Chaim Shmulevitz famously explains that life means being able to give and benefit others. Since the metzora sits in solitude, he is deprived of the most

crucial part of the human experience. He cannot give and is therefore considered dead.

Nissan is the month when we were reborn. The signs of life begin with the ability and willingness to give. Let's join together by extending our hands, helping to usher in an enjoyable Yom Tov for all by contributing to our local ma'os chitim campaign, helping people we know, and contributing to the Yated's annual Keren Hachessed campaign, thus bringing about our own personal geulah and the geulah sheleimah bekarov.