

TorahFax: Vayakhel-Pikudei

Rabbi Zalmen Marozov

Tuesday, Adar 21, 5783 (Hakhel Year) / March 14, 2023

Now that Purim is behind us, we start preparing for the holiday of Pesach (Passover), which is one month after Purim. The highlight of Pesach is the Seders. In Israel only one Seder is performed, and, in the Diaspora, two Seders are celebrated. In Israel Pesach is a seven-day holiday, while in the Diaspora eight days are celebrated.

Q. On Shabbat and holidays, we wash our hands after the kiddush, recite the Hamotzi over the Challah and eat the meal right after. Yet, at the Seder after the Kiddush we recite the Hagadah before the meal. Only after do we wash our hands and eat the matzah, etc. Why, at the Seder don't we eat the matzah and meal after the Kiddush and then recite the Hagadah?

A. The rabbis instituted this order to make sure that the participants, especially the children, stay awake for the entire Seder. If we would eat the meal first, there is a good chance that people will become drowsy and not perform the Seder properly.

Q. Why is it customary for the children to hide the Afikoman at the beginning of the Seder?

A. We encourage the children to hide the Afikoman in order to keep them awake throughout the Seder. The excitement of receiving a reward for returning the Afikoman will keep them from falling asleep.

Q. Why is it important to eat the Afikoman before midnight?

A. The matzah eaten for the Afikoman represents the Passover sacrifice at the time of the Temple. The meat of the sacrifice had to be eaten before midnight.

Q. Why do we eat the Afikoman matzah after the meal?

A. As mentioned before, the Afikoman represents the Pesach sacrifice which was brought in the time of the Temple. It had to be eaten at the end of the meal, in order that the taste of the Pesach meat will remain in the person's mouth. This is symbolic of the fact that the experience and message of the Seder should stay with us long after we have finished the Seder.

Q. What is the significance of the hard-boiled egg on the Seder plate?

A. One reason is that the egg is a sign of mourning. It is the first meal that a mourner eats after a funeral. At the Passover Seder the egg reminds us that, although we are celebrating our freedom, we still mourn the loss of our Beth Hamikdash (Holy Temple).

This is especially significant in light of the fact that the first Seder night always falls on the same night of the week as Tisha B'Av (9th of Av) - the day of the destruction of the Holy Temples.

Wednesday, Adar 22, 5783 (Hakhel Year) / March 15, 2023

The Pesach (Passover) holiday when we celebrate our freedom from bondage, begins Wednesday night, April 5. It begins with the Seder on the first night of Pesach. In the Diaspora we celebrate a second Seder on the second night of Pesach. The following are questions and answers concerning the Seder(s):

Q. In many congregations, Kiddush over wine, is recited in the synagogue on Friday nights and festive holidays, after the evening service. Why is the Kiddush not recited in the synagogue on Pesach night?

A. Since the cup of wine, over which the Kiddush is recited, is the first of the four cups which we drink at the Seder, the Kiddush cannot be recited in the synagogue. It must be done at the Seder where we drink the other three cups of wine.

Q. Why is the night of Pesach different than other holidays, that we drink four cups of wine?

A. Several reasons are given for the four cups of wine. According to one opinion in the Talmud, they represent the four expressions of redemption which G-d used regarding the liberation of the People of Israel from Egypt.

In Exodus (6:6-7) G-d tells Moshe, "Therefore say to the Children of Israel: I am the L-rd, and I will bring you out ("V'hotzeti") from under the burdens of the Egyptians; and I will deliver you ("V'hitzalti") from their bondage; and I will redeem you ("V'gaalti") with an outstretched arm and with great judgment. And I will take you ("V'lakachti") to Me for a people and I will be to you a G-d; and you shall know that I am the L-rd your G-d, Who brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians."

These four expressions ("I will bring you out... I will deliver you... I will redeem you... I will take you to Me") represent different stages in our redemption. We commemorate these four expressions and stages of our freedom through the four cups of wine we drink at the Seder.

According to another opinion in the Talmud, the four cups of wine also remind us of another liberation many years before the Exodus. Joseph, who spent many years in an Egyptian jail, was freed from jail as a result of his correct interpretation of the dream of Pharaoh's butler and subsequently Pharaoh's dream. In describing his dream and Joseph's interpretation of the dream, the word "kos" - "cup" is mentioned four times (Genesis 40:11-13). As a result of this episode, Joseph was given his freedom and eventually became ruler of Egypt. Thus, the four cups also represent Joseph's freedom.

Rabbi Yitzchak Abarbanel, who lived during the Spanish inquisition, sees the four cups as a symbol for the four redemptions spread over the period of Jewish history. The first one was when G-d redeemed Abraham from his idol-worshipping family and chose him and his children as G-d's nation. The second was the redemption from Egypt. The third redemption is the very existence of the Jewish people and their survival through the many difficult years of exile amongst the many nations. The fourth and final redemption will be with the coming of Moshiach. May it be, G-d willing, speedily in our days.

Friday, Adar 24, 5783 (Hakhel Year) / March 17, 2023

This Shabbat we take out two Torahs from the ark for the Shabbat morning Torah reading. In the first Torah, we read the last two Parshiot of the book of Exodus (Shmot), Vayakhel and Pekudei. In the second Torah, we read Parshat Hachodesh (Exodus 12: 1-20).

The two Parshiot, Vayakhel & Pekudei speak about the contributions which the Jewish people gave towards the sanctuary (Mishkan); the construction of the sanctuary and its contents. The Torah enumerates the exact amount of gold, silver and copper which was collected.

When everything was finished, it was brought to Moshe to assemble. In Parshat Pekudei, the Torah tells us, "And they brought the Mishkan [Tabernacle] to Moshe, the tent and all its vessels, its clasps, its boards, its bars, its pillars, its sockets..."

The Torah tells us that Moshe put up the Mishkan all by himself! The Mishkan was very heavy, Moshe's assembling it himself was a great miracle. Why did G-d want Moshe to put up the Mishkan by himself? G-d wanted to grant Moshe this special mitzvah, honor and merit of putting up the Mishkan.

But the Mishkan was very heavy, and it was humanly impossible for Moshe himself to put it all together and erect it. Moshe said to G-d, "How can one person erect the Mishkan all by himself?"

G-d replied, "You just put your hands to it, and I will do the rest.. It will stand up by itself."

This teaches us a profound lesson. At times, we are faced with a certain mitzvah which G-d demands of us, yet, we may be skeptical and wonder, "How can I possibly accomplish this? It's beyond my capabilities."

This Parsha teaches us that G-d expects us to do our best. If we do our best, G-d will do the rest!

The Talmud tells the following story: Once, Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa saw people bringing gifts to the Temple in Jerusalem. He too, wanted to bring something, but he was too poor to be able to buy anything. So, he went out in the field to see what he could find and he came across a stone which would be very fitting to bring as a gift. The rock was too heavy, and he couldn't afford to pay anyone to help him carry it.

Then he saw five men. He asked them if they would carry the rock for him. They said, "Pay us fifty sela." He would have been willing to pay, but he didn't have that much. G-d saw his great desire to bring this gift to the Temple, so He sent five angels disguised as men. "Pay us only five sela and we will take it to Jerusalem," they told him. "But on one condition, that you must give us a hand." No sooner did he put his finger to the rock, and they found themselves in Jerusalem. He wanted to pay them, but they were nowhere to be found! Lesson: G-d expects us to do our best. He will do the rest!