

Celebration of Freedom **By Rabbi Pinchos Lipschutz**

The Seder is the highlight of the Yom Tov of Pesach, and regardless of what is going on outside, Jewish families everywhere sit around a table and celebrate our freedom from Mitzrayim so many years ago. Regardless of our financial situation, all Jews are like kings and queens at the Seder, from the way we lean to the way we set up our tables and the way we conduct ourselves that night.

For thousands of years, it has been this way. In times of war and in times of peace, in times of depression and suppression, in ghettos and barracks, Jews have been extending themselves in unimaginable times in incredible ways to celebrate our exodus from Mitzrayim.

We do this because recognizing that Hashem took us out of Mitzrayim is the bedrock of our faith, as is the recognition that despite whatever condition we are in as we observe Pesach, we are there because Hashem willed it so for our betterment.

It was in the merit of our faith in Hashem that we were redeemed back then, and it will be in the merit of our emunah that we will be helped out of any unfortunate situation we find ourselves in. Therefore, certainly, if things are going well for us, and even if not, we have no reason to let anything impact our joy as we celebrate Yetzias Mitzrayim.

Pesach is the Yom Tov of emunah, a time to celebrate it, reinforce it, and transmit it to our children and those under our influence.

This is why the Haggadah is centered around the matzos, not only because it represents cheirus, freedom (see Tosafos, Pesochim 108), but also because it represents emunah.

Repeatedly, the Torah refers to the Yom Tov of Pesach as Chag Hamatzos. In davening and Kiddush, we also refer to the Yom Tov as Yom Chag Hamatzos.

The idea that matzah represents the theme of Pesach is reinforced as we begin the recitation of the Haggadah by raising the matzah and reciting Ha Lachma Anya. We say that the matzah we are about to partake of is the same matzah that our forefathers ate. We conclude by saying that this year we are here, in golus, but next year we will be in Eretz Yisroel. Now we are enslaved, but in the coming year we will be free.

The first time the Bnei Yisroel ate matzah was when they left Mitzrayim. Writing about that time, the Yalkut Shimoni in Parshas Beshalach says, "Lo nigalu Yisroel ela b'zechus emunah, shene'emar, 'Vaya'amein ha'am.'" The Jews were redeemed from Mitzrayim because of their deep belief in Hashem.

The Zohar refers to matzah as “michla demehemnusa,” food of emunah. We can understand that to mean that upon eating the matzah while leaving Mitzrayim, the Bnei Yisroel were infused with emunah, and through that emunah, they merited to be saved from Mitzrayim.

The idea that those who believe in Hashem and place their faith in Him see salvation is presented in pesukim, Chazal, Rishonim and Acharonim. It is the way we should lead our lives if we wish to merit success in all we do.

The Ramban (Emunah Ubitachon 1) points out that the posuk in Tehillim (37:3) states, “Betach baHashem va’asei tov – Have faith in Hashem and do good,” instead of stating, “Do good and trust in Hashem.” This is because bitachon is not dependent on a person’s good actions.

The Brisker Rov would say that the degree to which Hashem will deal with us mercifully correlates to the amount of faith we have in Him. He said this is clearly expressed in the posuk (Tehillim 33:21) states, “Ki vo yismach libeinu ki vesheim kadsho botochnu yehi chasdicha Hashem aleinu ka’asher yichalnu loch.”

Rabbeinu Bachya writes explicitly (Kad Vekemach, Bitachon) that the Jews were redeemed from Mitzrayim in merit of their belief. He cites the posuk in Tehillim (22:6) of “Eilecha zo’aku venimlotu,” and says that the reason they were saved was because “becha votchu velo voshu,” they believed.

The Meshech Chochmah, on the posuk of “Ushemartem es hamatzos” (Shemos 12:17), writes that when the Bnei Yisroel will be shomer the matzos (and other mitzvos of Nissan), Hashem will be shomer the night of the Seder to redeem them.

Rabbeinu Yonah writes in Mishlei (3:26) that a person who trusts in Hashem is saved from a tzarah even if he deserved the tzarah. A person’s bitachon prevents the problem from afflicting him. As the Yalkut says in Tehillim (32), “even a rasha who has bitachon is surrounded by chesed.”

The Chofetz Chaim (Sheim Olam, Nefutzos Yisroel 9) quotes the Vilna Gaon, who said that bitachon is not dependent upon a person’s merits. Anyone who maintains strong belief is protected by his bitachon and Hashem acts charitably with him.

Bitachon is not something that is reserved only for tzaddikim. Any one of us, no matter our level, can have perfect emunah and bitachon. When faced with a problem, when it appears as if life is being tough with us, we all have the ability to trust in Hashem and be helped.

Matzah is the symbol of Pesach because it encompasses all the messages of the Seder. As we consider and contemplate the exalted moment when our forefathers left Mitzrayim, we eat the very same matzah, unchanged in formula and taste, at the very moment they did, on the same night, year after year, century after century. With this matzah, we became a nation. We gave up avodah zorah, left the shibbud Mitzrayim, and emerged as bnei chorin.

This is as discussed by the Rambam, who writes (Hilchos Chometz Umatzah 7:1), “There is a mitzvas aseil to discuss the miracles that were performed for our forefathers in Mitzrayim on the evening of the 15th of Nissan, as the posuk says, ‘Zachor, remember the day you left Mitzrayim...,’ and the posuk states, ‘Vehigadeta levincha,’ to tell your children [about the miracles Hashem performed for us then] on that night, meaning the night on which matzah and maror are placed before you.”

The Ramban at the end of Parshas Bo discusses the centrality of sippur Yetzias Mitzrayim in Jewish belief and reminds us that just as Hashem publicly performed miracles for the Jews in Mitzrayim, so does He perform miracles for us every day of our lives. Those who follow the mitzvos are rewarded, and those who do not are punished.”

This is the foundation of Jewish belief and what we refer to as Hashgocha Protis. When we sit at the Seder and retell the stories of the many miracles that took place at that time, we increase our emunah and bitachon, and that engenders more zechuyos for us. This is another indication and explanation of the statement of the Zohar that matzah is michla demehemnusa, the food of faith.

This may be why we begin the Haggadah with the declaration of “Ha lachma anya di achalu avhasana b’ara d’Mitzrayim.” We proclaim that this is the bread that our forefathers ate in Mitzrayim, when they were still poor and lacking in their observance of mitzvos, as well as in their emunah and bitachon in Hashem. Upon eating the matzah, they were strengthened in their emunah and belief in Hashem and thus merited redemption from slavery.

Thus, we advise people who are lacking in faith, “Kol ditzrich yeisei veyeichol. Join us and partake of the matzah, michla demehemnusa. Doing so will infuse you with faith.” Then we can say, “Hoshata hochah leshanah haba’ah b’ara d’Yisroel.” Those who are still needy and lacking in their faith will, by eating the matzah, become strengthened in emunah and bitachon and worthy of the geulah sheleimah bekarov. “Hoshata avdi leshanah haba’ah bnei chorin.” Before partaking of the matzah and discussing the exit from Mitzrayim, we are slaves to our desires. After the matzah and reliving the geulah experience, we become free.

This ties in with the message of vehigadeta levincha, which, as we saw in the Rambam, is a primary obligation of the Seder night. The mitzvah is to speak to the children and grandchildren in a way that engenders love and interest in the message of the Torah.

When we sit at the Seder and recount the Mitzrayim experience, we must do so in a way that impacts our children and leaves a lasting impact, ensuring that the children will pass on the tradition to their children.

We need to view ourselves as if we have now been let out of Mitzrayim as free people and keep in mind that this night is all about our children, infusing them with joy, happiness, knowledge, and the beauty of our mesorah. We are part of the chain that began at Krias Yam Suf and

continued through the midbar, Eretz Yisroel, Bavel, Spain, Portugal, Yemen, Iraq, Iran, Egypt, Morocco, Germany, Lithuania, Italy, Hungary, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Ukraine, Russia, England, France, Auschwitz-Birkenau, and the United States, until our current homes.

Even Jews who have veered from the Torah way of life hold a Seder, eat matzah, drink four cups of wine, and read from a Haggadah. No matter how far they are gone, the Pesach story still speaks to them and ignites a spark of belief and faith.

Rav Yitzchok Silberstein recounted the story of a doctor who immigrated from Russia and claimed he was Jewish. The bais din was attempting to verify the validity of the claim and asked him to bring two witnesses who could verify his Jewishness. He brought with him a man who said that he had attended his bris as an infant and another who was a doctor like him.

The man had a fascinating tale to tell. He said that he served as a doctor in the same hospital as the applicant's mother, and they had a deal between them that could have cost them their lives had they been caught.

He said, "Back in the day, potatoes were a very valuable commodity. Every day of the year, his mother would sneak me a potato, and in return, when Pesach came, I would bring her shmurah wheat flour, which was prepared with all the hiddurim. She would use that flour to bake matzos. This went on for a very long time. She held back valuable potatoes from her children every day of the year so that she would have kosher matzos for Pesach.

"You must know that had she been caught, she would have lost her job in the hospital, as well as lost her life. The best that she could have hoped for had she been caught with her matzos was being sent far, far away. And despite that, she kept this up for many years."

Turning to the bais din, he said, "Now, I ask you: Is there any doubt that she is Jewish?"

After that dramatic testimony, the head of the bais din turned to the son of the heroic doctor who risked her life for the mitzvah of matzah and asked if she was still alive. The man answered that she is very much alive, and because of her excellence in medicine, despite her old age, she was still a practicing doctor in the hospital she worked in with the man who testified.

They called her on the phone and the rov asked her if she observes Shabbos. She said that she would do so, but her job held her back. However, after saying that, she became overwhelmed with emotion, as she told the rov how she was "moser nefesh for Pesach."

Here she was, hiding her Jewishness from the hospital and the authorities. From all outward appearances, there was nothing that identified her as Jew, but she held on to Pesach with mesirus nefesh.

What was it about Pesach that kept her Yiddishkeit alive? No doubt, it was the memories of her father sitting at the Seder eating matzah and instilling the messages of our faith in her. It was

because her father – and perhaps her grandfather as well – sat at his Seder table and engaged in the mitzvah of vehigadeta levincha in a way that left an indelible impression upon her. He leaned to his left and ate the matzah – michla demehemnusa – explaining its importance and conveying with the way he enjoyed each bite how important matzah and its message are to every Jew. And thus the tradition continued.

Even amidst the frigid temps of some Russian village, with hatred for Jews abound, and threats so palpable that she felt that she could not keep Shabbos, throughout the whole year she sacrificed as she dreamed of the night she would partake of matzah.

Matzah, with its multiple messages – the bread of affliction, lechem oni, the bread of freedom, lechem geulim, the bread of faith, michla demehemnusa – calls out to all who partake of it that no matter what your situation is, no matter where you find yourself, know that Hashem is with you and will lead you to freedom and geulah.

We live in a time of freedom and plenty, but there are ill winds blowing, as the freedom we have been enjoying is at stake. Many are suffering from an inflationary economy; aspects of the economy many of our brethren are involved with are in recession.

Israel has been at war for six months already. As the nations of the world are turning against it, war beckons on the northern border as well and a whole new threat has been opened with Iran. As people fear for their lives, hundreds of thousands of troops and reservists are girded for battle. The economy is teetering and the country's zechus of Torah support is withering and at risk.

Despite it all, the matzah reminds us that we will persevere. In every generation, there is a despot or a nation who rises up to destroy us, but Hashem saves us from their evil plans. On Motzoei Shabbos Parshas Tazria, we all witnessed such an instance, as over 300 drones, ballistic missiles and cruise missiles were shot at Israel, each one of them packed with the ability to cause a catastrophe. Instead, they were miraculously destroyed before they could do any damage, besides for injuries caused to an unfortunate 7-year-old Bedouin girl. Once again, the Shomer Yisroel protected us from harm, this time in a most dramatic way.

Let us sit at the Seder reveling in its mitzvos, learning its lessons, and passing them on to the next generation. Let us appreciate the good we have and put it on display, reinforcing our emunah in the ultimate geulah and receiving help with our personal needs.

Leshanah haba'ah bnei chorin be'ara d'Yisroel. May this be the final year of golus. Next year free in Yerushalayim.