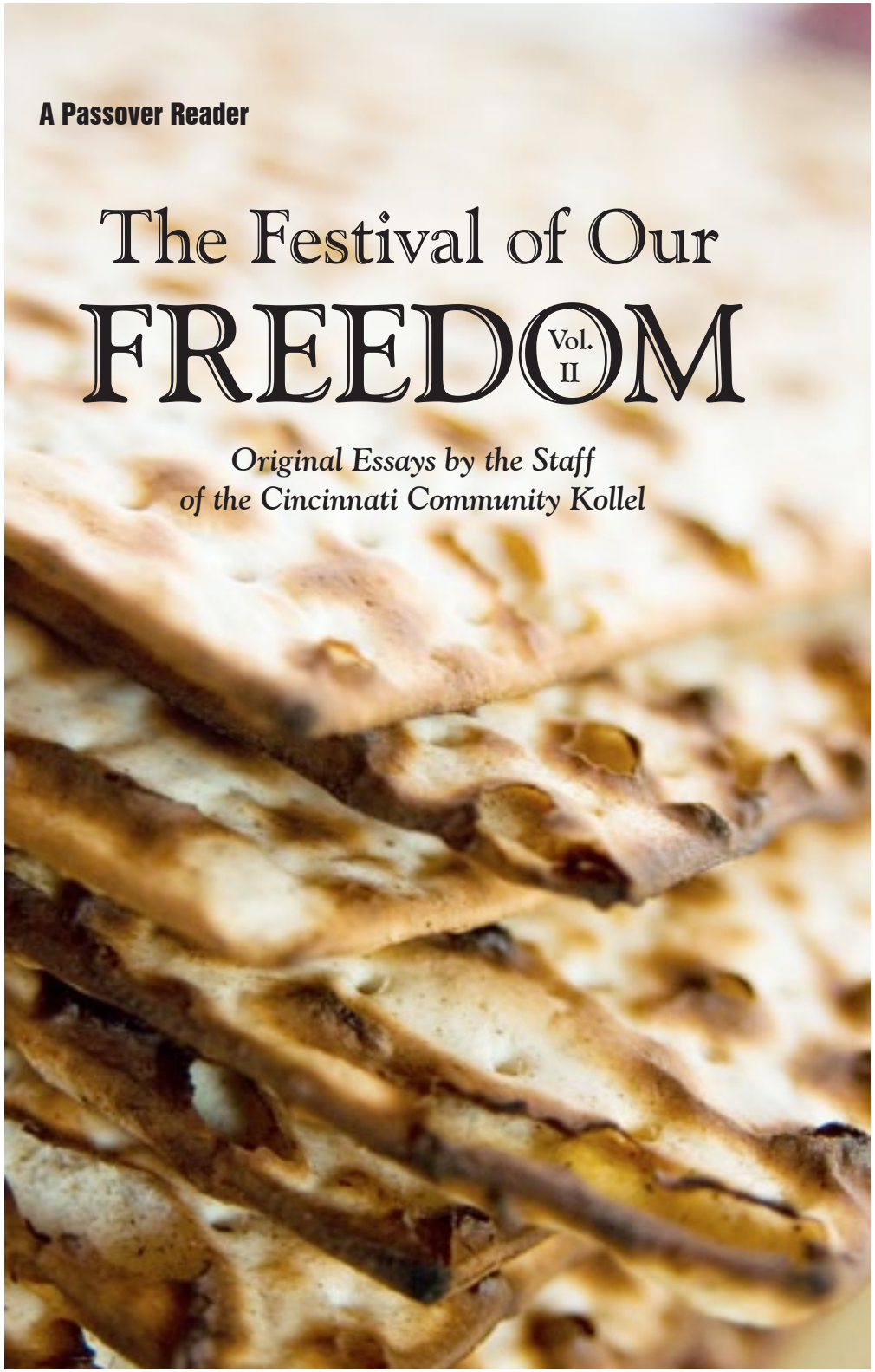

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The Festival of Our Freedom, Volume I is available in PDF format at
http://kollel.shul.net/Resources/Pubs/pubs.htm
There you can also find our Annual Reports and other Holiday Readers.

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Preface

Freedom lies at the very core of our celebration of Passover, when we commemorate the Exodus. We know that we left the bonds of Egyptian slavery, but into what type of freedom did we enter?

Moses seems to have been bothered by the same question. Where were the Children of Israel headed with their newfound freedom? G-d responded that Moses was to lead them to Sinai, to join G-d in the covenant of the Torah (see Exodus 3:12).

Is the Torah, then, really our new freedom? Yes, answers the Mishnah. "There is no free man except one who engages in Torah study." (Ethics of the Fathers 6:2)

This is quite perplexing. The Torah may be inspiring and meaningful, but can it really be a tool for personal freedom?

Irving Bunim, in his commentary to this Mishnah, quotes the Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore's analogy for human freedom. "I have on my table a violin string. It is free.. But it is not free to do what a violin string is supposed to do to produce music. So I take it, fix it in my violin, and tighten it until it is taut. Only then is it free to be a violin string." As Bunim puts it, an uncommitted life, free of any higher goals and responsibilities, brings a bondage worse than slavery.

The Torah, then, is more than just a set of rules and ethics. It is a conduit for human aspiration, allowing us to be, truly, all that we can be.

In the pages that follow, members of the staff of the Cincinnati Community Kollel offer you a chance to study the Torah. These essays are designed to educate, inspire, and enhance your Passover holiday.

Enjoy!

Rabbi Meir Minster

Rabbi David Spetner

Rabbi David Spetner

The Yeast in the Dough

HAVE YOU EVER WONDERED IF ALKA SELTZER IS KOSHER FOR PASSOVER? After ingesting loads of matzo the question has certainly crossed many people's minds. Why does G-d want us to eat this difficult-to-digest flat bread?

The logical place to look for an answer would be in the Haggadah. Just as we conclude the recounting of the Exodus we are told that we need to understand the reasons for eating the three primary Seder foods: The paschal lamb (in the times of the Temple), matzo and *maror* (bitter herbs).

Regarding matzo we are told that the dough of the Jews had not yet risen when "There was revealed upon them the King of Kings, The Holy One, blessed be He, and He redeemed them." As the verse that the Haggadah immediately quotes makes clear, we had to bake unleavened dough because our former masters were pushing us out the door. Why is it important for us to know that G-d revealed himself as part of the rationale for eating matzo?

Ramban (Nachmanides), in his introduction to Shemos (Exodus) gives us an insight into the meaning of redemption. He points out that Book of Shemos is called by our Sages "The Book of Redemption," yet half of it is not about the redemption from Egypt at all. It is the detailed description of the building of a Sanctuary in the wilderness. Ramban answers this question by explaining that redemption is not simply freedom from bondage. Rather, it is like the return of an exiled son to the lofty and noble position or estate of his ancestors. The Patriarchs and Matriarchs were the vehicles through which G-d's Presence was manifest in the world. Their tents were the Sanctuaries of their times. It is therefore only when the Jews build a Sanctuary—a place where G-d is once again revealed and manifest in the world—that these children of great ancestors are truly redeemed. Hence, the entire Book of Shemos is a progression towards full redemption.

This redemption that culminated in G-d's presence coming to rest in the Sanctuary was the result of a process of revelation. It was a process that began on the first night of Passover in Egypt, when "there was revealed upon them the King of Kings, The Holy One, blessed be He, and He redeemed them." The Jews began to be the vehicle for G-d's being felt and sensed in the world. This revelation forced the Egyptians to chase them out, leaving them no time to bake anything but matzo.

This leads us to ask: Is the eating of matzo then, just a matter of circumstance? Is this juxtaposition of events the only meaning behind our eating of matzo?

The Torah tells us that when Moses went up to receive the Torah he did not eat or drink for forty days and nights. Ramban (*Toras Ha-Adam: Shaar Hagemul*) explains that certainly Moses needed nourishment during that time. Culling from Midrash and Talmud, Ramban shows that there is a higher form of nourishment that can sustain not only the soul, but the physical body as well. The emanations of G-d's Presence (*ziv haShechina*) have the ability to nourish even the physical body if that body is properly refined as Moses's was. The Manna that the Jews ate daily in the wilderness is explained by our Sages as *ziv haShechina* made into physical form. Since the Jews did not have the refinement of their bodies that Moses had, they needed the nourishment to be made into the physical form of manna. Moses however, could be nourished directly from the spiritual.

Even the Jews, though, could only be nourished by Manna, explains Ramban, because they had experienced a high level of revelation at the splitting of the sea. This revelation elevated their bodies somewhat, to a degree that they could be sustained by Manna alone.

There are two other times when man's body *is* nourished by the Divine Presence, writes Ramban. These two times are before Adam & Eve sinned, and after the Resurrection of the Dead at the end of history, when mankind will return to the pre-sin state. The pure human body before the sin and after the resurrection is on a lofty level akin to Moses and the Jews in the wilderness.

Our Sages use a fascinating metaphor to describe *Yetzer Harah*—the Evil Inclination that is enmeshed within ourselves. They refer to

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this inclination as the "yeast in the dough." On one level this metaphor depicts the idea of evil being mixed within our conscience so that we must struggle to discover what is truly good and act upon it. This is in contrast to Adam before the sin, when evil was something exterior to himself, symbolized by the serpent that enticed Eve to eat from the Tree of Knowledge.

But there may be a deeper meaning. Sin introduced death into the world so that in order to achieve *tikkun*—to fix ourselves—we need to die and decompose, to be rebuilt anew in the coming Resurrection.

Yeast is also an agent of decomposition. It accomplishes fermentation by breaking down sugars into ethanol and carbon dioxide. The human body more easily digests fermented dough because part of the breakdown that our bodies need, in order to draw nourishment, has already been accomplished by the yeast.

Matzo, then, in all its indigestive glory, stands as a symbol of food without sin, something that an elevated human body would more easily tolerate. The revelation of G-d's Presence at the Exodus did not merely set the Jewish people free. It began the process of elevation that made it appropriate for them to eat bread that was free of the symbol of sin. The revelation increased seven days later at the splitting of the sea, when the Jews were uplifted to the level of eating Manna. It is fascinating to note that the Talmud writes that although for the first month after the Exodus, before the Manna fell, the Jews ate the matzo that they took out of Egypt, but in that matzo they tasted the taste of Manna. Matzo, we see, was the introduction to the food of a more spiritual existence.

We call Passover the Festival of Freedom. It is not merely the commemoration of our physical freedom. The holiday calls on us to remember that we need not be slaves to our physical passions. We do not need to banish them, but to master them, lest they master us. We eat matzo to remind ourselves that our bodies as well as our souls are capable of a higher level of existence, one that we will merit fully with the repairing of ourselves and of the world.

Rabbi Yitzchok Preis

Passover Kiddush, All Year Long?

"*…Zecher liy'tziyas Mitzrayim*—in remembrance of the Exodus."

These words are declared in the Kiddush (blessing of sanctification) at the beginning of every Passover Seder throughout the world. The terminology certainly seems apropos to the opening blessing of this Exodus-focused evening. But this is not the only Kiddush within which these words are found. In fact, every Shabbos (Sabbath) and holiday evening meal opens with the Kiddush blessing, and every one of those blessings includes this phrase!

With regard to most of the holidays we can perhaps recognize the relevance. After all, on Shavuos we relive the Revelation at Sinai that immediately followed and, in a sense, capped-off our Exodus; on Sukkos we remember the manner in which G-d protected us following our exit from Egypt into the wilderness. Far less apparent, though, is the pertinence of this "Exodus-remembrance" to the themes of Shabbos and Rosh Hashanah. These special days are linked to Creation itself and clearly far pre-date the Egyptian exile. What can we mean when we declare that Rosh Hashanah and Shabbos are celebrated as a "remembrance of the Exodus?"

One may be tempted to suggest that this liturgical formula was simply "borrowed" from other Kiddush texts and erroneously incorporated into the Rosh Hashanah and Shabbos editions. However, a quick look at the Ten Commandments as they appear in Deutoronomy 5:12-15 makes it evident that, at least regarding the Shabbos, this is not the case. In that section, G-d Himself states:

> "Safeguard the Sabbath day to sanctify it… And you shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and G-d

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your G-d, has taken you out from there with a strong hand and an outstretched arm; therefore G-d, your G-d, has commanded you to make the Sabbath day."

It is clear that the "remembrance of the Exodus" is fundamental to Shabbos. But why?

Let us investigate the nature of Shabbos to see if we can discover its connection to the Exodus. In so doing, we will hopefully develop a better appreciation of the purpose of the "remembrance of the Exodus" and be able to understand how this theme is relevant to Rosh Hashanah as well.

There is something peculiar about Shabbos. The primary prohibitions on this special day are against *melacha*—often translated simply as "work," but more accurately understood as "acts of creative mastery over Creation." (Labor intensive activity is not Biblically prohibited if it achieves no lasting result; only those activities which alter the world in some way are given the title melacha.) Six days each week we act like mini-Creators. We produce everything from culinary cuisine to technological gizmos. We develop, renew, modify, and enhance various elements of our homes, gardens, economy and environment. By desisting from such endeavors on Shabbos, we declare that the true Creator is G-d alone. We acknowledge that it is only with the faculties, resources, and wisdom He provides us that we are capable of the achievements of our work week.

This is a beautiful, and, it would seem, a universal message. Why, then, is the commandment of Shabbos directed specifically to the Jew? After all, some mitzvos are particularly "Jewish mitzvos" while others are universal. For example, belief in G-d is incumbent on all of mankind. Similarly the prohibitions against theft, murder and incest are not limited by the Torah to "members of the tribe." On the other hand, building a sukkah (a booth) and eating matzo to commemorate and relive experiences in the wilderness after the Exodus that were unique to our ancestors, are understandably Jewish mitzvos. By what logic, then, is Shabbos, with its recognition of a sole Creator (and Maintainer) uniquely commanded to Jews?

The early twentieth century commentator, Rabbi Meir Simcha of Dvinsk, in his work *Meshech Chochma*, explains that the Jewish people have a unique role as "witnesses" of creation. Our experiences during the miracle-filled Exodus provided rare testimony to the Creator and His control over all of Creation. As Nachmanides points out, the vivid,

nature-altering plagues and miracles accompanying the Exodus countered the three common "anti-G-d" beliefs of that time, which were:

1) There is no G-d.
2) G-d exists but lost control over His creations.
3) G-d can control but has no interest in our petty world.

All three of these are quashed when G-d indicates time and again exactly how He will counter the natural order on behalf of the group destined to be His people. Accordingly, G-d says of us, "…You [Israel] are My witnesses."

Ultimately, explains the *Meshech Chochma*, Shabbos is a gift, but it is gifted to those whose very existence bears testimony to its message. We now understand our need to focus on the Exodus as we proclaim the sanctity of the Shabbos. Shabbos is the day that attests to Creation. But it is the Exodus which provides the testimony to G-d's having created and maintained control and involvement over the "created." Our having experienced the Exodus makes us the witnesses; our remembrance of the Exodus is the testimony.

Maimonides, in his Guide to the Perplexed (2:31) provides another level of connection. He describes the elevated status of Shabbos as stemming from its being the day affirming G-d's role as Creator. This alone might have warranted positive declarations and special garb, but not necessarily our desisting from *melacha*. Shabbos as a "day of rest" is an expression of our recognition and appreciation of the caring and kindness reflected in His having redeemed us from Egypt. This again explains both the unique connection between the Shabbos and the Jew, as well as the association of Shabbos and the Exodus.

We can apply these messages to Rosh Hashanah as well. The primary themes of the day are Creation, Coronation and Judgment. These can remain vague and distant without recognition of G-d's continued involvement in our world. Remembering the Exodus draws to mind G-d's dominance over all "laws" of Nature and facilitates greater recognition of his role as Creator and Sustainer, King and Overseer.

"….*Zecher liy'tziyas Mitzrayim*—in remembrance of the Exodus."

Having learned how this concept impacts Shabbos, all holidays, and ultimately our relationship with G-d, we come back to our Passover Kiddush with new respect for this phrase. This "remembrance" theme is reinforced throughout the Seder with its various liturgical, "hands-on" and even edible(!) tools, all designed to draw our attention

to the messages of the Exodus. We now recognize how critical it is that we absorb and properly transmit these lessons. Proper attention to the Exodus enhances our appreciation of G-d's involvement in our world and in our lives and allows us to achieve the goal of making that involvement known to mankind. In that merit, we can ask G-d to make His Presence ever more manifest and that He bring true peace to all those who bear witness to His Greatness. With that in mind, we can be more passionate when concluding our Exodus-focused Seder with the plea, "Next year in Jerusalem."

If not this year, then next year in Jerusalem! 

Rabbi Chaim Barry

Time Capsules, Eternal Messages, & Passover

> **Time capsule**—a historic cache of goods and/or information, usually intended as a method of communication with people in the future. *(Wikipedia)*

MANKIND HAS A GREAT DESIRE, A DEEP NEED, TO MAKE AN IMPRINT IN THE world and leave a legacy. There is almost an insatiable desire for immortality which manifests itself in many people leaving behind artifacts, information, or other means by which others will remember them in the future, thus immortalizing them. This explains why dictators spend fortunes leaving statues of themselves in their countries, and why the average person will attempt to purchase the largest headstone for his grave.

If you could leave a time capsule for your future descendants about yourself, what would it be? Would it be a description of your job, or your children? How about your house, or your pet(s)? What exactly would the message be that you would like to impart to the future—stop global warming, or promote world peace, or feed the hungry? In all likelihood, we would attempt to impart a message consistent with our world view and experiences so that our ideas ultimately reach immortality. If this is true of ourselves, we may ask what G-d Himself would choose to impart to future generations. This might appear to be a very pretentious undertaking, but the truth is that He has already told us what His message is, through the story of the Exodus of the Jewish people from Egypt.

To understand this point further we must answer the following

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basic question regarding many of the Mitzvos given to us. The Ramban (Nachmanides—twelfth century), in his commentary on the book of Exodus explains that, regarding the mitzvos of observing the Sabbath, fixing a mezuzah to our door posts, and others, there is a peculiar addendum linked to them: The Torah commands us to remember that G-d took us out of Egypt. Tefillin (phylacteries), for example, begins with the exhortation to "bind them on your arm and between your eyes as a remembrance" and ends with the strange addition to remember that G-d took us out of Egypt. This same peculiarity is present in the mitzvah of affixing a mezuzah, as well. Why?

Answers the Ramban: G-d is sending us a time capsule. This time capsule, however, contains the ultimate message for mankind that "I, G-d your G-d, exist and am involved in your daily lives, guiding and leading you every step of the way!" The Exodus was the ultimate message to a pagan world which denied G-d's involvement and concern in earthly affairs, and even denied His very existence. The world was ripe for a correction of this misguided philosophy. This Divine wake-up call came in the form of the most awesome display of supernatural fireworks that the world had ever seen or will ever see again.

Imagine a UFO entering the atmosphere and landing in the middle of Times Square at 3:00pm on a weekday when everybody is, for the most part, sober. An event of this caliber would transform the people of New York, the entire country and, eventually, the entire world as well that—to steal a phrase from a popular show—"the truth is out there."

By comparison, the Exodus dwarfs such an event in its magnitude. The Rabbis explain that G-d performed over 300 miracles throughout the vast landscape of ancient Egypt, all of which were done publicly in front of millions of Egyptians and Jews. It is no wonder, then, that this event led to a mass conversion of at least hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of Egyptians to Judaism. The Exodus had created a euphoric realization of the existence of a Creator who is involved and is in control of the world.

However, if such an event were to be repeated constantly, there would be no choice but to throw oneself into complete and utter submission to the will of G-d, throwing off-balance the delicate equilibrium in man's ability to choose freely between good and evil. Therefore, this message was only repeated once and, as with all moments of inspiration, was destined to fade away with time and history. Hence, G-d, in His infinite wisdom, conceived of a way that this

memory may live within us every day. He affixed to many mitzvos in the Torah this "secondary" mitzvah of remembering the Exodus. Through the daily wearing of tefillin and the affixing of a mezuzah on each of our door posts, we declare with conviction that G-d exists and performed miracles for us in Egypt. It is no wonder, then, that the Passover Seder itself is replete with symbolic actions to help us recreate the experience of the Exodus, from the bitter herbs reminding us of our previous servitude, to the four cups representing our eventual freedom and redemption.

Latent in every mitzvah of the Torah is this living time capsule, consistently communicating to us these foundations of our faith. Whereas a man-made time capsule lies buried underground, dead to the world, and communicates a dead ancient message to a strange future world many centuries later, the time capsule of G-d is a living, breathing instrument, experienced by the Jewish people daily throughout the millennia and communicates a message relevant to the soul of all humanity.

It is said that during the Passover Seder the Divine Presence itself comes down to listen to each Seder. This is puzzling because such an idea is not associated with any other major holiday. What is so unique about Passover that warrants such a visitation from G-d Himself? Based on the previous explanation offered by the Ramban, the answer becomes clear. The Seder is meant for all Jews to relate to their children and themselves the miracle of the Exodus. Through the telling of the story of the Exodus, we again come to the realization of the existence and power of G-d. This belief is deepened every year, and, as a result, our connection and bond to G-d grows closer and stronger. That which merits this special Divine visitation is the deep connection which we form with G-d through the Passover Seder. May this Passover bring us closer to G-d and ultimately bring us to the redemption.

Rabbi Abraham Braunstein

Darkness, Light, & the Passover Seder

A Meditation on Rabbi Yitzchok Hutner's *Pachad Yitzchok*

THE MISHNAH IN TRACTATE PESACHIM (116A) SAYS, "THEY POUR FOR HIM the second cup and here the son asks his father. If the son does not know how to ask, then the father teaches him how to ask." The Talmud elaborates on this, and says, "If the son is wise, he asks the father. If not, the wife asks. If the wife is not adequately smart, the father asks himself."

This explanation is astounding. One would think that the whole point of the son asking his father the "*Mah Nishtanah* (The Four Questions)" is in order to involve the children in the Passover Seder. Indeed, the entire Seder night highlights the doing of rituals "in order for the children to ask." So if the son is not capable of asking, or if there is no son at the Pesach table, one would think that the host of the Seder would just go straight to the answer. However, this is not the case; the father of the household is supposed to "ask himself." How can we understand this seemingly peculiar and very difficult interpretation of the Talmud in regard to the recital of the Haggadah? Why must the questions be asked, even if it means someone is asking himself?

At the end of the above-quoted Mishnah in Pesachim, the Mishnah tells us of another requirement in regard to the recital of the story of the Exodus. The Mishnah states, "One starts with the derogatory aspects of our existence and one ends with the praise." This requirement is met by starting the Haggadah from "We were slaves in Egypt," or "In the beginning our forefathers were idol worshippers."

This too seems to be a strange law. On the night that we are celebrating our exodus, our freedom, and our becoming G-d's nation, why do we have to talk about our unpleasant, humiliating past?

The Maharal[1] gives a beautiful answer. He says that "The praise that is preceded by degradation is a much stronger praise, as we see the day is preceded by night." We can appreciate the light and the redemption much more after experiencing the darkness that preceded it. We must therefore "relive" and make mention of the darkness, the slavery and the idol worship, so that we can fully appreciate the light and joy we were given.

There are other instances in the Seder where this same point is illustrated. For example, in the final blessing of the portion of the Haggadah known as "Maggid," when we expound upon Scripture's account of the Exodus, we say, "G-d has taken us out from slavery to freedom, from despair to joy, from darkness to a great light." To fully understand the freedom that the Jewish nation was given, we have to be aware of what they had gone through to get there. We are therefore commanded to "start with the degradation and end with the praise" when reciting the Haggadah.

Let us take this a step further. Rabbeinu Yona, in his work *Shaarei Teshuva*, says, "It is incumbent upon one who trusts in G-d to anticipate in the depths of his despair that the darkness will be the cause for the light, as it says (Micah 7: 8): 'Do not rejoice, my enemies, over me—for if I have fallen, I will rise, for as I sit in darkness, G-d is my light.' The Rabbis expound on this verse, 'Because I have fallen I will rise, because I sit in darkness, G-d is a light unto me.' If I would not have fallen, I would not have risen; if I would not have been in the dark, G-d would not have been a light unto me." Here we see that not only is the appreciation for the light magnified when it is preceded by dark, but the dark brings about and is cause for the light that follows.

We can now understand the obligation of asking questions. Asking a question means "I am in the dark." Just as in the recital of the Haggadah we emerge from darkness into light, so, too, is the Haggadah formatted in the manner of moving from obscurity to clarity. No doubt, the information remains the same whether or not preceded by a question—yet how much greater is the light of inspiration when one gains an understanding of a concept after struggling with a difficult question, in contrast to having been lectured on a topic without the

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1 Rabbi Judah Loew of Prague (1525—1609)

question even posed. One of the simplest, albeit greatest, techniques of an educator is to pose a question to the class and only then give the requisite information as an answer to the question. How much greater is the appreciation for the knowledge when it is presented as an answer to a problem.

This understanding of darkness preceding light, darkness *causing* light, and appreciating the light that follows darkness, describes well our current situation in galus/ exile. However, when G-d redeems us, speedily in our day, then "It will be that night itself will be turned into day." The light will feed on itself. We will not need the darkness to facilitate light, but the light will be the reality of the times. It is for this reason that we conclude the blessing of Maggid (the part of the Seder where we relive the Exodus) with "We will sing to you a new song on our redemption and on the freedom of our souls." The word *shir* ("song," in Hebrew) in this statement is said using the masculine form of the noun, as opposed to the feminine form, *shira*, which is used elsewhere, in regard to our redemption from Egypt. The masculine form is used because this "new song" of the future redemption will not be a song in which there will be feminine "labor pains," when the darkness gave birth, so to speak, to the light. Rather, the future national rescue of the Children of Israel will feature an everlasting, eternal song of freedom and redemption, with no need for a preceding darkness.

Rabbi Eli Polsky

"Thank Dog"

Throughout the year, we commemorate the Exodus through our performance of a variety of mitzvos. Some of those commemorations are obvious, such as the Passover Seder and all of the laws and customs that go along with it. Some of those commemorations are not so obvious, such as the commandment to don tefillin (phylacteries), or the redeeming of the firstborn. One particularly head-scratching commandment is the mitzvah to redeem the first-born donkey.

> "Every first issue of a donkey you shall redeem with a lamb or a kid; if you do not redeem it, you shall axe the back of its neck." *(Exodus 13:13)*

This is an especially perplexing commandment on several levels. How does this mitzvah help us commemorate the Exodus? Also, there are almost no other commandments in the Torah involving non-kosher animals; why now does a non-kosher animal make an appearance, especially in the context of holiness? We are taught here that if you do not redeem it, you must kill it in order not to work it, since it is holy; this is unusual, since we rarely, if ever, associate non-kosher animals with holiness. However, the most obvious question is, why the donkey, in particular? What is it specifically about the donkey that garners a special commandment, and not, say, the camel, or any other non-kosher beast, for that matter?

This is not a new question. The Talmudic sage Rabbi Elazar addressed this question roughly two thousand years ago. His answer is both surprising and eye-opening. He explains the reason for this commandment is because "…The donkeys helped the Jews when they fled Egypt. For, in fact, there was not one Jew who did not have at least 90 donkeys loaded with the gold and silver riches of the Egyptians."

Surprising.

Since my ancestor forced an ancestor of my donkey—an ancestor

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that not only did not give any thought to what it was doing, but probably schlepped all of those riches against its will—therefore, for all generations, even thousands of years later, the entire species becomes the object of a mitzvah?

Seemingly absurd and overreaching.

And yet eye opening.

Since my ancestor forced an ancestor of my donkey—an ancestor that not only did not give any thought to what it was doing, but probably schlepped all of those riches against its will—therefore, for all generations, even thousands of years later, the entire species becomes the object of a mitzvah.

Seemingly absurd and overreaching? Or is this the Jewish version of gratitude?

We are prohibited from eating the meat of a *treifa*, a "torn" animal. But what should one do with such meat if one happens to have it in one's hands? The Torah commands us to give it to dogs. Why dogs? The Midrash explains that when the Israelites left Egypt, none of the dogs so much as "whetted their tongue" against them. This went against the dogs' natural inclination. Therefore, says the Torah, give dogs their reward for eternity. Whenever a Jew has meat that is prohibited to him, he should feed that meat to dogs.

We are talking of an event that happened thousands of years ago that involved not me and this dog, but rather my ancestor and a totally different dog! And, in contrast to the donkeys, those dogs didn't even do anything! So why am I rewarding them? I understand that we should give the entire species of donkeys a reward. At least they broke a sweat all those thousands of years ago. But what did the dogs do to deserve filet mignon? For just standing around and remaining inactive? Does the Jewish view of gratitude know no boundaries?

But it gets worse.

Moses was responsible for initiating most of the Ten Plagues. Most, but not all. The first three plagues—blood, frogs, and lice—his brother Aaron started, by hitting the Nile or the ground with his staff. Why were these plagues outsourced to Aaron?

The Torah is teaching us a profound lesson on the Jewish view of gratitude, *hakaras hatov* in Hebrew. Both the Nile and the dirt saved Moses's life. Before Moses was born, Pharaoh decreed that all of the Jewish males who were born were to be immediately drowned in the Nile. If they were not, Pharaoh's sorcerers would know, and the Egyptian police would burst into the Jewish house, and forcibly take the

infant and drown him. When Moses was born, his mother put him in a basket and floated him down the Nile. As far as Pharaoh's sorcerers could tell, Moses was in the river. Their sorcery did not tell them if this Jewish male was floating above the water or if he was under the water. Thus, Moses's life was spared by the Nile (albeit indirectly), and the rest, as they say, is history.

Years later, Moses witnessed an Egyptian taskmaster beating a Jewish slave. Moses killed the taskmaster, but now he had a problem on his hands. How would Pharaoh react when he heard that Moses, a Jew, had killed an Egyptian? Moses hid his "crime" by burying the dead Egyptian in the sand. Thus Moses' life was spared again, this time by the earth. Is it no wonder, then, why Moses could not bring himself to strike the water and the dirt when it came time to perform these plagues?

But the donkeys, at least, did something. The dogs, at least, were living. So give them their rewards. But the water and the sand are inanimate. This means that they do not breathe, they do not live, and they do not think. They did not calculate how to help Moses in his hour of need. They just… were. They were handy when Moses needed them. Therefore, years later, Moses would be forbidden to strike them? How are expected to understand this mind-set?

For that matter, how are we expected to understand the mind-set of expressing gratitude to the entire donkey and dog species? At the most basic level, those donkeys which carried the riches out of Egypt, and those dogs which did not bark at the Jews as they left, are not personally benefiting from our gratitude. And even if they were, would they even recognize that they are being thanked? There seems to be much more than meets the eye here, more than just our conventional definition of gratitude.

In order to understand gratitude, we must examine the opposite extreme, ingratitude.

As the Jews neared the end of their journey to the Land of Israel, they encountered two nations. The first nation, Moab, hired the prophet, Balaam, to curse the Jews. The second nation, Ammon, did not come out to greet the Jews with bread and water as the Jews passed near their country. The Torah takes a very negative view towards both nations, to the point that the Torah prohibits a Jew to marry a convert from these two nations "until the tenth generation." Why? The Torah explains, "because of the fact that they did not greet you with bread

and water on the road…and because they hired Balaam…to curse you."

This begs an explanation. How could the Torah equate these sins? One nation hired a prophet to destroy Israel, and the other did not display basic decency. These are two very different sins. And yet the Torah states those transgressions together in the same breath, and metes out the same penalty on both nations!

The great medieval sage Ramban (Nachmanides) gives an enlightening explanation: The Torah does not tolerate ingratitude. These two clans were descended from Lot, a nephew of our forefather, Abraham. When a mighty army of four kings captured Lot, Abraham gathered a small army and risked his life to save his nephew. Ammon and Moab did not recognize that great act, an act to which they owed their very existence.

Both of these nations' actions were prompted by the same deficiency in their national character traits: *k'fias hatov*—ingratitude. Therefore, the Torah tells us, we must be very careful, lest the seeds of ingratitude enter our national psyche—"One from Ammon or Moab shall not enter into the Congregation of G-d, not even for ten generations…because of the fact that they did not greet you with bread and water on the road…and because they hired Balaam…to curse you." From the very same rotten seed that sprouted Moab's plan to curse the Jews, sprouted an indifference to Jewish welfare as the Children of Israel wandered past Ammon's land.

However, there is still one piece missing from the puzzle: the Jews did not even need the bread and water that Ammon failed to offer! For forty years the manna fell from heaven, and for forty years water flowed from Miriam's Well. How can we compare the ingratitude of a nation that set out to destroy the Jews, to the ingratitude of a nation that did not offer the Jews products which they did not even need?

Herein lies the key: The purpose of Hakaras hatov is not for the benefit of the one on the receiving end of the gratitude; its purpose is to benefit the one *expressing* the gratitude.

What is the root of ingratitude?

Rabbi Chaim Friedlander, of the Ponevezh Yeshiva, posits the following: One who does not wish to be indebted to anyone will, in his mind, try to suppress any memories of a good deed which he received. Even if he is not successful in completely suppressing thoughts of the good deed, he will succeed in minimizing its impact. He may downplay any inconvenience which the deed caused to his benefactor, he may downplay the deed itself, or worse, delude himself into thinking that he actually *benefited* his benefactor! With this mind-set, he will never be "indebted" to anyone for anything. He might think, "True, he saved my life, but he only did it so he could feel good about himself. I was just a handy means towards his self-esteem inflating end."

With such an attitude to people whom we can see and whose deeds are tangible, it is just a small step indeed towards being ungrateful to the Ultimate Benefactor, G-d. "What has G-d done for me lately? He gave me a nice house? Well, he gave my neighbor a nicer one. He gave me a beautiful family? Well, they are always demanding things from me. He gave me health? Well, who doesn't have good health? He gave me life? Well, whoever asked to be born? I do not wish to owe G-d anything, and it turns out that I don't!"

It is not such a stretch from denying benefits to denying the Benefactor. "I bought this nice house with *my* money. *I* raised this beautiful family. *I* kept my body in tip-top shape. G-d didn't create me. *I* am the culmination of evolution. There is no One to owe anything to except myself."

In order to combat this poisonous attitude, the Torah places an extremely strong emphasis on hakaras hatov. Even in a situation in which the beneficiary of the hakaras hatov does not need it (the Jews wandering in the desert), does not feel it (the Nile and the dirt), or did not personally do anything to deserve it (today's donkeys and dogs), a Jew has an obligation to express his gratitude. Eventually, this attitude will "trickle up" and will manifest itself in our attitude towards G-d. If, on the other hand, he does not "exercise" the gratitude muscle in almost any situation, he is in danger of reverting to ingratitude. And, when he drifts into this "ingratitude mode," he may eventually deny G-d.

During this season, as we celebrate the birth of our nation, a special emphasis is placed on hakaras hatov. It is especially important that we never forget He who redeemed us from our bondage in Egypt, gave us the Torah, and distinguished us as His chosen nation. He constantly guides us, guards us, and bestows all forms of kindness upon us. The more careful we are to express gratitude towards the smallest beings over the smallest matters, the more likely we will express our gratitude towards G-d and never forget Him or His goodness.

Alter B. Raubvogel

Free at Last

It's common knowledge that the weekly Sabbath reminds us of how G-d created the world in six days, resting on the seventh. However, in the Friday night Kiddush we declare that the Sabbath is a commemoration of *two* events:

> …Who apportioned to us, with love and grace, His holy Sabbath, a commemoration of the work of Creation, for it is the first day of those proclaimed to be holy, a reminder of the Exodus from Egypt…

In fact, the Torah itself says that the Sabbath is meant to remind us both of the Creation and the Exodus. Keeping and observing the Sabbath is the fourth of the Ten Commandments, which are recorded twice in the Torah. The first time, in Exodus, the Torah speaks of the seven days of Creation. But in Deuteronomy Moses repeats the Ten Commandments, and he says:

> Observe the Sabbath day, to sanctify it… Don't perform any labor… so that your slave and your maidservant will rest, like you, **and you will remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the L-rd, your G-d, took you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm**; therefore the L-rd, your G-d, has commanded you to make the Sabbath. *(Emphasis mine.)*

So how, exactly, is the Sabbath supposed to remind us of the Exodus?

Here are three approaches.[1]

The Rambam, in his *Guide to the Perplexed*, explains that by making the Sabbath special, we reenact G-d's sanctification of the seventh day.

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1 This writer has found no corroborating source, but he would humbly suggest another answer. Our Sages tell us (Midrash; Talmud, Sanhedrin 56b) that the mutiny at the bitter waters of Marah, only days after the Splitting of the Sea, was a result of idleness from Torah study. In the aftermath, G-d presented the Israelites with three commandments and all of their laws, so the people would have something to study until the Revelation at Sinai. The Sabbath was one of those commandments.

But G-d also commands us to rest on the Sabbath, not as an analog to G-d's rest, but to remind us of our freedom to rest, a liberty made possible when G-d took us out of Egypt.

Nachmanides (Ramban) is uncomfortable with this explanation, because there is nothing in sitting idle which actively or directly calls the Exodus to mind; and to the casual observer, nothing in our observance of the Sabbath has an obvious association with the Exodus. If anything, he argues, resting on the Sabbath simply parallels G-d's rest on the seventh day.

Instead Nachmanides explains that the whole point of the Exodus was to demonstrate that G-d created the world *ex nihilo* and that He still controls it—that is, the Exodus and the Sabbath are both supposed to reinforce the same aspect of our faith in G-d, and they do so in tandem. The Torah, in Deuteronomy, is telling us that if one observes the Sabbath but still finds himself skeptical about the miraculous nature of the Creation, he should remember the Exodus and all it signifies.

Rabbi Yaakov Emden, in his *Siddur*, offers what might be a compromise between the Rambam and Nachmanides.

He asks: If the Sabbath is a testimonial to our world's Divine origin, why do only Jews have to keep it? Isn't it important for all of humanity to know and remember how we got here?

The answer, he says, is that observing the seventh day as one of rest is uniquely appropriate for the Jewish people, whom G-d liberated from bondage in Egypt. The Exodus set the Israelites apart from the rest of the nations; thus the first of the Ten Commandments serves as a preface for the following nine: "I am the L-rd, your G-d, Who took you out of Egypt."

Rabbi Emden adds that the Exodus reinforces our belief in Creation in a way that the narrative in Genesis can't. The Creation was, by necessity, *prehistoric*. That might—and does!—lead man to question the truth of Divine origin. But the slavery of the Israelites in Egypt and their miraculous departure were known as fact to the world at large, and remained so for centuries.

Once a year, on Passover, we reenact the Exodus and we try to take its lessons to heart. The weekly Sabbath is a wonderful opportunity, not just to recharge our batteries as one week ends and another approaches, but to remind ourselves of both the miracle of Creation and our unique association with it.

Rabbi Cobi Robinson

How is This Night Different?

"How is this night different than any other night?" *(Haggadah)*

That's the question that Jewish children have been asking their parents and grandparents at the Seder for generations. Hopefully, the following collection of short thoughts can help us realize just how unique this night really is.

ONE OF THE MITZVOS THAT THE JEWISH PEOPLE DID TO MERIT THEIR REDEMPtion from Egypt was the sacrificing and eating of the paschal lamb. The commentaries are bothered by this episode: How could they have done this mitzvah in the first place? The only acceptable place to eat this sacrifice is in Jerusalem—not in Egypt!

There is a comment by *Targum Yonason*, however, that can serve as a solution to this problem. When the verse (Exodus 19:4) states, "I will carry you on the wings of eagles…" *Targum Yonason* explains that this miraculous flight *had already taken place*. The night of the fifteenth of Nissan, the same night when we celebrate the Seder each year, every Jewish home was temporarily transported to Jerusalem to eat the paschal lamb.

So we, the Jewish people, really were in Jerusalem then after all… Which means we are in Jerusalem now. The holidays are not only commemorations of events past, but, more importantly, are times to relive and draw strength from the unique powers of those days. If we were in Jerusalem during the original exodus, that means every year at the Seder we are in that very same place. It is no coincidence, then, that the Hebrew words *achilas matza* ("eating matzo") and *Yerushalayim* (Jerusalem) have the same numerical value. So, during this year's Seder, enjoy an all-expense-paid trip for you and your loved ones to Israel. If you close your eyes, you may feel it. If you open them, who knows, you may just get a glimpse of the Temple Mount.

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"*KADEISH, URCHATZ, KARPAS, YACHATZ*…" JUST READING THOSE WORDS causes the familiar tune to start running through our minds. They are, of course, the fifteen steps of Seder night. Is there any significance to the number fifteen, or is it completely arbitrary?

If one would consider the other things that are numbered fifteen, our answer would be clear.

1) The numerical value of one of G-d's names ("Kah") is fifteen.
2) There are fifteen "Songs of Ascent" in Psalms.
3) There are fifteen steps connecting the two parts of the Temple.
4) There are fifteen stiches in the song "*Dayenu*."

What are the common denominators? Growth. Development. Progress. Ascent.

Imagine the following scenario: A fellow prints directions from point A to point B off his computer. The problem is that he simply sees them as a random list of instructions, one line having nothing to do with the next. He'll never get to where he wants to go. Obviously, he can only reach his destination if he follows the directions in order. This Seder night we should be careful not to make the same mistake. The opportunity for growth and development is in front of us. We just have to realize that *Kadeish* is our point of departure, and *Nirtzah* is our destination. If we follow the directions carefully we have a guaranteed guide to success.

WE START THE EVENING BY INVITING THOSE WHO ARE NEEDY TO JOIN OUR Seder. "*Ha lachma anya* (this is the bread of affliction)…" It is certainly an appropriate beginning, but why did the author start the Haggadah in Aramaic? After all, the rest of the Haggadah is in Hebrew.

The key to our answer lies in the following source in the Talmud (Berachos 12b). Whenever Rabbi Eliezer would visit a sick person he would pray in Aramaic, "May G-d remember you for peace." The Talmud asks, how could he pray in Aramaic if our sources say that the angels who carry our prayers don't understand Aramaic? The answer given is that angels aren't needed to carry these prayers, because G-d comes personally to be with the sick—and G-d understands every language.

The author of the Haggadah wanted to make one thing clear from the outset: G-d has come personally to join your Seder. How did the author set this tone? By starting in Aramaic. Doing so gives one pause: "If G-d wouldn't be right here, in this room, visiting my Seder, I wouldn't be able to say this in Aramaic." So, in addition to all your friends and family, don't forget to give honor to your esteemed Guest.

RABBI ELCHONON WASSERMAN—MAY G-D AVENGE HIS MURDER DURING the Holocaust—relates a tradition in the name of Rabbi Elijah of Vilna, the Vilna Gaon, that there are 64 potential mitzvos (some of Torah origin, others Rabbinic) one can perform on the Seder night. The word "mitzvah" is commonly and correctly translated as "commandment." There are, however, other layers of meaning to it as well. *Mitzvah* also shares the same meaning as the word *tzavta*, which means to be connected or united. Every mitzvah is an opportunity to connect and build a relationship with G-d. The Seder night lends us 64 such opportunities.

IN SUMMARY:

.Your Seder's in Jerusalem, the city of inspiration,
With G-d as your guest, a private invitation,
An opportunity to unite through mitzvah observation,
Rising fifteen steps to spiritual elevation.

This night truly is different than any other night!

Rabbi Yitzie Stern

The Seder and the Self-Help Workshop

IT HAS LONG BEEN SAID THAT JEWS WILL ALWAYS ANSWER A QUESTION WITH a question. Some may say that it stems from our inherent stubborn and skeptical nature. Others may suggest that it is a cultural nuance developed from centuries in exile under hostile authorities. But few would think that our religious ritual could encourage this practice. And yet, as we look closely at the ceremonies of the Seder night, one cannot help but notice that questions take center stage. At no other time during the year do we do so much to elicit questions. We keep the kids up way past their bedtime. We adorn the table with strange foods and lots of wine. Bitter herbs, leaning, and dipping all add to the spectacle. Our children cannot help but ask, "Why is this night different than all other nights?" But it may equally leave the adults wondering, "What's the big deal?"

Educators have begun to understand that questions are not just a testing tool; they are also a uniquely effective teaching tool. In American law schools it is commonly referred to as "the Socratic method." But it works for children as well: the premise is that when a child is asked a question before being taught new information, he or she will be genuinely interested in hearing the answer. Students become interested through questions and retain the information much more effectively than if they are spoon fed. If this is so with questions which are posed to children, certainly these benefits will be achieved when a child is moved to ask by himself.

The saying goes, "The question of a wise man is already half the answer." This simply means that through the use of a question one

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has successfully targeted how the information in the answer will be of specific interest and use. Without a precise, well-formed question, new facts may not be fully appreciated and integrated into the knowledge base of the listener.

For example, a mind can be compared to a warehouse, where each piece of knowledge is a box on the shelf. If a delivery that is clearly tagged and labeled comes to the warehouse, it will be promptly stored in its rightful place on the shelf. If, however, a shipment comes without proper labeling, it may be placed temporarily in some lonely corner, only to be forgotten or thrown away. The same is true of information that we learn. If we know how and why the information is relevant, there is a much better chance that it will stick. This could be why the Talmud was not formatted as dry halachic codes. Rather, it was written as a conversation, a dialectic of questions and answers.

This concept can already be found among the nuances of the Hebrew language. The Hebrew word for question is *she'eila*, its root being *sha'al* (spelled shin, aleph, lamed). The word used for "grave" is *she'öl*,[1] which also shares the root *sha'al*. What is the connection between a question and the grave? Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch[2] explains that the root *sha'al* actually means "to demand." The grave demands the return of the physical body to the dust from which it was created. Likewise, a lending agreement is also called a *she'eila*, because the borrowed item is eventually demanded back by the lender. Thus, a question can be understood as a stated demand for knowledge. One's desire to know the truth builds until it finds expression in the form of a question. It is a desire which cannot be denied.

This alone would be a profound and refreshing insight into the educational wisdom of the Talmud. However, this does not fully solve our problem. Let us examine the following Talmudic passage:[3]

> "Our Rabbis taught: If one has a wise son, this son should ask him [the four questions]. If his son is not wise, his wife should ask him. If he has no wife, he should ask himself. And even if there are only two sages who know the laws of Passover, they should ask each other."

1 See, for example, Genesis 37:35 and Psalms (9:18)

2 Commentary to Psalms 9:18

3 Tractate Pesachim (116a)

Remarkable! Why would a question need to be asked when, in the case of a wise son or two scholars, the participant knows the answer? It is clear, then, that the role of this dialogue is not merely to teach the uneducated. Obviously, we are trying to reinforce that which is already known. But how do questions help?

We may say that a human being has two types of knowledge: external and internal. Our external knowledge is composed of those truths that we have learned and accepted but which do not affect our actions. This knowledge is "external" to us; it does not really define who we are and how we behave. We may also refer to this as "knowledge of the mind." Internal knowledge, however, is composed of those truths that are so real to us that they have become integrated into our psyche and our way of thinking—they are "internal" to us. This is also where our morals reside. Internal knowledge can also be called "knowledge of the heart" (as in the common expression, "take it to heart").[4]

To illustrate, everyone knows that there are certain items that are dangerous to eat. It is dangerous to eat poisonous substances and it is also dangerous to eat large amounts of very fatty, high-cholesterol food. Nobody would ever consider taking a risk and eating a poison-laced cookie, no matter how appetizing. However, when it comes to healthy eating, often a fatty piece of steak will tempt even the best behaved among us. Thus we could say that the dangers of an unhealthy diet are contained within the knowledge of our "mind," whereas the awareness of the fatality of poison resides within the knowledge of our "heart."

It takes great effort for one to make knowledge a part of one's essence. Only through a traumatic experience or rigorous educational conditioning does information get promoted from external knowledge to internal. For instance, in our previous example, one who suffers a heart attack would most certainly adopt a healthy diet to prevent a recurrence. For him, the need to eat healthy has been upgraded to the realm of the "heart" (pun intended). Likewise, a person who attends a series of lectures about the dangers of heart disease may also be moved to make this knowledge a part of his way of life. He has been conditioned, through an educational experience, to live with

4 See *Sefer Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh*, Vol. 1, paragraph 81, where the author compares the relationship of the two intellects to a parent with its child. See also Rabbi Lawrence Kelemen, *To Kindle a Soul*, pp. 31-32, where this concept is applied to character trait development.

the value of a healthy lifestyle.

On the Seder night, we highlight some of the most fundamental tenets of Judaism. We discuss G-d's omnipotence, providence, and protection for His people. These principles are so essential to our faith that nobody is exempted from the obligation of reciting the Haggadah. "Even if we were all wise, all understanding, all experienced, and all versed in the Torah, we would nevertheless be required to recount the story of the Exodus from Egypt," as the Haggadah states. We do this not by merely reciting dogma. If we did that, these beliefs would remain dry principles confined to the realm of the "mind." Instead, we attempt to train ourselves so that these beliefs will be upgraded into the knowledge of the heart, assimilated into our very being. Questions help arouse our desire to know and understand, and make the answers part of our very thoughts and feelings. They aid us in educating ourselves as well as our children.

So, why do Jews answer a question with a question?

Well…what else would you expect?

Thank you!

To Shmuel Plotsker, for your editorial assistance.

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