



TORAH WEEKLY

A project of the Denver Community Kollel



Parshas Tzav/Shabbos Hagadol

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A Taste of Torah Creation of a Nation

by Rabbi Chaim Gross

The Seder night. The Night of Pesach invokes in us an almost otherworldly feeling, mixed with nostalgic memories of previous years when we were children, sitting at our parents' or grandparents' table, watching in wide-eyed wonder at the magical events unfolding around us. It is the place where the past, present and future of our nation blends together seamlessly in a beautiful, harmonious tapestry.

Now, we find ourselves sitting at the table with our own family, attempting to recreate the magic of our memories, to pass it on to our own children. As is only fitting, it is on this most special night that we are commanded (Shemos 13:8), "*Vihigadeta livincha, You shall tell it to your children!*" Each father is entrusted with a sacred task - to tell over the story of our nation's Exodus to his child.

The idea behind this mitzvah is quite obvious; it is the concept of what we call *mesorah*, or the transmitting of our tradition, which forms a multi-generational chain linking our children all the way back to those who personally experienced the Exodus from Egypt and witnessed the Ten Plagues with their very own eyes.

However, one might find himself asking the following question: "*I understand why this story must be told to my children, but why must it be done by me? In fact, I think it would be better if a more qualified, knowledgeable teacher would pass it on to them!*" Would this not accomplish the same purpose?

An exploration of the Seder Night so as to understand what is really taking place as we journey through the Haggada will provide a deeper appreciation of the mitzvah of *vihigadeta livincha, you shall tell it to your children.*

Many commentators make an observation about the Seder. Throughout the night we perform many mitzvos, and each one is preceded by a *bracha* (blessing) exclaiming how Hashem has sanctified and commanded us to perform the mitzvah - all, except one: the mitzvah to tell over the actual story of the Exodus. It appears that there is no blessing recited over it. Why do we not recite a *bracha* over this most crucial commandment?

Many answer that there is, in fact, a blessing, and that is the *bracha* of *asher gi'alanu* recited at the conclusion of retelling the story. However, points out the Chasam Sofer (Rabbi Moshe Sofer; 1762-1839), this does not fully resolve the problem, as a *bracha* is usually recited prior to performing the

mitzvah, not afterwards - why is this one different from all others?

The Chasam Sofer gives a beautiful answer: The Talmud teaches that one must begin the story of the Exodus with the low point in our history and end with the high point. This includes not only the physical state of the Jewish People - the transition from slavery to freedom - but also the spiritual definition. The Haggada thus states, "Originally our forefathers were idol worshippers - and now Hashem has drawn us close to His servitude." The Chasam Sofer adds another dimension to this. He explains that just as the Talmud teaches (Pesachim 116b) that one is obligated to see himself as actually going out of Egypt, so must he view himself as truly undergoing that metamorphosis of idol worshipper to servant of Hashem. It is as though he is undergoing a *geirus*, or conversion process, where the potential convert enters the purifying waters of the *mikvah* (ritual pool) and emerges as a member of the Chosen Nation. In other words, the Exodus that we experience on the night of Pesach is not just a physical journey; rather, it is a profound, spiritual voyage which changes our essence and elevates it to that of an entirely different nature.

Now, says the Chasam Sofer, let us examine the conversion process: When does one recite the blessing over immersion - prior to submerging, or only after emerging from the water? The halacha is that it cannot be recited before, because the words of the *bracha*, "Blessed are You, Hashem... Who has sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us regarding immersion" are not yet applicable to the person. He is not yet part of that group which G-d sanctified with commandments. However, once the new convert emerges from those holy waters as a Jew, he can and does recite that *bracha*.

That is why, continues the Chasam Sofer, we, too, cannot recite the *bracha* over the commandment of telling our Story at the onset. At that point, as we relive the experiences of our ancestors, we are not yet G-d's Chosen Nation about whom could be said those special words, "Blessed are You Hashem... Who has sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us." Only upon its conclusion, when we have completed our spiritual ascension, can we recite a blessing over this incredible mitzvah. This will take us back to the question posed at the beginning: why must the fathers be the ones

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Stories for the Soul

Lengthy Thanks

A young man once observed the Chofetz Chaim (Rabbi Yisrael Meir Kagan; 1838-1933) praying a rather long *Shemone Esrei*. Later, the fellow asked him, "Rebbi, I see you're davening a long *Shemoneh Esrei*. What great *kavanos* (intentions) do you have? I'd like to have some of those *kavanos* too."

The Chofetz Chaim sighed and said to the young man, "I don't really have such lofty *kavanos*. I just try to have in mind the simple meaning of the words of the *Shemoneh Esrei*. But when I get to the blessing of *Modim* (which focuses on thanking Hashem for His kindnesses) and I think of everything Hashem has done for me, it just takes a long time to say thank you."

In this week's parsha, the Torah discusses a *korban toda*, a thanksgiving offering. While this offering is brought as an expression of gratitude to Hashem only by people who have survived certain types of life-threatening situations, all of us should take the opportunity to thank Hashem for His many kindnesses both during *Shemone Esrei* and at other times, as well.

Kollel Happenings

SPRING-SUMMER AVOS UBANIM ON SHABBOS AFTERNOON

The Kollel's spring-summer Avos Ubanim program continues this Shabbos afternoon at the Kollel Torah Center in West Denver and Southeast Denver. Learning begins one hour before mincha, followed by nosh and prizes. For sponsorships and more info, email info@denverkollel.org.

CHOL HAMOE'D LEARNING AT THE KOLLEL

The Kollel is proud to present Chol Hamo'ed learning during Pesach. A daily *shacharis* and breakfast will be followed by a *shiur* every day of Chol Hamo'ed at the Kollel's Torah Centers in West Denver and Southeast Denver. Visit www.denverkollel.org or email info@denverkollel.org for more info.

BUILD YOUR LEGACY AND SECURE THE FUTURE OF TORAH WITH LIVE ON/LIFE & LEGACY

The Kollel is one of 28 local organizations selected to be part of Rose Community Foundation's Live On/LIFE & LEGACY program, which focuses on creating financial stability for the future through planned giving. Think it's not for you? Think again! Anyone can make a planned gift, no matter the amount. Visit www.denverkollel.org, email rmh@denverkollel.org or call 303-820-2855 for more information.

Halacha Riddles

Last week we asked: How could the proper *bracha* on a food differ depending if it's cooked or fried? **Answer:** As discussed in previous weeks, a food requires its specific *bracha* only when it is being in its normally eaten state. Thus, a vegetable normally eaten cooked but not raw would require a *shehakol* when eaten raw, not a *ha'adama*.

By the same token, if a food is normally eaten when fried, but not when it is cooked, or vice-versa, the specific *bracha* would be relevant only in its normally eaten state. Onions, for example, are eaten on their own when fried, but cooked onions are not usually eaten by themselves after

cooking. Therefore, one would recite *ha'adama* on a fried onion but not on a cooked onion. (Raw onions, as well, would require *shehakol*, as onions are not normally eaten alone raw, but as a secondary part of a salad or a sandwich. A possible exception would be a sweet onion, if it is normal in a particular locale to eat such onions raw.) Similarly, if onions are normally eaten pickled (e.g., in pickled herring), one would make *ha'adama* when eating pickled onion. (Mishna Berura 205:5).

This week's question: Why would a food's blessing receive an adjustment on this particular Shabbos Hagadol?

Lives of Our Torah Leaders

Rabbi Saadia Gaon - Part XXII

There are some sources which, though not fully reliable, record the following chapter of Rav Saadia's life: In 937, some

individuals attempted to make peace between the Exilarch Dovid ben Zakkai and Rav Saadia.

A Taste of Torah

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to tell that Story to their children? A passage in the Talmud (Kesubos 11a) will help provide the answer. The Talmud debates the following question: Does a *bais din*, a Jewish court of law, have the ability to perform a conversion on a non-Jewish child? Generally, for a conversion to be valid, the potential convert must express his genuine desire to become part of the Jewish Nation and take on the hundreds of responsibilities this entails. However, a child is not yet considered of sufficient intelligence to be able to assess the situation. Thus, one cannot be sure that he truly wants all this, even if he insists that this is his desire. In such a case, can the court of law perform the conversion anyway, acting on behalf of the child?

The Talmud attempts to bring a proof from a source which seems to spell out clearly that such a conversion is indeed valid, but quickly dismisses it by drawing a distinction. That case is different, says the Talmud, for there it is discussing a situation where a father came together with his child to convert. As such, the child's conversion is valid, because what a father does is desirable to the child.

Although a child is considered incapable of genuinely desiring something because he cannot comprehend all its consequences, this situation is an exception. The Meiri, a classic Medieval commentary on the Talmud, explains: A child is born with an innate desire to be just like his

father - when he sees his dear father pursuing a certain course, it becomes beloved and precious to him. Thus, he, too, will most passionately want it for himself - no matter what sacrifices it may entail.

With this, we return to our point of origin. We ask, we wonder, "Would it not be better for me to find someone more qualified to teach my child our nation's Story? Shouldn't I recruit the most knowledgeable, persuasive and charismatic figure I can find to impress these crucial lessons of Jewish faith into the walls of my child's heart?" And the answer is, a thousand times, NO! As we have explained, on this holy night we make a spiritual journey, a conversion of sorts - the transition from a non-believer to being a servant of Hashem. We enter the purifying waters of the Haggada as nondescript members of the world, and emerge as the Chosen People, bound by the laws of the Creator. And if we wish that our children make this journey as well, not just superficially, but to internally conclude that the Jewish faith is the correct and only path, then there is only one way to do it. The parent must take the children by the hand and lead them through it; the parent must go through that conversion process together with them. Then, and only then, can one be certain that the children will emerge from the *mikvah* with true faith in their hearts - for that which they see done by their fathers becomes beloved above all else.

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