THE BENJAMIN AND ROSE BERGER

TORAH TO-GO®

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ESTABLISHED BY RABBI HYMAN Z"L & ANN ARBESFELD

Diaspora Judaism at a CROSSROADS

Dedicated in memory of Cantor Jerome & Deborah Simons

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Rabbi Josh Flug
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One of the most moving moments of the Seder arrives when families raise their glasses together to sing V'Hi She'Amda—"And it is this [promise] that has stood by our ancestors and us." Why do we raise our glasses? Rav Yekusiel Yehuda Halberstam (The Klausenberger Rebbe, in *Yetziv Pisgam* Haggadah) suggests that it is based on the Gemara in *Eruvin* 65a:

אמר רב ששת משום רבי אלעזר בן עזריה יכול אני לפטור את כל העולם כולו מן הדין מיום שחרב בית המקדש ועד עכשיו שנאמר (ישעיהו נא, כא) "לכן שמעי נא זאת ענייה ושכורת ולא מיין" ... מאי יכולני לפטור דקאמר נמי מדין תפלה.

Rav Sheshes said in the name of Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah: I am able to exempt the entire world from judgment from the day the Temple was destroyed until now, for it is said (Isaiah 51:21): Therefore hear this now, you afflicted one, drunk but not with wine."... What is the meaning of "I am able to exempt" that he also said? It means: from the judgment of prayer.

The Gemara initially thought that Rabbi Elazar Ben Azariah was exempting us from all of our misdeeds while in galus because galus is like a forced state of drunkenness. The Gemara rejects that on the basis that someone who is drunk is actually responsible for his actions. Rather, Rabbi Elazar Ben Azariah is saying that just as someone who is drunk is exempt from tefillah, we too, during this state of galus are not held responsible for not having the proper kavanah (intent) while praying (see Rashi).

Rav Halberstam suggests that we raise the glass of wine to allude to this idea. While we are in galus, we are confused and disillusioned. We can't even concentrate on important matters such as tefillah. While we recite V'hi She'Amda, we beseech Hashem to take this into account.

In every generation there are those who hate us, and in every generation, we experience different forms of confusion and disillusion. For Diaspora Jews living in 2026, part of the confusion and disillusion surrounds the future of Diaspora communities. Ten years ago, who would have thought that shuls and schools would require such high levels of security? Who would have thought that a student on a college campus would be shunned by colleagues and professors alike for believing that Israel has a right to exist? For some, October 7th was a wake-up call to make Aliyah — to be in the front row of these historic times. For others, Aliyah is not on the table at this time and they remain committed to building Jewish life where they are, even as they grapple with unprecedented challenges and uncertainty about the future. Perhaps this is precisely the state of drunkenness that Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah described — not knowing where we truly belong, unable to see clearly what the future holds, yet still raising the cup and beseeching Hashem to understand our confusion as we navigate this moment in Jewish history.

Diaspora Judaism stands at a crossroads and we hope that this issue of the Benjamin and Rose Berger Torah To-Go will help provide clarity on these issues. As we raise our glasses this year at V'Hi She'Amda, we recognize that we don't have all the answers and we don't know what the future will bring. While we beseech Hashem to provide us with mercy and salvation, we also ask Him to help us find clarity amidst the confusion.

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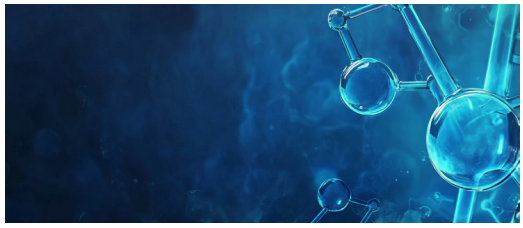

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INTRODUCTION

THE COVENANT THAT STANDS AND CALLS US TO BUILD

Rabbi Dr. Ari Berman

Rosh Yeshiva and President, Yeshiva University and RIETS

וְהִיא שֶׁעָמְדָה לַאֲבוֹתֵינוּ וְלָנוּ

And it is this (promise) that has stood for our ancestors and for us.

The Haggadah continues:

For not only one enemy has risen against us to destroy us, but in every generation they rise against us to destroy us — and the Holy One, Blessed be He, saves us from their hands.

At first glance, this passage appears to reinforce a narrative centered on antisemitism and survival. In every generation, there are threats. In every generation, there are enemies. October 7th tragically reminded us how real that truth still is.

But the key phrase is not the enemies.

The key phrase is "וְהִיא שֶׁעָמְדָה" — "And it is this that has stood."

What is the "this"?

It refers back to the covenantal promise made to Avraham Avinu at the Brit Bein HaBetarim — the promise that even though his descendants would experience exile and oppression, they would emerge, grow, and inherit a destiny. The promise was not merely that we would survive our enemies. It was that we would become a great nation, a bearer of blessing, a covenantal people.

The Haggadah does not say, "And our ability to fight stood for us."

It does not say, "And our vigilance stood for us."

It says, "The covenant stood for us."

The Jewish people were never sustained by reaction alone. We were sustained by mission.

Yes, in every generation there are those who rise against us. But that is not the headline of Jewish history. The headline is that something deeper carries us forward — a brit, a calling, a purpose that transcends any single political moment.

That is precisely the challenge of our era.

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If we focus only on those who rise against us, we risk defining ourselves by our adversaries. But the Haggadah insists that what truly "stands for us" is the covenant — the commitment to build families, communities, batei midrash, institutions of learning, and a moral vision for the world.

The promise to Avraham included exile. But it also included growth. "וְאַחֲרֵי כֵן יֵצְאוּ בִּרְכֻשׁ גָּדוֹל" — "Afterward they will leave with great substance." That "great substance" is not merely material wealth; it is spiritual depth, national resilience, and covenantal identity forged in challenge.

In our moment, we again live in two realities. There are those who rise against us. And there is the covenant that stands for us.

The flourishing of the State of Israel is part of that promise standing. And we are privileged to live in a generation that not only inherits the covenant but takes part in its very unfolding by contributing to the building of the Jewish state. The responsibility of Diaspora Jewry to build Torah institutions, to form leaders, to engage the broader world and sanctify God's name with clarity and confidence — that too is the promise standing.

Our task is not merely to survive this generation's threats. It is to build deeply rooted communities so that when history calls, we are ready.

"וְהִיא שֶׁעָמְדָה" means that Jewish destiny is not fragile. It is not accidental. It is sustained by something eternal.

Our task, then, is not merely to survive this generation's threats. It is to align ourselves with the covenant that has carried every generation before us — to build deeply rooted communities, to educate with seriousness, to form leaders in years of quiet growth, so that when history calls, we are ready.

In every generation, there are enemies.

But in every generation, there is also a brit.

And if we choose to stand inside that covenant — deeply rooted and forward focused — then future generations will say of us as we say at the Seder:

וְהִיא שֶׁעָמְדָה לַאֲבוֹתֵינוּ וְלָנוּ.
It was that promise that stood for them.

And it stands for us still.

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Diaspora Judaism at a CROSSROADS

As part of this issue of Torah To-Go, we convened a symposium on the future of Diaspora Judaism in an age of growing Aliyah. We invited leading rabbis to reflect on the meaning of galus, the rise of antisemitism and the challenges and opportunities facing Diaspora communities in the years ahead.

Please introduce yourself

Rabbi Goldberg: As the Rav of a large and diverse shul, I have the privilege of interacting with a broad cross-section of Klal Yisrael and of listening to and learning from their experiences, perspectives, and attitudes on these and many other issues. My own family is deeply connected to Israel: my siblings and their families have made Aliyah, and my parents spend half the year living there. While I feel a profound yearning to move to Israel myself, it is clear to me that, at this time, my responsibility, mission, and purpose are to serve my community here.

I am often challenged with the premise that if I were to declare my intention to make Aliyah, the community would follow. Unfortunately, experience suggests otherwise, as evidenced by rabbanim who have made that move in the past and in the present without triggering a communal migration.

I strongly believe that Aliyah need not always be viewed in binary terms as an all-or-nothing proposition. For a variety of legitimate reasons, one may primarily reside in the Diaspora while still making a concerted effort to spend meaningful time in Israel and to "live" there as often as possible. While this is obviously not the same as permanent relocation, paying taxes, or serving the country, fostering an ongoing and meaningful relationship with Israel, including investing in a home there, can deepen connection and help pave a path toward eventual Aliyah.

Rabbi Liss: I have the privilege of serving as both a community rabbi in Highgate, London—where my wife and I have led the community for almost 18 years—and as the Director of Rabbinics for the United Synagogue.

The United Synagogue is the largest Jewish Charity (non-profit organisation) in the UK. It comprises

OUR PANELISTS

Rabbi Efrem Goldberg
Mara D'asra, Boca Raton Synagogue

Rabbi Nicky Liss
Rabbi, Highgate Shul & Director of Rabbinics, United Synagogue, England

Rabbi Menachem Penner
Executive Vice President , Rabbinical Council of America, Dean Emeritus, RIETS

Rabbi Shalom Rosner
Rosh Beis Medrash, Machon Lev Anglo Program, Rabbi, Ohel Ephraim in Nofei Hashemesh, Bet Shemesh

Rabbi Larry Rothwachs
Director of Professional Rabbinics, RIETS, Rabbi, Congregation Beth Aaron, Teaneck, incoming Rabbi, Meromei Shemesh, Ramat Beit Shemesh

56 communities (including Highgate) as well as the Office of the Chief Rabbi, the London Beth Din, KLBD and the United Synagogue Burial Society. It serves the British Jewish community, powering Jewish life in the broadest possible way: teaching Torah in a range of settings, shaping Jewish futures and enabling communities to flourish in a way that is caring, active and welcoming to all.

As Director of Rabbinics, I am responsible for leading the rabbinic recruitment team, for delivering continuous professional development for our rabbis and rebbitzens, and for providing a rabbinic voice at the U.S. Directors table, contributing to policy development, safeguarding oversight, and communications.

And so, this matters. A lot.

In recent years, the Jewish community in the UK has faced a challenging and unsettling period—from the divisions that followed Brexit, through the strains of COVID, to the horrors of the October 7 attacks and the rise in antisemitism that followed.

These events have left many feeling uncertain about the future of British Jewry. And yet there has been increased engagement and vibrancy in our communities, as more Jews feel their connection to Am Yisrael.

This issue is also deeply personal. We were blessed to live in Yerushalayim for nine years, and it is where our eldest daughter, son-in-law and two grandsons are now based.

And let's not pull any punches: Israel is our homeland.

As my late rabbi, Rabbi Isaac Bernstein, zt'l, often put it: Chutz La'aretz is a "station" and Israel is our "destination." He also quoted the *Meshech Chochmoh* at the end of Parshas Bechukosai, that we must avoid the trap of thinking that "*Berlin* (or New York or London) *hee Yerushalayim*."

The Diaspora is our temporary home, but while here, we will try, B'Ezras HaShem, to help our Jewish communities flourish as much as possible and feel pride in their Judaism. As Rabbi Shamshon Raphael Hirsch comments (Shemos 19:6), as a *mamleches kohanim v'goy kadosh*—a kingdom of priests and a holy nation—we have a mission to represent Hakadosh Boruch Hu to the rest of humanity. In the face of growing antisemitism, we must be authentic and proud Jewish voices.

Rabbi Penner: I serve as the Executive Vice President of the Rabbinical Council of America and as Dean Emeritus of the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary at Yeshiva University. In these roles, I work closely with rabbis, educators, and Jewish leaders across North America, Israel and beyond, helping to strengthen Torah communities and support those who lead them.

Much of my work sits at the intersection of Diaspora Jewish life and the State of Israel. I see rabbis and families considering Aliyah, institutions investing in long-term growth, and communities trying to think responsibly about their future. That vantage point has made these questions not theoretical but practical and personal.

Before moving into national leadership, I served for two decades as a shul rabbi. From that position, I watched families build lives, educate children, struggle with tuition,

consider Aliyah and wrestle in very real ways with the tension between commitment to their local kehillah and love for Eretz Yisrael. My own family's deep connection to Israel—including the Aliyah of all of my grandchildren to date—has only sharpened that perspective. I therefore feel a responsibility to both: to strengthen Torah life wherever Jews live today, and at the same time to keep our eyes firmly on the larger story of the Jewish people and our return home.

Rabbi Rosner: I am presently Rosh Beis Medrash of the English-speaking program at Machon Lev (having also taught at Yeshivat Reishit Yerushalayim for 10 years, and Yeshivat Kerem BYavneh for six years), and Rav of Ohel Ephraim in Nofei Hashemesh, Bet Shemesh.

My wife Tamar and I were *zoche* to make Aliyah 18 years ago, with six children at that time ranging from age four months to 12 years old.

Aliyah had always been a dream for me—a value inculcated in me from my dear parents, z"l, as well as during my years at Yeshivat Shaalvim. Throughout my 20 years on the YU campus, from MTA to Yeshiva College to semicha to Kollel Elyon, and ultimately teaching in the BMP Program, I relished being in such a hallowed and sacred institution. My father studied there and was in the first class of Einstein Medical school. My maternal grandfather, Rabbi Mitchel Eskolsky, also received semicha from YU in the 1920s.

My roots in YU, then, run deep. And yet, I felt a calling—not just the individual calling of a Jew wanting to raise his family in Israel, but something larger: a sense of taking part in the *kibbutz galuyos* of our people, the generational, national destiny calling, which we have witnessed over the past almost 200 years. We discussed our Aliyah decision with many rabbanim on both sides of the ocean, all of whom of course had their own viewpoint. Ultimately, as our children were getting older and an opportunity opened up for me to be involved both in a yeshiva and a community, we felt that Hashem was sending us the boat, the helicopter—and we jumped. Hashem has given us and our children much bracha, and we daven for the day when we can welcome all Jews to our holy borders.

Rabbi Rothwachs: I have served as the Rabbi of Congregation Beth Aaron in Teaneck, New Jersey, for over two decades, and I currently serve as the Director of Professional Rabbinics at RIETS. In parallel with my rabbinic work, I am a licensed clinical social worker, and I work with individuals, couples and families.

My wife, Chaviva, and I are making Aliyah and leading a new community, Meromei Shemesh, in Ramat Beit Shemesh, which is in its early stages. This reflects an effort to bring together two realities we have lived professionally and personally: the remarkable success of Diaspora communities in building warm, supportive religious environments, and the deep truth that Jewish national and spiritual destiny is ultimately realized in the Land of Israel.

As more of our most committed families make Aliyah, what is the strategic case for investing millions in Diaspora religious infrastructure, especially given the rising cost of living in the Diaspora?

Rabbi Liss: Although we are starting to see small examples of this in the UK, this phenomenon is nowhere near as widespread as it is in the USA.

At the same time, Rabbi Berel Wein, zt"l, wrote in "Tending the Vineyard":

> *The role of a Rabbi is to make Torah, its knowledge, observances, traditions and values a primary force in the lives and families of our congregants. It is also the ability to give them a sense of perspective: Where do I fit into the story of the Jewish people?*

We aspire to help every Jew find their place and give them the tools to enable their Jewish growth. And for that, we need high-class programming and excellent infrastructure. And this is where the kehilla structure of Chutz La'aretz plays a major role, enabling Jews of all levels to connect with their part in the story of the Jewish people and find a place of belonging.

I would also note that strong religious infrastructure in the Diaspora is one of the best ways to produce committed Jews who love and support Israel.

It is not an either/or option. Our desire is for Israel, but for many of us, our current responsibilities are to the Jewish communities in the Diaspora.

Rabbi Penner: The American Jewish community is not on its last leg. Even with increased Aliyah, the reality on the ground suggests that there will be several generations of serious Jewish

life in North America. Responsible leadership means planning for the world as it is likely to be, not only for the world we hope it will become.

Planning is always uncertain. History can shift quickly, and HaKadosh Baruch Hu often moves events in ways we do not anticipate. But if we expect significant communities to remain here for decades, then we have an obligation to build strong schools, shuls, mikvaot and communal structures that allow Torah life to flourish. Weak infrastructure does not inspire commitment; strong institutions do.

Solid Diaspora institutions also play an important role in supporting Israel itself. Communities with stable schools and shuls are the very communities that produce committed Jews, donors, advocates and families who eventually make Aliyah. Investing here is not a contradiction to Israel. In many ways, it is one of the ways we sustain Israel.

Rabbi Rothwachs: The strategic case begins with clarity about what strong Diaspora institutions actually produce. They do not automatically produce Aliyah. What they produce is something more foundational: durable Jewish identity, deep literacy, communal confidence and the psychological and spiritual stability required to make life-defining decisions. Weak Diaspora infrastructure does not lead to more Aliyah. It leads to a thinner identity, weaker belonging and ultimately greater assimilation. People rarely choose to build their lives in Israel because Jewish life was marginal where they grew up. They move because Jewish life was strong enough to convince them that being part of the Jewish story matters.

At the same time, we must acknowledge a real tension. Highly successful Diaspora communities can unintentionally normalize permanence. The goal, therefore, is not simply to build strong institutions, but to build institutions that function as launchpads rather than destinations. That means consciously shaping communities that produce confident Jews who see Aliyah as a natural extension of their Jewish lives rather than as a rupture from everything familiar and supportive.

Diaspora communities are where identity and communal responsibility are formed. Israel is where Jewish civilization is fully expressed at scale. Strong Diaspora institutions, properly understood, are one of the primary ways we prepare people to step into Jewish destiny.

Ultimately, this is not a competition between strengthening the Diaspora and strengthening Israel. Diaspora communities are where identity and communal responsibility are formed. Israel is where Jewish civilization is fully expressed at scale. Strong Diaspora institutions, properly understood, are one of the primary ways we prepare people to step into Jewish destiny.

The responsibility of Diaspora communities, given the affordability challenges, is first to ensure that committed Jewish life is realistically sustainable for families choosing to build their lives there. If we fail to do that, financial exhaustion, rather than values or calling, will determine where families ultimately live.

The long-term communal obligation is therefore twofold. We must build funding structures that preserve access to Torah life and protect the economic dignity of families raising the next generation. And we must recognize that Jewish history is dynamic, and that some families will choose to build their future in Israel for reasons that go far beyond economics.

Rabbi Rosner: When we made Aliyah, my wife and I resolved that we would never, ever, look down on any Jew who had not yet decided to make Aliyah. Every family has their own unique *peckel*, their own set of factors to weigh in making this life-changing decision. Given that reality—and given that there are still vibrant, robust communities in the Diaspora catering to millions of our Jewish brothers—we must keep investing and supporting the religious institutions in these communities. At the same time, parallel to these investments, we must educate those same communities that the real center of the Jewish past, present, and future is the Land of Israel. That is where our resources also need to be flowing, because that is our ultimate Waze destination.

Rabbi Goldberg: There is something profoundly beautiful about the fact that so many of our most committed families feel drawn to build their lives in Israel. It speaks to the success of the very communities that raised them. When a young person spends a gap year in Israel and chooses to stay, or returns inspired to eventually make Aliyah, that inspiration did not come from nowhere. It was cultivated in the yeshivos and

schools, youth groups, shuls, and homes that invested deeply in their Torah life and instilled those values. When a young person in whom the community invested makes Aliyah, it is not a failure of that investment, it is an incredible return on it.

At the same time, our investment in dynamic, vibrant, and passionate Torah institutions outside of Israel is not only about or measured by Aliyah. These institutions are critical and worthwhile in their own right. While the question of Aliyah should not be *if* but *when*, the reality is that there are legitimate reasons why many people are not yet in a position to make that move. Additionally, there is a meaningful demographic of Israelis who have moved to the Diaspora. They too need leadership, love, support, and serious Torah institutions and infrastructure. So long as there is a Diaspora Jewish community there is a responsibility to inform, inspire, enrich and empower them with Torah institutions and lives.

A thriving Diaspora community is not a contradiction to love and commitment to Israel. On the contrary, it is a critical source of influence and advocacy for Israel and often one of Israel's greatest incubators for those who will immigrate there. And so long as Jews are living outside of Israel, sustaining vibrant Torah life there is both a responsibility to those communities and a contribution to the Jewish future as a whole.

How do we reconcile the imperative of living in Eretz Yisrael with the reality that for many, Diaspora communities serve as stronger centers of Jewish learning, chesed and religious life?

Rabbi Penner: There is clearly an ideological and halachic pull toward living in Israel. At the same time, many sources recognize that a people must remain in or navigate to a place where they and their family will grow religiously and live responsibly. For some families, that calculation is far from simple. Questions of schooling, parnassah and community carry real weight.

Still, we cannot ignore the larger picture. This moment in Jewish history is one in which the future of the Jewish people is increasingly centered in Israel—a unique sense of peoplehood, of being part of the story itself rather than watching from afar. North America is, for the first time, becoming a suburb of Israel. Each family must weigh its circumstances carefully, but Aliyah should be a serious and compelling aspiration, not merely an abstract ideal. We need to speak more clearly about Aliyah and Zionism as serious and natural aspirations for our children. Too often these ideas are treated as optional rather than central to Jewish life. Our schools and communities should normalize the possibility that building one's future in Israel is a real and honorable path.

And if we feel we must remain in galut, we must remember that we are in galut. Israel is home, and many of us feel that when we visit. We are, like some Israelis themselves, on *shlichut* (assignment) in Chutz La'aretz, God's agents to serve the needs of our families.

Rabbi Rothwachs: This tension is often treated as self-evident, but the assumption itself is worth questioning. Do we actually have comprehensive data showing that Diaspora communities are stronger centers of Torah learning, chesed or religious vitality than Israel? Much of this belief is shaped by personal experience, specific communities or generational memory. The scale, diversity and intensity of Torah life across Israeli society today make it difficult to sustain that claim in any generalizable sense.

It may be that what people are reacting to is not Torah infrastructure but relational infrastructure. Many Diaspora communities, especially shul-centered ones, function as highly intentional relational ecosystems. In Israel, religious

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life is often embedded in national and municipal structures rather than built around voluntary membership. That difference can shape lived experience even if access to Torah learning and chesed is equal or greater.

The more honest framing may be that we are not reconciling two fixed realities, but comparing two different models of religious life. The Diaspora model emphasizes intentional community because it must. The Israeli model assumes Jewish identity as part of public and cultural life. The challenge for this generation is not deciding which is better, but learning how Israeli communities can increasingly incorporate intentional relational infrastructure, while Diaspora communities prepare people to live inside a national Jewish framework that operates differently from the voluntary community model.

Rabbi Rosner: There is a thought from Rav Kook that I heard many years ago. I used to find it humorous (את חטאי אני מזכיר היום), but I have come to understand its truth and depth. Many are familiar with the famous question of why the Rambam does not count the mitzvah of *yishuv Eretz Yisrael* as one of the 613 mitzvos. The consensus of most meforshim, based on many other halachos in the Rambam himself, is that it is a *mitzvah D'Oraisa* even today, but it is not counted as an independent, stand-alone mitzvah.

Rav Asher Weiss draws a parallel: just as the Ramban views tefillah as a mitzvah yet does not count it among the 613, so too the Rambam treats *yishuv Eretz Yisrael*. Both are obviously critical, but neither is counted as an independent mitzvah. I heard in the name of Rav Kook that *yishuv Eretz Yisrael* is not counted because it impacts every mitzvah one performs in the Land—each is elevated by being done in Eretz Yisrael. The roots of this are already found in the Ramban at the end of Acharei Mos, but after living here for 18 years, I can attest that it's not just a kabbalistic, esoteric concept in Heaven, it is felt in *this* world, in our everyday lives. There is an additional spiritual, national element that infuses all parts of our life here.

Given this reality, let's return to the question. We are naturally more comfortable in an environment we know, and growing up in a particular place may shape how we define a "better center of Jewish learning, chesed and religious vitality." But Baruch Hashem, today there are many wonderful kehilot in Israel that embody these values. Our children thank us constantly for bringing them to our country, which *defines* religious vitality.

And just to add: How does one measure commitment and religious vitality, anyway? Of course, through *shemiras hamitzvos* and Talmud Torah, but there is another element, one that many of us often overlook. I'd like to quote a message I expressed at an *erev chizuk* in my shul a few weeks after October 7:

> *Baruch Hashem I've had the zechus of being involved in and shaped by major Torah centers for the past 40 years. I was on the YU campus for 20 years, imbibing and growing from all my amazing rebbeim, and for the past 15 years, have been teaching in yeshivot here in Israel. Torah, avodah, giving shiurim, that's what my life has been about. And then came that awful day. Simchas Torah 5784, the day that is seared into our memory forever. Without even knowing what exactly what was happening, putting my son Avraham into a car and watching him drive off to gather his soldiers, then putting my son Yehoshua into another car and watching him drive off to join his plugah (platoon), and then hearing that my son-in-law Amitai was also on his way to the South, all of my rabbinic training, my semicha, my misabek b'afar ragleihem and dibuk chaverim (learning from teachers and colleagues) did not and could not prepare me for those moments… But I saw it in my boys that they were prepared. They knew what this meant, they recognized the tzav hasha'ah (the mission of this moment), and they jumped at the opportunity. What was it that they knew, that they felt, that they believed, that I was missing, that I was lacking? And I realized that I was nurtured, trained and shaped in the world of Rav Soloveichik, and that is amazing and wonderful and still guides my every moment of learning and shiurim. It was that Torah of religious Zionism, after all, that motivated my wife and me to bring our family here 15 years ago. But here, now, in this era, in this country, I needed to tap into Torat Eretz Yisrael, an additional world view, that could help us cope and deal with the present situation. That, of course, is the outlook of Rav Kook, and how he teaches me to see the cataclysmic events surrounding me. Though I am not a trained or a seasoned talmid of Rav Kook, I will share one crucial message that he gives us for our times.*
>
> *In Orot Milchama, he writes* כשיש מלחמה גדולה בעולם, מתעורר כח משיח — *The milchamot of Am Yisrael represent very powerful, even uplifting moments and they are part of the divine hand, bringing the world to its ultimate state of redemption.* כתום המלחמה, מתחדש העולם ברוח חדש ורגלי משיח מתגלים יותר—*these major national events, as difficult and painful as they are, are ultimately the harbinger of a brighter and stronger future, paving the way for the footsteps of Mashiach.*

But how do we tap into this process, this outlook, this vision? He explains that our outlook has to change, from one of prat (individual) to one of klal (community). Yes of course, to focus on the prat, in terms of our chesed, our tefillah our limud HaTorah, but also in our overall hashkafas hachaim, zooming out from each news story and each detail of what's happening, and recognizing that Am Yisrael is right now on the move, on the move forward towards its ultimate destiny, and we must view ourselves as part of that awesome and eternal Am.

My children have a deep-seated connection to the nation and to the land that imbues them with instincts of communal responsibility and clarity of purpose. My question is, then, how does one define "religious vitality" and a "complete observant experience"? Hashem is obviously the only one with the heavenly scorecard, but I humbly suggest that we widen our perspective of what is acceptable and even an encouraged form of *avodas Hashem.*

Rabbi Goldberg: The mitzvah and aspiration to live in Eretz Yisrael is real and powerful. For thousands of years Jews prayed for it, dreamed of it, and longed for the opportunity to return. In our generation, the gates are open in ways our ancestors could hardly imagine. It is therefore natural and appropriate that many feel called to build their lives there. That aspiration should be celebrated, encouraged, and honored.

And yet, Torah history also teaches us that vibrant Torah life has existed outside the Land for long stretches of Jewish history. The great yeshivas of Bavel shaped the Talmud itself. Communities in Spain, Poland, Lithuania, and beyond produced towering scholars and flourishing centers of Torah learning. The presence of great Torah life in the Diaspora does not negate the centrality of Eretz Yisrael; rather, it reflects the remarkable resilience of the Jewish people to build holiness wherever we are planted.

Reconciling these realities demands humility. We should affirm the ideal of living in Israel while recognizing that individuals and families must make decisions based on their circumstances, their spiritual growth, and their ability to contribute meaningfully. For some, Israel is where their Torah will flourish most. For others, their unique role in strengthening Diaspora communities is itself an act of sacred service. The key is that wherever we live, our hearts remain oriented toward Israel and our lives committed to strengthening the Jewish future.

> The presence of great Torah life in the Diaspora does not negate the centrality of Eretz Yisrael; rather, it reflects the remarkable resilience of the Jewish people to build holiness wherever we are planted.

Rabbi Liss: Political commentator Nadav Eyal drew a fascinating contrast between minority and majority cultures on the Call Me Back podcast.

In Chutz La'aretz we have a minority outlook, and that enables us to look inwards, to strengthening those around us, and to build vibrant communities. Of course, through our tefillos, tzedakah and aspirations, Israel is always at the front of our minds—and never more palpably than the last two years, where we have seen the growing phenomenon of (as Brett Stevens puts it) "October 8th Jews."

Twenty-five years from now, if Mashiach has not yet come, will our communities still sustain the critical mass needed to thrive—or are we witnessing the start of an inevitable demographic shift toward Israel?

Rabbi Rothwachs: Intellectual honesty requires acknowledging visible trajectories when they are already underway. We are likely moving toward a more geographically concentrated Jewish future, even if the timeline and shape of that process remain uncertain. Birthrate differences, migration patterns

and the gravitational pull of Israel as the center of Jewish public life are already reshaping global Jewish demographics. The question is not whether Diaspora communities will continue to exist, but what scale and form they will take, and whether they will remain broad-based communal ecosystems or become smaller, more ideologically concentrated communities.

Recent events, including October 7 and the subsequent rise in visible global antisemitism did not create these questions, but they did strip away a level of historical comfort that many of us had quietly come to rely on. For several decades, many Jews experienced an unprecedented period of security, integration and institutional stability. I will admit to real concern, and even some level of dismay, that roughly two and a half years after October 7, we have not seen sustained, serious communal attention to the long-term civilizational implications of what we experienced. The immediate response in the aftermath was intense and appropriate. But what is far more consequential is what happens once the urgency fades—and here, I worry that we have allowed ourselves to drift back toward assuming stability rather than honestly exploring whether stability can actually be assumed. My concern is not that communities are indifferent. It is that we may be choosing psychological comfort over historical clarity.

The goal should not be to predict decline or to panic. But it should absolutely be to refuse complacency. The measure of success will not be whether Diaspora communities remain exactly as large as they are today, but whether they remain spiritually strong, institutionally honest and deeply connected to the evolving center of Jewish life, even if that requires rethinking assumptions that felt unquestionable only a generation ago.

We must recognize that at some point, be it soon or not so soon, Hashem's promise of a full *kibutz galuyos*, which is an "inevitable demographic consolidation," will happen.

We do our children a disservice if we raise them to assume that the social and political conditions of one generation will necessarily define the next, or if we allow them to believe that the relative stability many of us experienced represents the default setting of Jewish history.

The long-term success of Jewish continuity will depend less on geography and more on whether the next generation experiences themselves as participants in Jewish history rather than as residents of a particular Jewish moment. Raising children who are rooted in identity, resilient in the face of uncertainty, and capable of building Jewish life under changing historical conditions is not optional. It is one of the central educational and communal responsibilities of our time.

Rabbi Rosner: Along with supporting Jews in the Diaspora with whatever support they need, I think it is imperative to recognize the current events for what they are, and see the writing on the wall. The miraculous events surrounding the State of Israel over the past few years, as well as the *kibutz galuyos* over the past almost 200 years, coupled with less than hospitable surroundings in many of our Diaspora exiles (remember, that's what they are; See Maharil Diskin Mishpatim and Rav Schacters's application to *galus*) forces us to face the reality that Jewish life and Jewish history is fluid and pushing us towards our national destiny. We don't know how long, we don't know how the process will continue. But we must remember what we say so often in our prayers.

ושא נס לקבץ גלויותנו וקבצנו יחד מארבע כנפות הארץ.

Hashem, please bring us back to our land. This is our national aspiration and dream, and as the Kuzari cautions, we should not be among those who only speak like *tziftzuf hazarzir*, a chirping bird who has no internal sense of the content of his sounds. We are a stiff-necked nation, and wherever we are, we strive to thrive, but we also must recognize that at some point, be it soon or not so soon, Hashem's promise of a full *kibutz galuyos*, which is an "inevitable demographic consolidation," will happen.

Rabbi Goldberg: Predicting the Jewish future has always been a risky endeavor. Time and again in our history, trends that seemed inevitable shifted in unexpected ways. What we do know is that the Jewish people are living through an extraordinary moment: the flourishing of a sovereign Jewish state alongside vibrant Diaspora communities. How that balance evolves over the next twenty-five years is difficult to know.

It is certainly our hope and prayer that the center of gravity of Jewish life will continue to move increasingly toward Israel. But it does not necessarily mean the disappearance of meaningful Diaspora communities. Even if Israel

becomes the primary demographic center, there may still be important and thriving Jewish communities around the world contributing to Torah scholarship and global Jewish influence.

Rabbi Liss: With regret, I am not yet able to predict the future! But as community leaders, we try to look at trends and likely scenarios and remain nimble in our planning. In that spirit, my team has been tasked with looking at what kind of Rabbinate the UK will need in 10 years' time—how the community's needs are changing and how the Rabbinate should evolve to meet them. That in itself is a hard enough question.

Rabbi Penner: This question weighs on me. Often the most motivated and idealistic people, including rabbis and teachers, are the ones most drawn to Aliyah. And those with greater means are often more able to make the move. When leadership and resources leave first, communities feel the strain.

We may be entering a period of imbalance, where leadership relocates more quickly than the broader population. If too many educators and rabbanim depart without a plan to replace them, sustaining strong communities in North America will become increasingly difficult. This is not a reason to discourage Aliyah, but it does mean we must intentionally cultivate the next generation of leaders here as well.

In practical terms, this means building leadership pipelines—identifying young people early, encouraging careers in the rabbanut, chinuch and communal service, mentoring them and providing the financial and professional support that makes those paths viable. At the same time, we must recognize that this may be a transitional phase in Jewish history. Thoughtful planning can help ensure that our communities remain strong even as the center of gravity continues to move toward Israel.

How can the Diaspora sustain strong religious practice, communal cohesion and Torah scholarship as many of its most learned families and educators move to Israel?

Rabbi Rosner: Perhaps we should be asking ourselves why so many learned families and passionate educators are making the move. Maybe it's something we ourselves should consider—or be more encouraging when a child decides to stay in Israel after their gap year program.

Yes, many of the strongest and brightest are moving. But Hakadosh Baruch Hu never leaves a herd without shepherds, and there will always be leaders who choose to remain and lead our Diaspora communities.

I often speak with educators and communal leaders considering Aliyah. Probably to the chagrin of some of my children, I do not tell everyone that must come. I have colleagues who felt they needed to make Aliyah no matter what, regardless of their profession in Israel. Others believed that if they couldn't serve the Jewish community in the same way there, then they should stay. I support both approaches —this is a very personal decision, and both have validity.

What we can say is that those who do make the move will find many learned and accomplished leaders already there, preparing the way for those who follow—something akin to a Goshen model, when Yehuda was sent ahead to establish schools and shuls for those that would follow.

Chazal discuss two areas of our avodah: *bein adam LaMakom,* between man and God, and *bein adam lachaveiro,* between man and man. The Gra and others added a third: *bein adam le'atzmo,* the perfection of our own religious personality.

Perhaps today we are witnessing a fourth category, one that was not relevant for nearly 2,000 years: *bein adam la'amo*—between a person and the Jewish nation. Acts such as bikur cholim or organizing chesed are beautiful expressions of *bein adam la'chaveiro.*

But when one defends the Jewish people in their homeland, or chooses to move to Israel, the impact extends beyond the individual. These actions carry national significance and fall within the broader framework of of *bein*

adam la'amo.

May we continue to witness the hand of Hashem, recognizing the unfolding miracles that accompany our daily lives, and together merit to experience the final stage of *geula shleima b'meheira beyameinu.*

Rabbi Goldberg: It is true that many rabbonim, educators, scholars, and passionate families are choosing to build their lives in Israel. But the Diaspora continues to host talented Torah personalities, professionals and lay. We must prioritize Torah scholarship, support educators, and cultivate the next generation of teachers and leaders who will care about Israel and plan to one day live there full-time but until then feel a sense of mission, purpose and responsibility to inspire the Jewish people wherever they are found.

Rabbi Liss: We are blessed that many of our greatest rabbis, rebbetzins educators and community leaders have remained in the UK and we will continue to nurture that pipeline.

At the same time, we can tap into the incredible resources that Israel provides. In recent years, we have welcomed shluchim from Israel to the UK to teach and serve as Rabbinic couples for three to five years, bringing a richness that can serve as a model moving forward.

Additionally, advances in connectivity, such as podcasts or online shiurim, allow us to strengthen a truly global Jewish community and access resources both in Israel and in the wider Diaspora in ways not possible before.

Another challenge that I see in the UK and hear about from colleagues in Israel and in the United States: We face a rising global difficulty in convincing our best and brightest to pursue careers in rabbanus /chinuch /kiruv. How do we make these roles both attractive and financially viable? Arguably, this question poses an even greater threat to the chinuch of our next generation—regardless of where they live.

Rabbi Penner: The nature of Torah leadership has changed. There was a time when the local rabbi was the primary conduit to Torah scholarship. Today, anyone can access outstanding shiurim and teachers from anywhere in the world. The highest levels of scholarship may increasingly come from Israel, and that is not necessarily a loss for Diaspora communities.

The local rabbi, rebbetzin and teacher play a different, but no less important role. They are present in people's lives, serving as mentors, role models and guides. That personal connection cannot be replaced by online learning. That is why the RCA invests so heavily in rabbinic families. They are irreplaceable and, without them, few congregants are able to grow.

Rabbi Rothwachs: Rather than viewing this primarily as loss, we should increasingly think in terms of global Jewish leadership ecosystems. In a world of constant travel, digital learning and institutional partnerships, Torah leadership is no longer confined to a single geography. Educators, scholars and communal leaders can influence multiple communities simultaneously, and Diaspora and Israeli institutions can function in ongoing intellectual and educational partnership rather than in isolation.

It is worth stepping back to ask what we are really witnessing as growing numbers of rabbis, mechanchim and Jewish communal leaders choose to build their lives in Israel. It is tempting to frame this as movement away from Diaspora communities. But it may be more accurate to understand it as movement toward another arena of service to the Jewish people. For many, serving Klal Yisrael in Israel is not a withdrawal from responsibility but an expression of it—a statement about where they believe Jewish history, Jewish responsibility and Jewish opportunity are increasingly centered.

Diaspora communities, however, will need to become more intentional about leadership development. Communities that assume leadership continuity will struggle. Those that expect leadership circulation, invest in cultivating local leadership, and maintain strong relationships with Israeli centers of Torah learning will be far more resilient.

The long-term model is likely not separation but integration: shared faculty, shared institutional initiatives, and leadership pipelines that assume movement between Israel and the Diaspora over the course of a career. In that model, leadership movement is not abandonment. It is participation in a broader, shared project of building Jewish life across multiple centers of Jewish reality.

Is there an authentic Torah vision for a flourishing long-term Diaspora, or are our institutions ultimately waystations in the Jewish people's return to our homeland?

Rabbi Goldberg: Torah history suggests that both ideas contain truth. On the one hand, the ultimate trajectory of Jewish history points toward redemption and a fully restored Jewish life in Eretz Yisrael. Our prayers, our holidays, and our collective memory all orient us toward that destiny.

On the other hand, the Torah also

recognizes the sanctity of Jewish life wherever Jews live. Throughout centuries of exile, our sages built communities of extraordinary holiness, scholarship, and compassion across the globe. Those communities were not merely temporary holding patterns; they were places where Torah flourished and Jewish life reached remarkable heights.

Rabbi Liss: I would like to return to the point I started with.

While we have Jews in the Diaspora we must continue to build excellent structures to support and nurture them, to help them grow along their Jewish journeys, and to instill a love for Torah, Hashem and Eretz Yisrael.

Allow me to conclude with a beautiful thought from Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, zt'l.

In May 2001, he participated in a public dialogue with Amos Oz and was asked what can be done to encourage Aliyah.

As part of his response, Rabbi Sacks noted that the famous Jews' College was for many years housed in a magnificent building in the centre of London. When he was appointed the Head of the College in 1983, it was in serious debt, and so he told the community to sell the building and build a smaller one further out in Hendon, in the centre of the Jewish community, not the centre of town; this time not a splendid building, but a temporary residence—a *mishkan*.

They replied: Is it dignified for the English community not to have a college in a big, magnificent building?

He answered powerfully: Now, when we have the State of Israel, any building Jews build abroad is a temporary residence, a succah. It is forbidden to build structures that proclaim: This is our house forever. I try to signal to our community that Israel is our place, our homeland—but I do not agree at all with the idea of negating the Diaspora.

May we soon see the day when we all return to Eretz Yisrael. In the meantime, as Rabbi Wein tasked us, we should all endeavour to give all Jews a sense of perspective: Where do I fit into the story of the Jewish people?

Rabbi Penner: Ideally, we hope for a day when the Jewish people are gathered in our homeland and that Diaspora institutions are no longer necessary. That is the vision embedded in our tefillot, in our longing for k*ibbutz galuyot,* and in our history. If we merit it, we should one day look back at the Diaspora as an important but temporary chapter.

For now, however, we live in the present. We have real communities with real needs. Our task is to build them responsibly and with dignity, even as we keep our eyes on the larger destination of Jewish return to Israel. With God's help, we should merit to see a time when those strong communities become bridges that lead our people home.

Rabbi Rothwachs: The Torah clearly recognizes the reality of Jewish life in exile and provides frameworks for building deep, meaningful religious communities outside the Land of Israel. At the same time, classical Jewish thought consistently treats exile as historically real but not historically final. The tension is not between building strong communities and believing in Jewish return. The tension is between strength and permanence.

Chazal themselves hint to this historical movement. The Gemara in *Megillah 29*a, teaches that in the future, even the *batei knesset* and *batei midrash* of the Diaspora will ultimately be carried to Eretz Yisrael:

עתידין בתי כנסיות ובתי מדרשות שבבבל שיקבעו בארץ ישראל.

In the future, the synagogues and study halls of Babylonia will be established in the Land of Israel.

This is not only a geographic statement. It reflects a deeper idea that the Torah life built in exile is not lost. It is gathered, elevated and ultimately re-centered in the Land of Israel. In many ways, over the course of our lifetimes, we are witnessing forms of this unfolding—*kibbutz galuyot* not only of individuals and families, but of communities, institutions and centers of Torah life. More and more, we are watching pieces of the Jewish world reposition themselves around the center of Jewish national and spiritual life.

A mature Torah perspective allows us to build institutions of real depth, Torah learning, *chesed* and *kedusha* in the Diaspora while maintaining historical humility. Jewish communities outside Israel can flourish spiritually and institutionally, but they should not be imagined as replacing the central role of Israel in Jewish historical destiny. There is an opportunity for this generation not only to observe these processes, but to see ourselves as participants in them—as part of a redemptive story that is still unfolding in real time. The challenge for this generation is to build Diaspora communities that are strong enough to sustain Jewish life with dignity and depth, and honest enough to recognize that Jewish history continues to move.

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RUNNING TO OR RUNNING FROM?

Mrs. Stephanie Strauss

Executive Director, YU in Israel
Assistant Vice President for Israel Strategy and Enrollment
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At various pivotal and decisive moments throughout my adult life, my father, *a"h*, would ask me a deceptively simple yet profoundly meaningful question: *"Are you running to or running from?"* His wisdom was rooted in a deeper insight—that while life's transitions are rarely exclusively about escape or pursuit, the strongest and most enduring choices are those driven by aspiration: running *toward* something of value rather than simply running away *from* discomfort or fear.

This framing—*running to* versus *running from*— resonates deeply with our most ancient narratives and the ongoing journey of the Jewish people. The story begins with none other than Avraham Avinu, who exemplifies this existential and spiritual crossroads.

In Bereishit 12:1, Hashem commands Avraham:

לך לך מארצך וממולדתך ומבית אביך...
Leave your land, your birthplace, and your father's house…

אל הארץ אשר אראך.
To the land that I will show you.

Avraham was instructed to run *from* familiarity, comfort and security, and then to run *to* something unknown: a land that Hashem will show him, a mission to achieve his full potential, and a destiny defined by divine promise. This poetic framing encapsulates the tension we all confront at transition points in life: do we pursue what is next, or cling to what is known?

And though the promise of a homeland and a great nation born from his descendants seemed exhilarating, the narrative of Bnei Yisrael in the wilderness reminds us that escaping bondage is not the same as stepping into destiny.

The Midbar Generation: A Lesson in Hesitation

After fleeing slavery in Egypt, the Israelites successfully built a thriving Mishkan—a mobile community infused with constant Divine presence. Yet, despite having truly run *from* Egypt and having received clear reassurance from Hashem:

והבאתי אתכם אל הארץ… ונתתי אותה לכם מורשה.
I will bring you to the land… and give it to you as a heritage.
Shemot 6:8

Many balked at the notion of conquering Eretz Yisrael and taking ownership of their heritage and inheritance.

Even after witnessing Nachshon ben Aminadav's "leap of faith" into the sea, the generation struggled to find the psychological and ideological strength to run *to* the land that awaited them. They were anchored by comfort, memories, fear—and a communal inertia and doubt that stifled faith and resolve.

Community: Anchor or Springboard?

This ancient story reflects a consistent human theme: community can be both a source of strength and a potential anchor. Community holds and nurtures us; it gives identity, support, and meaning. It invites honest reflection:

- *Have I and my family invested in building a community strong in number, resources and collective purpose for its members?*
- *Have we fortified our community's religious institutions, so that Torah scholarship, religious practice, Jewish education and communal life are thriving?*

For many Torah-observant, Zionistic Jews in the Diaspora, the answer to these questions is *yes* — and with good reason. Strong communities with inspiring leadership, quality schools and camps, energetic Torah study and networks of support create a sense of home and belonging that is not easily relinquished. This vibrant and idyllic Jewish life fosters growth and resilience — and here lies the dilemma: even when the pull *to* something greater is strong, the instinct to remain where we are can be stronger.

Some argue that sustaining these communities is itself a sacred imperative. Indeed, the Jewish world is enriched by thriving centers of Judaism in the Diaspora, and these communities contribute to, support and strengthen the State of Israel in countless ways. We are one people bound by more than geography—by shared history, text, practice and destiny.

Variables Disrupting Tranquility

Yet life introduces variables that confront every Jew—individuals and families—with our thematic question: Are we running *to* a future built on promise, or running *from* discomfort, fear, or uncertainty?

Consider a few forces that disrupt personal and/or communal equilibrium:

- A child chooses to make Aliyah after studying in Israel.
- The cost of living rises faster than anticipated income, creating economic anxiety.
- A beloved and revered Rav or communal leader announces plans to move to Israel — and others follow.
- And perhaps most starkly: antisemitism, which in even the most secure Jewish communities, has reached levels unseen since pre-World War II.

Each variable—alone or in synergy—forces us to ask: What will pull us to seriously consider aliyah? Economic pressure? Familial bonds? Communal shifts? Or stark reminders of how tenuous safety and acceptance can be in our host countries? And it is important to recognize that our motivations can get blurred—we may mistakenly conflate the pull *toward* the positive promise of Israel with the push *away* from challenges or threats in the Diaspora.

Challenges Within Israel

Of course, Israel is not a utopia. Security concerns, military service, rising costs and religious diversity within Israeli society give pause to those considering a move. Israel's realities include both inspiring vibrancy and serious challenges. But these very imperfections — lived *together*— deepen the sense of shared fate and communal responsibility to build, defend and contribute.

Building and Belonging: Past, Present, and Future

Jewish life in Israel reflects the rich tapestry of Diaspora backgrounds. English-speaking olim have successfully integrated into Israeli society and have contributed to and reached the pinnacles of every facet of national life: from education and innovation to business and civic leadership. Our children have served in many capacities, fighting our wars and sustaining our home front.

Many who were community builders abroad have built thriving, Torah-rich communities in Israel, fully embracing the gift of "*v'natati otah lachem morasha*." We have also strengthened Torah institutions and nurtured Jewish

See more shiurim & articles on Making Aliyah

life, as it is written in Devarim 33:4,

תורה צוה לנו משה מורשה קהילת יעקב.
Torah was commanded to us by Moshe; the heritage of the congregation of Jacob.

This verse reminds us that our *heritage* is both Torah learning and a communal inheritance — one lived in the land that has held our hopes, dreams and destiny for millennia. In doing so, we are actualizing the dual "*morasha*"—the inseparable bond of the *heritage* of Torat Yisrael and Eretz Yisrael.

Aliyah: Halachic and Ideological Dimensions

Embedded in this conversation is an underlying and powerful halachic and ideological idea: our individual and collective responsibility to fulfill the mitzvah of *yishuv ha-aretz* — the significance of making Aliyah and inheriting, settling and dwelling in the Land of Israel.

In religious Zionist thought, the tension between choosing to stay or to go is not only psychological or practical, it is also theological—a collaborative, divinely orchestrated partnership between God and the Jewish people in building the future. This concept is reflected in the teachings of Rav Avraham Yitzchak HaCohen Kook, who emphasized that our actions in the land — settling it, cultivating it, building community — are themselves part of the religious task of actualizing God's purpose for the Jewish people: hastening the redemption. In this view, making Aliyah is part of a shared covenantal journey with God, where human initiative advances a divine mission (See, for example, *An Angel Among Men*, p. 511).

In this context, the Torah itself teaches us about our own effort and divine assistance. Concerning the building of the Mishkan in Pekudei 39:33, the pasuk states:

ויביאו את המשכן אל משה.
They brought the tabernacle to Moshe.

Rashi explains that initially no one was able to erect the Mishkan due to the weight of the boards. Hashem instructed Moshe "busy yourself with your hands," and once Moshe did so, the Mishkan stood up on its own. This teaches that we must first take action and contribute what is within our ability; only then does God complete the work.

A similar principle is found in *Masechet Sotah* 8b, and again in *Masechet Makot* 10b:

בדרך שאדם רוצה לילך בה מוליכין אותו.
In the path that a person wishes to go, he is led.

Hashem assists and guides us along a path we sincerely aspire to pursue. Although making aliyah can be fraught with uncertainty, we make the effort and take a "leap of faith," and God provides the promise and the opportunity.

Conclusion: Running *To* the Future

The question *running to* or *running from* is not a one-time decision. It is a dynamic tension that runs through Jewish history and individual lives. Running *to* is not always easy—it asks of us courage, vision, faith, sacrifice and the willingness to leave comforts for promises worth pursuing.

Whether our path leads us to lay deeper roots in the Diaspora or to answer the call to move to Eretz Yisrael, the decision must be grounded in purpose, conviction and clarity of heart. The stories of Avraham, Nachshon ben Aminadav and countless Jews through history invite us to take our own leap of faith— not simply away from what we have built and in which we have thrived, but toward our individual and collective heritage and destiny.

For Further Discussion:

Personal Reflection on Motivation: Think about a major life transition you've made or are considering. How do you distinguish between "running to" something versus "running from" something? Can these motivations coexist, and if so, how do we ensure that the "running to" remains primary?

Halachic Obligation vs. Personal Choice: How do you understand the halachic status of living in Israel today? Is Aliyah an individual obligation, a communal ideal, or a personal choice? How does one's answer to this question shape the decision-making process?

Generational Considerations: Many families face the reality of children who study in Israel and choose to stay, creating a pull for parents to follow. How should family considerations—being near children and grandchildren—interact with other factors in the Aliyah decision? Is following one's children "running to" or "running from"?

KIBUD AV V'AIM VS. LIVING IN ISRAEL

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The Medrash (*B'reishis Rabbah* 39:7) relates that Avraham was afraid to leave Terach because people would say he left his aging father, and this would cause a *chilul Hashem*. Hashem responded, "*Lech* ***lecha***" (12:1), I exempt you ("*lecha*") from *kibud av*, but nobody else. And I will record Terach's death before your journey.

The Maharal (Rashi 11:32) explains the uniqueness of Avraham's circumstance and the "death" of Terach as follows: When Avraham began an entirely new era by leaving Terach, his connection to him was completely severed. Therefore, Hashem exempted him, and only him, from *kibud av*, emphasizing the total break by treating Terach though he had died before Avraham's journey to Eretz Yisroel.

This Medrash corroborates the Rambam's view (*Mamrim* 6:11) that one must honor a parent even if he is a *rasha*. According to the *Tur* (Yoreh Deah 240:18), however, a *rasha* does not need to be honored by his son and Avraham was therefore not unique at all.

The *Tur* proves his position from the Gemara (*Bava Kamma* 94b), which states that a son, after his father's death, does not have to repay interest that his father accrued over his lifetime. Chizkiyahu's shabby treatment of his *rasha* father's body, which *Chazal* endorsed (*Pesachim* 56a), also supports the *Tur's* view.

To defend the Rambam, we must assume that *kibbud av* contains an interpersonal (*bein adam lechavero*) component (see *Minchas Chinuch* No.33). However, this *bein adam lechavero* aspect applies only while the father is alive (see *Maharam Schick*, Y.D. 218). The obligation to honor a deceased parent (*Kiddushin* 31b) is purely *bein adam lamakom.*

The Ramban (*Shmos* 20:12) suggests that *kibbud av* is included in the honor of Hashem, because parents are Hashem's partner in creation (*Kiddushin* 30b). Therefore, a *rasha*, who is unworthy of being treated as Hashem's partner, is excluded from the *bein adam lamakom* dimension of *kibbud av*.

Thus, the Rambam requires one to

honor a parent who is a *rasha* only because of the *bein adam lachavero* component. But because interpersonal obligations do not apply to one who died, one need not honor a deceased *rasha*. Hence, the Gemara (*Bava Kamma, Pesachim*) refers to a dead parent, while the Rambam refers to a *rasha* who is still alive.

The Gemara (*Kiddushin* 31b) relates that Rav Assi had an elderly mother. She told him, "I want jewelry." He made it for her. "I want a husband." He said, "I will look for you." She said, "I want one as handsome as you." He left her and went to Eretz Yisrael.

He then heard that she was coming after him. He asked R. Yochanan, "May I leave Eretz Yisrael to meet my mother?" R. Yochanan said, "I don't know." Rav Assi waited a bit and returned. R. Yochanan said, "Assi, if you want to leave, may Hashem return you in peace."

After Rav Assi left, he heard that his mother died and her coffin was coming. He said, "if I had known [that she died] I would not have left."

The Maharsha asks, why would Rav Assi not leave Eretz Yisrael if he knew his mother had died? He answers cryptically: Perhaps going to greet his mother's coffin is not called honoring the dead. The Tosafos Ri Hazakein (printed on the side of the Gemara, whose real author is R. Avraham min Hahar), answers identically: This is not part of [the obligation to] honor a parent after (their) death.

Why is this different than the Gemara's (ibid.) example of honoring a parent by referring to him as "My father, my teacher, may I be an atonement for his soul" [*hareini kaparas mishkavo*] for 12 months? This is the source for the recital of Kaddish Yasom for 12 months (Rama Y.D. 376:2). After that one says, "May his memory be a blessing for life in the World to Come" (ibid.).

The Rama cites our custom to recite Kaddish only for 11 months, so as not to imply that the parent was a *rasha*, whose judgment in Gehenom lasts 12 months (Ediyos 2:10). The Taz (Y.D. 240:12) asks: if so, why do we recite *hareini kaparas mishkavo* for a full 12 months?

He answers by quoting Rashi: "Upon me should come all bad things which would otherwise befall his soul. After 12 months, he already received all the judgment that he deserves." During the 12th month, however, he may not have yet merited Olam Haba.

When one refers to a deceased parent with no honorific, it is a degradation. Therefore, he must say *hareini kaparas mishkavo* in the 12th month. Refraining from Kaddish is only an omission, and is customary, to consider a parent a *tzadik* and not a *rasha*.

Rashi implies that, in fact, a son can reduce the punishment of his father in Gehenom. The Gemara (31b) defines *kibud* as providing service: Giving a parent food and drink, clothing and covering him, and helping him in and out. The Maharsha and the Ri Hazaken may hold that cooling down the fire of Gehenom is included in providing a service, much as turning on an air conditioner on a hot day. Merely accompanying a coffin is not included in the category of "honoring after death," even though colloquially we refer to a funeral as "*kavod ha'acharon*," the final honor.

This answer is problematic. R. Akiva Eiger (1:68) states that any matter that raises the honor and greatness of his father, such as saying "my father, my teacher,", is included in the obligation of honoring him after death. Presumably, escorting a parent's coffin likewise raises the parent's honor, as the term "*kavod acharon*" implies.

The Rashash offers a radical interpretation of Rav Assi's statement, "If I had known, I would not have left." It does not refer to leaving Eretz Yisroel to greet the coffin. Rather, he explains that Rav Assi meant: if I had known that my mother would follow me and die on the way, I would not have left Bavel. He feared that the strain of the journey, or the fact that he left her, caused her death. This answers the question of the Maharsha.

The Rashash attributes this interpretation to the Ra'avad. The Rambam (*Mamrim* 6:10) permits leaving a parent whose severe dementia makes it impossible for the child to stay. He should appoint others to assist the parents as befits them. The Ra'avad asks: if he leaves, whom can he appoint to guard the parent?

The Radvaz answers that a child cannot instruct or restrain a parent, whereas an appointed caregiver can act in a way that benefits the parent. Such situations are everyday occurrences (*maasim b'chol yom*). Nowadays, this applies to nursing

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care that involves exposing a parent's private parts, which is forbidden for a child to do.

The Ran asks a different question: Rav Assi left his mother when she was mentally unwell. How then can the Ra'avad rule that this is prohibited? The Ran suggests that the Ra'avad holds that one may leave a demented parent only to go to Eretz Yisrael. As the Ran notes, this suggestion is problematic. If one may not leave a healthy parent to go to Eretz Yisrael, and one may not leave a demented parent to go to another place outside of Eretz Yisrael, how does the combination of a demented parent and going to Eretz Yisrael allow one to leave?

The Rashash answers that the Ra'avad agreed with the aforementioned interpretation. Rav Assi regretted that he left his aging mother when he could not take care of her health. Therefore, it is prohibited. This answer is brilliant, but the *Shulchan Aruch* rules like the Rambam (Y.D. 240:10), so the Maharsha's question remains.

A more basic question can be raised. How was Rav Assi permitted to leave? *Tosfos* (*Avodah Zarah* 13a) permits leaving Eretz Yisroel only to learn Torah or to get married. In fact, the issue of leaving Eretz Yisroel for *kibbud av* is disputed by the poskim (*Pischei Teshuvah, Even Haezer* 75:6, *Yechave Daas* 3:69).

Perhaps, the *bein adam lamakom* aspect of *kibbud av* does not warrant leaving Eretz Yisroel, as *Tosfos* implies. Therefore, once Rav Assi discovered that his mother had died, and only the *bein adam lamakom* aspect of *kibud av* remained intact, he no longer had any justification to leave Eretz Yisroel. However, just as one is required to pay a personal debt, even if as a result he must leave Eretz Yisroel, so too one must repay his debt to his parents (see *Chinuch* #33) and honor them even by leaving Eretz Yisroel. Therefore, Rav Assi was permitted to leave Eretz Yisroel to honor his mother, a *bein adam lechavero* obligation.

This is comparable to a person who obligated himself to provide certain services in order to pay off a debt he owes as part of a business venture. That Shabbos, the rabbi gave an impassioned sermon encouraging Aliya. The debtor was so inspired that he put a "for sale" sign on his house. The creditor was appalled. "How will you repay me?" The debtor answered, "But the Rabbi said to make Aliya." They came to the rabbi, who ruled: "First pay back your debt. Then go on Aliya." One's debt to his parents, for life itself, exceeds any monetary debt.

If we equate remaining outside Eretz Yisroel with leaving it, there is further proof that *kibud av* overrides living in Eretz Yisroel from the Medrash. Only Avraham was exempted from *kibud av* to live in Eretz Yisroel, as derived from *Lech* ***Lecha***. All others must honor even a *rasha* father, even if as a result the mitzva of living in Eretz Yisroel cannot be fulfilled.

Perhaps this analysis can answer another question. Why did R. Yochanan say, "I don't know," and, when Rav Assi was persistent and returned, allowed him to leave? R. Yochanan may have been unsure of Rav Assi's reason to meet his mother. If it was only *bein adam lamakom* he would not be allowed. His persistence indicated that *bein adam lachaveiro* motivated him. Otherwise, he would have accepted "I don't know" and stayed in Eretz Yisroel. Once R. Yochanan realized this, he allowed Rav Assi to leave Eretz Yisroel to meet his mother. Rav Assi may have understood this and therefore said that had he known that his mother died, he would not have left Eretz Yisrael.

This analysis may also explain the Ran's suggestion. Perhaps, when one's parent has dementia, the interpersonal obligation ceases, since the parent is unable to understand the child's action. Alternatively, interpersonal obligations

derive from a social contract, based on potential reciprocity. For this reason, it does not apply when a person dies, as the Maharm Schick rules (See *B'Ikvei Hatzon* p. 88). Arguably, a parent with dementia is also incapable of reciprocity. If so, only the *bein adam lamakom* obligation exists. However, the mitzvah to live in Eretz Yisroel overrides nearly all mitzvos. Therefore, one may leave a demented parent to move to Eretz Yisroel, but not to move elsewhere.

One question remains: *Kibud av va'em*, by providing services, is clearly required and represents repayment of a debt. As such, one may not go on Aliya instead of fulfilling this obligation. This applies to parents who need these services. What about parents who simply miss their children and grandchildren and oppose Aliya for that reason alone?

This begs a larger question. Is there a mitzvah to obey a parent's wishes? Some authorities seem to limit the mitzvah to deeds that give the parent pleasure (*hana'ah*) (See Ritva, *Yevamos* 6a).

However, the *Chazon Ish* (Y.D. 149:8) states that there is another mitzvah, *mora*, of revering one's parents (Vayikra 19:3). The Gemara (*Kiddushin* 31b) includes a prohibition for the child to contradict the parent's words. This

What about parents who simply miss their children and grandchildren and oppose Aliya for that reason alone?

demands obedience. Nonetheless, if the parent makes an unreasonable request, he is required to cancel it if his child asks him to (*tzarich l'vatel r'tzono mipnei r'tzon b'no*). Precedent for this ruling may be the exemption of a married woman (30b). Her priority for the needs of her husband can make the father's demand unreasonable.

The Rema (Y.D. 240:25) rules that one need not heed his father's request not to marry a certain woman. Some infer from this that there is no obligation to obey a parent. A closer look at his source (Maharik 166) yields an opposite conclusion. A father ordered his son not to finalize his marriage. If she is right for him (*hogenes lo*), the father has no power to prevent the marriage. This is an unreasonable request. If she is not right for him, the son must obey. A son must ask a competent rav if the request is reasonable or not.

It seems that ordering a child not to make Aliya, merely because the parent will miss the company of the children and grandchildren, is an unreasonable request. This is especially true in the age of WhatsApp and Zoom, when one can see and converse with them daily. Therefore, notwithstanding the aforementioned analysis, a child may go on Aliya over his parents' objection in such a case.

Summary

Honoring a living parent contains both an interpersonal dimension (*bein adam lechavero*) and a spiritual dimension (*bein adam lamakom*). This framework illuminates the puzzling case of Rav Assi, who left Israel to meet his elderly mother but regretted his departure upon learning she had died en route. The explanation is that the interpersonal obligation justified leaving Israel. Once she died, only the *bein adam lamakom* obligation remained, which doesn't warrant leaving the Eretz Yisroel.

The practical conclusion addresses modern dilemmas: Children may make Aliyah even over parental objections if those objections stem merely from missing their company. Such requests are deemed unreasonable, especially today when video calls enable daily contact. However, if parents genuinely need their children's services—the concrete acts of *kibud* like providing food, clothing, or assistance—the interpersonal obligation takes precedence.

We Are Not Alone

Perspectives on Jewish Victimhood

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Antisemitism as an Affront to Hashem

Antisemitism has always been an integral part of the story of the Jewish People. Throughout the ages, our Sages have sought to provide theological context to the antisemitism in their midst, as well as to the phenomenon of *sinas Yisrael* in general. One prime example of this appears in a letter penned by the Rambam, who was asked by the Jews of Yemen to address a messianic movement that arose in the wake of religious persecution. The Rambam's response, known as *Iggeres Teiman*, contains a profound insight into the phenomenon of antisemitism:

ומפני שיחד אותנו הבורא במצותיו ובחוקותיו והתבארה מעלתנו על זולתנו בכללותיו ובמשפטיו שנאמר (דברים ד, ח) ומי גוי גדול אשר לו חקים ומשפטים צדיקים וגו' קנאונו העכו"ם כלם על דתנו קנאה גדולה וילחצו מלכיהם בשבילה לערער עלינו שטנה ואיבה ורצונם להלחם בה' ולעשות מריבה עמו ואלקים הוא ומי ירב לו ואין לך זמן מאז שנתנה לנו תורה זו עד זמננו זה שכל מלך עכו"ם גובר או מכריח או מתגבר או אנס שאין תחלת כוונתו ודעתו לסתור תורתנו ולהפך דתנו באונס בנצחון ובחרב.

Since the Creator has distinguished us by His laws and precepts, and our preeminence is manifested in His rules and statutes, as the pasuk says, "And what great nation is there, that has righteous statutes and ordinances, such as all this law that I set before you this day?" (Devarim 4:8), therefore all the nations took great umbrage against us regarding our faith, and their kings have applied themselves because of it to persecute us. Their true agenda was to wage war against G-d and to challenge Him. However, given that He is omnipotent, no one can actually challenge Him. There has been no era since Revelation in which some despot who has attained power, be he violent or ignoble, has not made it his first aim and purpose to destroy our law and to vitiate our religion, by means of the sword, by violence, or by brute force.

In the Rambam's view, antisemitism stems from a conscious or subconscious desire to challenge Hashem and His Torah. The Jewish People are the targets of this campaign because their *raison d'etre* is to act as Hashem's representatives in the world.[1]

Shechinta BeGalusa

The notion that antisemitism represents, at its core, an attempt to wage war against Hashem dovetails with a concept known as *Shechinta begalusa* — namely, that Hashem's presence accompanies the Jewish People into exile and does not forsake them. Even as we endure the brunt of attacks and harsh decrees at the hands of our enemies, there is a palpable

aspect of G-d that suffers along with us, *keviyachol* (as it were).

Shechinta begalusa is a lofty concept whose roots can be traced to *pesukim* in *Tanach*, *ma'amarei Chazal*, and kabbalistic sources. This essay will not address the concept in all its complexity and many manifestations. Rather, we will frame the concept in broad strokes, with an eye toward gleaning insights that can provide a measure of solace and inspiration for times such as these, when we are unfortunately witness to a worldwide resurgence of antisemitism.

The Divine Assurance Given to Yaakov Avinu

An explicit reference in the Torah to the notion of *Shechinta begalusa* comes in the form of a divine assurance given to Yaakov Avinu as he prepared to leave Eretz Yisrael in anticipation of the impending *galus* in the land of Egypt.

אָנֹכִי אֵרֵד עִמְּךָ מִצְרַיְמָה וְאָנֹכִי אַעַלְךָ גַּם עָלֹה וְיוֹסֵף יָשִׁית יָדוֹ עַל עֵינֶיךָ.

I will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also bring you back; and Yosef shall place his hand on your eyes

Bereishis 46:4

Ramban and Rabbeinu Bachayei note that Onkelos, in his translation of the word "ארד" (descend), employs the verb "איחות," which implies a physical descent. In other instances in which the verb "ירד" appears in connection with Hashem, Onkelos renders it "אתגלי," "I will reveal," scrupulously avoiding a translation with physical connotations. By opting for a literal translation here, Onkelos implies that Hashem was assuring Yaakov that His physical presence would be with Yaakov and his progeny for the duration of the Egyptian exile.[2]

Inasmuch as *galus Mitzrayim* is a prototype of future exiles, *Chazal* (*Mechilta*, *Parshas Bo*) extend this idea to other exiles as well:

גלו למצרים שכינה עמהם .. גלו לבבל שכינה עמהם .. גלו לעילם שכינה עמהם ... גלו לאדום שכינה עמהם.

When they were exiled to Egypt, the Shechinah was with them … When they were exiled to Babylonia, the Shechinah was with them … When they were exiled to Ilam, the Shechinah was with them … When they were exiled to Edom, the Shechinah was with them …

Klal Yisrael's Redemption is Synonymous with Hashem's Self- Redemption

The next phrase in Hashem's promise to Yaakov, "וְאָנֹכִי אַעַלְךָ גַּם עָלֹה," "And I will also bring you back," implies that Israel's redemption from Egypt entailed a redemption for the *Shechinah* as well. This corollary dimension to the concept of *Shechinta begalusa*, and its paradoxical nature, is noted in the *Mechilta*:

אלמלא מקרא כתוב אי אפשר לאמרו כביכול אמרו ישראל לפני הקדוש ברוך הוא עצמך פדית.

If not for these verses, one could not say this. It is as if the Jewish People said to the Holy One Blessed be He, "You redeemed Yourself."

Chazal discern the motif of Hashem's self-redemption in the unique phraseology of a *pasuk* in *Parshas Nitzavim*, which foretells Hashem's restoring the captivity of *Bnei Yisrael*:

וְשָׁב ה' אֱלֹקיךָ אֶת שְׁבוּתְךָ וְרִחֲמֶךָ וְשָׁב וְקִבֶּצְךָ מִכָּל הָעַמִּים אֲשֶׁר הֱפִיצְךָ ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ שָׁמָּה.

Then, Hashem, your G-d, will bring back your captivity and have mercy upon you, and He will return and gather you in from all the peoples to which Hashem your G-d has scattered you.

Devarim 30:3

As Rashi notes, the word "*ve'shav*" (as distinct from *ve'heishiv*") connotes a reflexive act of self-return, implying that the return of Israel's captivity also entails a return of the *Shechinah* itself.[3]

In light of the above, we might

conceptualize the notion of *Shechinta begalusa* as consisting of three distinct, albeit related, motifs:

1. *Tza'ar HaShechinah* — the suffering that the *Shechinah* experiences when the Jewish People suffer.
2. *Galus HaShechinah* — the exile and redemption of the *Shechinah* that parallels the exile and redemption process of the Jewish People.
3. The shared identity and destiny that binds the *Shechinah* with *Klal Yisrael*.[4]

Our focus will be on the first of these motifs, the *tza'ar haShechinah*.[5]

Two Aspects of *Tza'ar HaShechinah*: Individual and Collective

As noted, *tza'ar haShechinah* means that when we suffer in exile, Hashem suffers with us. The *Mechilta* (*Bo*, *Masechta DePischa* 14) presents two different applications of *tza'ar haShechinah*, based on *pesukim* in *Tanach*:

וכן אתה מוצא כל זמן שישראל משועבדין כביכול שכינה משועבדת עמהם שנ' ויראו את אלקי ישראל ותחת רגליו כמעשה לבנת הספיר. וכשנגאלו מה הוא אומר וכעצם השמים לטוהר. ונאמר בכל צרתם לו צה. אין לי אלא צרת ציבור צרת יחיד מנין ת"ל יקראני ואענהו עמו אנכי בצרה ...

We find that whenever the Jewish People are oppressed, the Shechinah, as it were, is oppressed with them, as the pasuk states, "And they saw the G-d of Israel, and under His feet there was the likeness of sapphire brickwork" (Shemos 24:10) [a reference to the leveinim, the bricks that the Jewish People used during their slavery in Egypt]. When they were redeemed, what does it say: "Like the very sky for purity" (ibid.). And it says, "In all their distress, He is distressed" (Yeshayahu 63:9). We only know this regarding the suffering of the community. How do we know that this also applies to the suffering of individuals? Because it states, "He will call Me and I will answer him, I am with him in suffering ... " (Tehillim 91:15).

One of the *pesukim* cited by the *Mechilta* is from *Yeshayahu* 63:9:

בְּכָל צָרָתָם לא [לוֹ] צָר וּמַלְאַךְ פָּנָיו הוֹשִׁיעָם בְּאַהֲבָתוֹ וּבְחֶמְלָתוֹ הוּא גְאָלָם וַיְנַשְּׂאֵם כָּל יְמֵי עוֹלָם.

In all their distress, He is distressed, and the angel of His Presence saved them. In His love and pity, He redeemed them; He raised them, and exalted them all the days of old.

The word *"lo"* can be spelled with an *aleph*, לא, meaning "no," or with a *vav*, לו, meaning "His." The verse is written with an *aleph* but is to be read with a *vav*. Ibn Ezra and Radak adopt the latter rendition and explain the *pasuk* to mean that whenever we suffer, Hashem, *keviyachol*, experiences distress as well. This accords with the prooftext cited in the *Mechilta*.

The last *pasuk* cited by the *Mechilta* is from *Tehillim* (91:15):

יִקְרָאֵנִי וְאֶעֱנֵהוּ עִמּוֹ אָנֹכִי בְצָרָה אֲחַלְּצֵהוּ וַאֲכַבְּדֵהוּ.

He will call Me and I will answer him; I am with him in distress; I will release him and I will honor him.

> The *Shechinah* does not merely identify with the plight of the collective community. It also shares in the suffering of each and every individual.

The *Mechilta* interprets this *pasuk* as a reference to the suffering of an individual. Apparently, *tza'ar haShechinah* has two manifestations. The first relates to the suffering of the community at large, where the *Shechinah* suffers along with it. This motif is expressed by the *pasuk*, "בכל צרתם לו צר," "In all their distress, He is distressed."[6] Second, when an individual Jew is in distress, Hashem is present in his suffering. This dimension of *tza'ar haShechinah* is captured in the *pasuk*, "עמו אנכי בצרה."

In other words, the *Shechinah* does not merely identify with the plight of the collective community. It also shares in the suffering of each and every individual.

This second manifestation is echoed in a statement of the *mishnah* in the name of Rabbi Meir:

אמר רבי מאיר בשעה שאדם מצטער שכינה מה לשון אומרת קלני מראשי קלני מזרועי.

Rabbi Meir said: When a person suffers, what does the Shechinah say? Relieve the pain from My head, relieve the pain from My arm.

Sanhedrin 46a

Tza'ar HaShechinah in *Galus Mitzrayim*

We find allusions to both manifestations of *tza'ar haShechinah* in the context of the Egyptian exile. When appearing to Moshe Rabbeinu at the burning bush, Hashem expresses his empathy for the pain of the Jewish People:

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' רָאֹה רָאִיתִי אֶת עֳנִי עַמִּי אֲשֶׁר בְּמִצְרָיִם וְאֶת צַעֲקָתָם שָׁמַעְתִּי מִפְּנֵי נֹגְשָׂיו כִּי יָדַעְתִּי אֶת מַכְאֹבָיו. וָאֵרֶד לְהַצִּילוֹ מִיַּד מִצְרַיִם וּלְהַעֲלֹתוֹ מִן הָאָרֶץ הַהִוא אֶל אֶרֶץ טוֹבָה וּרְחָבָה אֶל אֶרֶץ זָבַת חָלָב וּדְבָשׁ אֶל מְקוֹם הַכְּנַעֲנִי וְהַחִתִּי וְהָאֱמֹרִי וְהַפְּרִזִּי וְהַחִוִּי וְהַיְבוּסִי.

Hashem said, "I have indeed seen the

affliction of My people in Egypt and have heeded their cry because of their taskmasters; yes, I am mindful of its suffering. I have come down to rescue them from the Egyptians and to bring them out of that land to a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey, the region of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Yevusites.

Shemos 3:7-8

Hashem is mindful of the suffering of the Jewish People and expresses His intention to rescue them. The singular phrase *machovav* "its suffering," would seem to be a reference to the Jewish People as a single unit. Hashem feels, as it were, the collective suffering of the Jewish People. This corresponds to the first *pasuk* noted above — *b'chol tzarosam lo tzar* — "In all their troubles He was troubled" — which the *Mechilta* interprets as referring to the *tzaras hatzibur*.

In connection with that same revelation, Rashi (*Shemos* 3:2) cites the second of the aforementioned *pesukim* to explain why Hashem appeared in a bush and not a tree:

"מתוך הסנה" - ולא אילן אחר משום עמו אנכי בצרה.

"Out of the bush" – and not another tree, because, "I am with him in suffering."[7]

As noted, this verse refers to Hashem suffering along with each and every individual. From this perspective, *Ki yadati es machovav* — "I am mindful of its suffering," takes on an additional layer of meaning. Not only does Hashem empathize with the collective distress of the community, He also feels the pain of each individual Jew who was subjected to the cruelty of the Egyptian servitude.

Nosei B'Ol: Ethical Imperatives

The *ba'alei hamussar*, the great masters of ethical development, draw a valuable lesson from this concept. If Hashem suffers along with us, then we must try to emulate Him and likewise empathize with the suffering of others. This concept is known as "*nosei b'ol im chaveiro*," carrying the burden along with one's friend who is suffering.

R. Shlomo Wolbe *zt"l*, one of the great *ba'alei hamussar* of our time, considers this quality a "foundation of creation" (*Shiurei Chumash, Parshas Shemos*). In his *Alei Shur* (vol. 1, introduction to section 4), he emphasizes that that it is insufficient to merely avoid harming others; we should aspire to carry the load of others by "paying attention to their suffering," thereby emulating Hashem. Rav Wolbe explains that in practical terms, this means that in addition to performing acts of *chessed* toward others, we should make efforts to communicate empathic feelings and a sense of kinship, allowing them to recognize that they are not alone in their pain.

Modeling the two types of *tza'ar haSechinah*, human empathy should be manifest on both a communal and an individual level. The Gemara *Ta'anis* 11a, states:

תנו רבנן בזמן שישראל שרויין בצער ופירש אחד מהן באין שני מלאכי השרת שמלוין לו לאדם ומניחין לו ידיהן על ראשו ואומרים פלוני זה שפירש מן הצבור אל יראה בנחמת צבור תניא אידך בזמן שהצבור שרוי בצער אל יאמר אדם אלך לביתי ואוכל ואשתה ושלום עליך נפשי ... אלא יצער אדם עם הצבור שכן מצינו במשה רבינו שציער עצמו עם הצבור שנאמר(שמות יז, יב) וידי משה כבדים ויקחו אבן וישימו תחתיו וישב עליה וכי לא היה לו למשה כר אחת או כסת אחת לישב עליה אלא כך אמר משה הואיל וישראל שרויין בצער אף אני אהיה עמהם בצער וכל המצער עצמו עם הצבור זוכה ורואה בנחמת צבור.

Our Rabbis taught: When the Jewish People are suffering and an individual separates himself from them, the two accompanying angels place their hands on his head and say, "This individual, who separated himself from the community, should not see the [eventual] liberation of the community." Another beraisa states: When the community is suffering, one should not say, "I will go home, eat and drink and live my life" … Rather, he should suffer with the community, for we find that Moshe Rabbeinu suffered along with the community, as the pasuk states, "And Moshe's hands grew heavy; so they took a stone and put it under him and he sat on it" (Shemos 17:12). Did Moshe not have a pillow or a blanket to sit on? Rather, this is what Moshe said, "Since the Jewish People are suffering, I too will be with them in their suffering." Anyone who suffers along with the community merits to see the liberation of the community.

This passage is clearly focused on the imperative of being sensitive to the suffering of the larger community.

Additionally, we must also strive to identify with the suffering of specific individuals. One of the qualities enumerated in *Pirkei Avos* chapter 6 for acquiring Torah is the ability to be *nosei b'ol im chaveiro*, with an emphasis on the individual friend.

In the Haggadah we state "*shelo echad bilvad amad aleinu l'chaloseinu*" — "there wasn't just one who stood upon us to destroy us". What is the significance of this sentence? Isn't the message made clear by the very next sentence "*b'chol dor vador omdim aleinu lechaloseinu*"? The Haggadah Sifsei Yitzchak suggests that throughout history, there have been movements whose ideological underpinnings were the brainchild of a single individual whose ideas achieved prominence through followers of that particular ideology. However, antisemitism is different. It cannot be traced to a particular founder (*shelo echad bilvad*); it is a toxicity that emerges in a variety of forms at any given time. In each generation, people come up with new reasons to hate the Jews based on the prevailing ideologies of the time (both from the right and from the left). The Haggadah proves this idea from Lavan and Pharaoh, illustrating how in one generation, it was Lavan with his form of hate, and in another generation, it was Pharaoh, with a different form of hate.

From Rabbi Adler's Haggadah "Asher Chanan" p. 66

This quality is highlighted by the Torah in its description of Moshe Rabbeinu's early life, when he emerges from Pharaoh's palace and becomes aware of the suffering of his brethren. Rashi (Shemos 2:11) states:

"וירא בסבלותם" - נתן עיניו ולבו להיות מיצר עליהם.

"He saw their suffering": He set his eyes and heart to suffer in their plight.

It was this quality that led Moshe to subsequently stand up to the Egyptian taskmaster who was beating a Jewish servant. Moshe suffered the plight of a single individual and saved him.[8]

Rejoicing with Others

The idea of *Shechinta begalusa* and its application for us should not be limited to times of crisis. Just as Hashem is with us when we are suffering, so too does He rejoice with us in times of joy. As elucidated by R. Wolbe, this idea can be gleaned from the comments of the *Mechilta* cited above, which highlights two halves of a prophetic vision shown to the elders at the time of *Matan Torah*:

וירא את אלקי ישראל ותחת רגליו כמעשה לבנת הספיר וכעצם השמים לטהר.

And they saw the God of Israel, and under His feet was the likeness of sapphire brickwork, like the essence of the heaven for purity.
Shemos 24:10

What is the nature of this vision and its significance? Drawing on *Chazal*, Rashi states:

כמעשה לבנת הספיר – היא היתה לפניו בעת השיעבוד, לזכור צרתן של ישראל שהיו משועבדים במעשה לבנים. וכעצם השמים לטהר – משנגאלו היה אור וחדווה לפניו.

"The likeness of sapphire — This had been before Him during the period of Egyptian slavery as a symbol of Israel's woes — for they were subjected to do brickwork. "And as it were as the body of heaven for purity — This implies that as soon as they [the Israelites] were redeemed, there was radiance and rejoicing before Him.

We see that just as Hashem identified with His nation's pain by setting up a constant reminder in the form of a sapphire brick, so did He take pleasure, *keviyachol*, in the nation's joy, symbolized by the image of a clear sky to commemorate their redemption.

The ability to share in the joy of others is a hallmark of Aharon HaKohen, an attribute attested to by Hashem Himself. In the wake of Moshe Rabbeinu's reluctance to lead the Jewish People, motivated in part by his deference to his elder brother, Aharon, Hashem declared that not only would Aharon not feel jealous, but, to the contrary — "*v'ra'acha v'samach belibo*" — "he will see you and be joyous" (Shemos 4:14). Aharon's joy for Moshe Rabbeinu was rooted in Aharon's ability to fully embrace the simchah of others.[9]

Avnei Shoham and *Avnei Milu'im:* Empathy and *Simchah*

As described in *Parshas Tetzaveh*, Aharon and all subsequent *Kohanim Gedolim* wore the names of the *shevatim* on two different garments. The names were etched upon the *avnei shoham*, which were positioned on the shoulder straps of the *eifod*, and they were also etched upon the *avnei milu'im*, the stones of the breastplate, which were worn on Aharon's heart. In both instances, the Torah references the word "*zikaron*" — remembrance (Shemos 28:12 and 28:9).

What was the nature of this remembrance? Some commentaries (see Rashi and Seforno) interpret it as referring to Hashem, who recalls the merit of the *shevatim*. Other commentaries, however, suggest that the remembrance refers to the mindfulness that the *Kohen Gadol* needed to have for the needs of the Jewish People (see *HaKesav VeHaKabbalah, Tzeror HaMor, Be'er Yosef*). Taken in this vein, we may suggest that the two locations — on the shoulder and on the heart — allude to the two types of identification with *Klal Yisrael* that a Jewish leader

must strive for. Carrying the names of the *shevatim* on Aharon's shoulders symbolizes the imperative to "carry the load" of the people — being *nosei b'ol*. This entails feeling empathy for the suffering of Jewish People, both on a communal and individual level. On the other hand, bearing their names on the *choshen* symbolizes that Aharon must be cognizant of the *simchah* of the Jewish People. Just as the image of "as the body of heaven for purity," shown in the prophetic image at *Matan Torah*, alludes to the joy of Israel's redemption, so does the clarity emblematic of the *Urim V'Tumim* represent times that are peaceful and joyous, when doubts and difficult questions are naturally resolved. In such times as well, Aharon remains mindful of the Jewish People and shares in their *simchah* — both collectively and individually.

Concluding Thoughts

Antisemitism can engender feelings of existential loneliness. On one level, this sense of being alone is a natural reality given that *Klal Yisrael* are, in fact, distinct and separate from all other nations in the world — *hein am levadad yishkon*. The concept of *Shechinta begalusa* reminds us, however, that to believe we are alone in the sense of being abandoned is to embrace a fallacy. First, Hashem Himself is with us in our suffering, and He suffers, as it were, alongside us. Second, our fellow Jews, who strive to emulate Hashem, are always there to suffer with those communities and individuals in times of distress.[10]

May we all be cognizant of these truths and find solace in them. And may we merit to see the day of "as the body of heaven for purity," when Hashem can rejoice with us in the *simchah* of the ultimate redemption.

Endnotes

1. For an elaboration on this idea, see the comments of the Ramban on *Parshas Ha'azinu*, *Devarim* 32:26.

2. Rabbeinu Bechayei proceeds to explain on a kabbalistic level that the letter ה in the words מצרימה and עלה allude to the *Shechinah*. Later commentaries elaborate by associating the letter ה with the *sefirah* of מלכות, which is synonymous with the kabbalistic notion of *Kenesses Yisrael*.

3. The *Hoshana* composition beginning "כהושעת אלם בלוד עמך," composed by R. Elazar HaKalir, includes repeated references to this motif. For further elaboration, see my article, "*Hoshanos*: Origins and Perspectives of an Enigmatic Ritual," available at: https://www.yutorah.org/lectures/lecture.cfm/1077854.

4. The idea of the *Shechinah's* stake in our redemption has many sources both in *nigleh* and *nistar*. Ramban, commenting on *Parashas Ha'azinu*, *Devarim* 32:26, writes that the Jewish People will merit redemption even if they are not completely worthy, because Hashem's reputation is dependent upon the existence of His people. Therefore, the purpose of the world can only be achieved if Hashem rescues His people and brings about the ultimate redemption. On a kabbalistic level, *Tosafos* (*Sukkah* 45a) explain that the phrase "אני והו הושיעה נא," part of the *Hoshanos* prayers of Sukkos, refer to two names of Hashem that represent Hashem's being imprisoned along with *Klal Yisrael*. Additionally, the phrase "אני והו," "I and Him," captures the kinship between Hashem and the Jewish People, who are bound together as a pair. For a fascinating elaboration on the nature of this bond, see what I have written in *Anim Zemiros - A Poem for All Ages* (Feldheim Publishers), pp. 144-149 in elucidation of the stanza, "פארו עלי ופארי עליו וקרוב אלי בקראי אליו," pp. 114-118. As noted in the previous note, the *Hoshanos* on Sukkos are replete with references to the notion of *Shechinta begalusa*.

5. For a discussion of the other areas, refer to my *shiur* on this topic, available at: www.yutorah.org/lectures/lecture.cfm/827139/.

6. This aspect of *Shechinta begalusa* is also implicit in the comments of *Chazal* (*Megillah* 29b and *Mechilta* ibid.) that in each period of exile, Hashem is with us.

7. This motif is highlighted by the name "אה-יה אשר אה-יה," which was revealed to Moshe at the *sneh*. Rashi (*Shemos* 3:14) writes that this name conveys that Hashem will be with them during their suffering in Mitzrayim as well as in future exiles.

8. Many Chassidic works and *sifrei machshavah* extend the concept of *nosei b'ol* to showing empathy for the *tza'ar* of the *Shechinah* itself. One who is capable of empathizing with the divine suffering and who infuses his prayers with such a dimension becomes worthy of heavenly grace, which can alleviate one's personal suffering. See, for example, *Degel Machaneh Ephraim*, *Parshas Beshalach*; *Bnei Yissaschar*, Kislev-Teves, 37. This motif can be traced to a *Midrash Tehillim* on the *pasuk*, "יַעַנְךָ ה' בְּיוֹם צָרָה" (*Tehillim* 20:2), cited in *Yalkut Shimoni* 679.

See also *Nefesh HaChaim* 2:11.

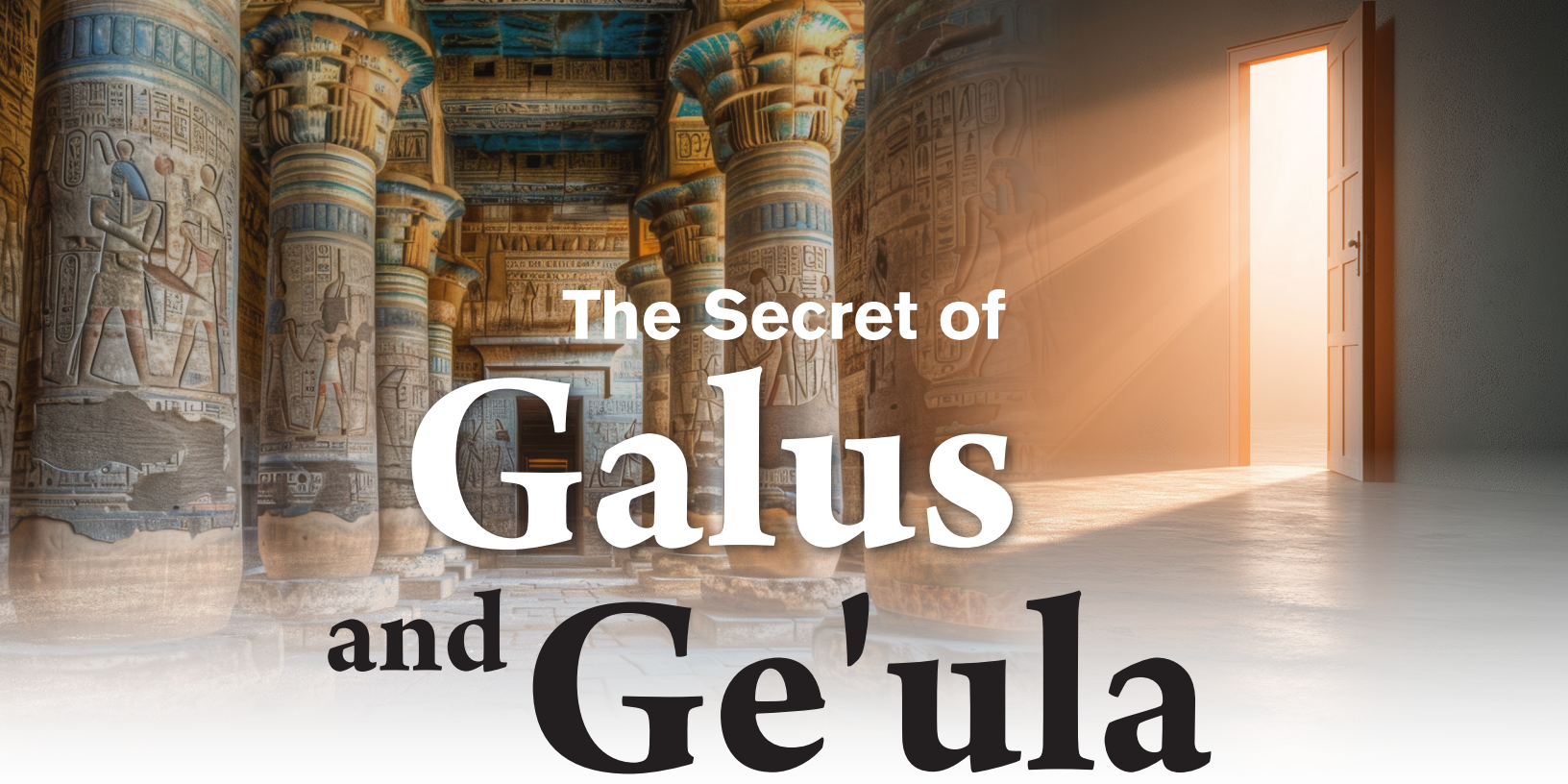
אמנם תכלית הכוונה. צריכה שתהיה רק צורך גבוה. כי במקום שיש חילול שמו ית' כגון צרת כלל ישראל. באמור עם ה' אלה והמה מוכים ומעונים. מחוייבים לבקש ולשפוך שיח לפניו ית"ש על חילול שמו ית'. ואך למען שמו יעשה. וגם היחיד על צערו אף אם אין חילול השם בדבה. יש מקום ג"כ לבקש לפניו יתברך על גודל הצער של מעלה בזמן שהאדם שרוי בצער למטה. כמאמרם ז"ל במשנה פ"ו דסנהדרין אר"מ בזמן שהאדם מצטער שכינה מה הלשון אומרת קלני מראשי קלני מזרועי.

Indeed, the ideal form of kavanah (intention) should be solely for a higher need. For in a place where there is a desecration of His name, blessed be He—such as when the Jewish people are in distress, as it says, "'with the Lord these [trials], and they are stricken and afflicted"—we are obligated to plead and pour out our words before Him, blessed be He, concerning the desecration of His name, blessed be He. And [prayer] should be done only for the sake of His name.

Moreover, even an individual [may pray] concerning his own suffering, even if there is no desecration of the Divine Name in the matter. There is still a place to plead before Him, blessed be He, about the magnitude of the suffering of Above at a time when the person is immersed in suffering below. As Chazal said in the sixth chapter of Sanhedrin: Rabbi Meir said—at the time when a person is in distress, what does the Divine say? "My head is heavy, my arm is heavy" [indicating God's compassion for our suffering].

9. R. Wolbe relates the story of R. Avraham Grodzenski, who, while sitting with his family eating dinner, suddenly stood up and began to dance. When asked by his startled family members to explain his strange behavior, he replied that he realized that at that very moment, he was missing his good friend's wedding. When you are truly happy for your friend, you will break out in dance whether you are physically present at the *simchah* or not.

10. As R. Soloveitchik notes in *Kol Dodi Dofek*, all Jews, no matter their affiliation, share the same fate, and it is our responsibility to let those who are suffering know that we are suffering with them.



The Secret of Galus and Ge'ula

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Moshe's Question

The Midrash on Parshas Va'eira cites a pasuk: "I see that with wisdom comes foolishness, because who is man to question what the king has already decreed and done?" (Koheles 2:12)

The Midrash says this refers to the question of Moshe recorded at the end of Parshas Shemos. Hashem told Moshe that Pharaoh would not let the people go. Hashem added that He would strengthen Pharaoh's heart. Moshe knew his mission would be difficult and that he would not succeed right away. Nonetheless, he was upset after his initial meeting with Pharaoh had worsened the Jews' situation as slaves in Egypt—Pharaoh had made a new decree that the Jews would have to gather their own straw to make bricks.

Upset, Moshe complained to Hashem and posed a challenging question: "Why did You send me?"

The *Shem Mishmuel* notes that the Midrash itself is puzzling. It seems that Hashem was criticizing Moshe for responding inappropriately. But why? After all, when Hashem told Moshe to go to Pharaoh, He had told him only that Pharaoh would not listen. He did not tell Moshe that things would get worse. Now, Bnei Yisrael had no time to rest from the horrible forced labor. Moshe felt guilty that he had caused this. This aspect of Pharaoh's response was not predicted. Why, then, is Moshe criticized for questioning the meaning of his mission?

Additionally, what is God's answer to Moshe. "*Ata sireh asher e'eseh l'Pharaoh*. Now you will see what I will do to Pharaoh?" How does that account for Moshe's complaint?

The Deep Challenge of Continuity

To explain this passage, the *Shem Mishmuel* focuses on a Midrash in Parshas Vayeishev. The Torah says Yaakov sent Yosef "from the valley of Chevron (*emek Chevron*)" to find his brothers. The city of Chevron, however, is on a hill, not in a valley. Why does the Torah say that Yaakov sent Yosef from a valley? Our sage interpret the word "*emek*" as to imply "*eitza amuka*"—the deepest idea of the tzaddik Avraham, who is buried in Chevron.

This mission of Yosef would lead him

to the place where the brothers would sell him, eventually to become a slave in Egypt. This sale initiated a series of events in which the whole family of Yaakov came to settle in Mitzrayim, where they subsequently became enslaved.

The Midrash explains the geographically inaccurate statement of the Torah. Yaakov sent Yosef based on the deep idea (*eitza amuka*) of the tzaddik Avraham Avinu, who is buried in Chevron. Hashem had made a covenant with Avraham many years earlier—the *bris bein habesarim*—wherein Hashem foretold the exile, slavery, and suffering of the Jewish People. This was a deep idea that Avraham Avinu had suggested to Hashem, as we will explain. The question that Avraham and Hashem were considering was that of continuity. This is the fundamental problem of the Jewish People. How do we continue from one generation to the next? Avraham was a great man, as were Yitzchak and Yaakov. But how could they perpetuate this greatness from generation to generation? While individual great people do exist, masses of millions of people are not necessarily great. How do you pass on the greatness of an Avraham or Yitzchak to the whole nation in future generations?

Hashem was going to give Bnei Yisrael tremendous blessings: Eretz Yisrael, Torah, and Olam Haba. They are great and unique gifts that the Jewish People is privileged to have received from Hashem. Think about Eretz Yisrael. So many nations continuously want to take that land. No nation has ever successfully done so. It always remains the exclusive gift of the Jewish People. In our days, after a period of 1900 years, the land has come back to its people. No other nation ever has been exiled from a land and returned: not the Nordic tribes of Netherlands and Germany, nor the old tribes that used to live in the English Isles, nor anyone else. The Jewish People, though, returned to the Holy Land where Hashem's eyes watch from the beginning of the year until the end of the year (Devarim 11:12).

Then we have the gift of Torah, the ultimate gift to the human race. We can know God's plans for running the world and what He expects of human beings. It takes us from the lowest levels of this world to the highest level of heaven. The gift of Olam Haba is when the world will change completely and there will be only good, not evil.

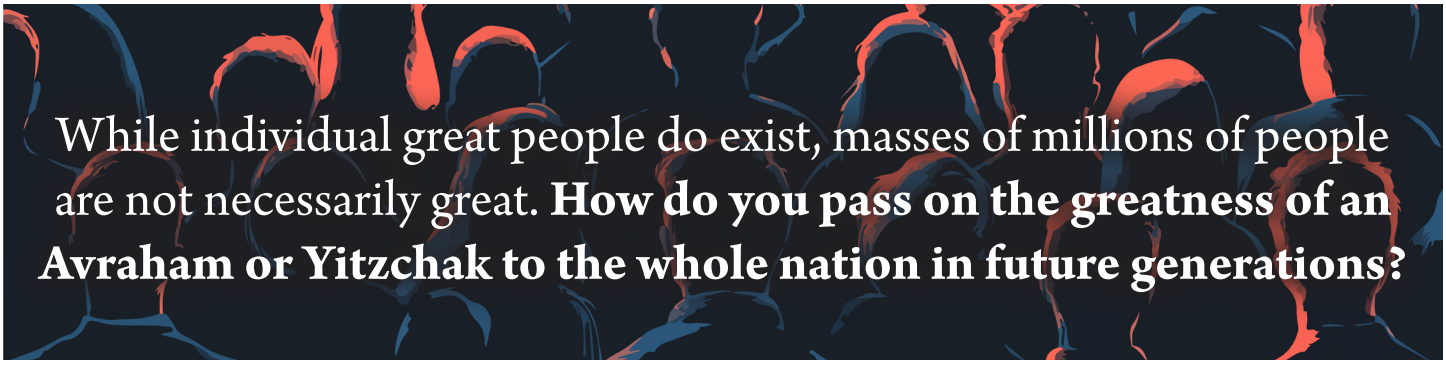
But these gifts must be deserved. Otherwise, the whole world would have them; and these three gifts are unique to the Jewish People. They come with serious requirements and prerequisites. *Yisurim*, suffering, is part of the price to earn these gifts.

How can the avos guarantee that their children will live up to their level? Avraham was having a serious discussion about this. Hashem asked him, "What do you prefer? You can pick *gehinom*, hell, with severe and terrible punishments, so your offspring will be afraid to stray from the tradition. Or you can choose *galus*, exile, a sort of suffering in this world instead of suffering in the next world." Avraham chose *galus*, the sufferings and travails in this world of exile from the Holy Land, to be the guarantor of the righteousness of the Jews instead of the suffering of hell in the next world.

Why did Avraham choose *galus*—subjugation and slavery to other nations—as the basic way to guarantee our continuity as a nation? Why didn't he choose *gehinom*? This is the *eitza amuka*. *Galus* and *ge'ula*, exile and redemption, are the fundamental cycle of our history.

The Depths of Exile

Avraham realized a deep idea. If the Jewish People would have the guarantee of the suffering of hell, they would inevitably stray from the Torah throughout the generations. Sometimes, life is too easy, and people take the blessings of Hashem for granted. Sometimes, people feel the desire to taste foreign waters. It is almost



inevitable that a generation will drift away from the Torah. If they are brought back because of the punishments of *gehinom*, then their failings remain and are not redeemed. If, on the other hand, the people receive the physical punishment of exile in this world, and we are distant from our land, our God, and His blessings, we can be moved to return. Sometimes there are pogroms, poverty, and hunger. The silver lining in the *galus* is that it must result in a *ge'ula*, redemption in this world. When the *ge'ula* comes, it is a redemption of the *galus* itself. As bad as *galus* is, that is how sweet the redemption will be.

We have suffered physically. Moreover, we have been the target of an ideological and philosophical campaign against our religion. Our enemies in this world have made our faith their target. The two religions that came out of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, turned Judaism into a target of their hatred and calumny. They claimed that Hashem abandoned His people and replaced us with another. This is a horrible chilul Hashem. When we come back now to Israel at the end of this exile of Edom and Yishmael, we are actually seeing the first rays of *ge'ula* with the return of millions of Jews to the Holy Land. This *ge'ula* will prove that the Jews were right despite all the troubles suffered throughout the *galus*. The kiddush Hashem of the final *ge'ula* will be directly proportionate to the pain of the *galus*.

The Pain of the Exile Teaches the Lessons of the Redemption

The *Shem Mishmuel* explains that the *galus*-and-*ge'ula* method of Jewish life throughout history is better than hell. Hell has terrible punishments, much worse than what we suffer in this world. But the redemption at the end of the *galus* is a redemption of the *galus* itself. Let's examine the *galus* of Egypt. The worse the exile was, the greater the redemption when it arrived. Indeed, the redemption from Egypt was the defining event of the emergence of the Jewish religion. It established the principal truth of God's intervention in human history, *hashgacha pratis*. God will interfere in human events. He is concerned with good and evil. He wants evil to be punished and good to be redeemed. This lesson was established via the *ge'ula* of Mitzrayim. The worse the *galus*, the greater the redemption and the more significant in terms of our philosophy and beliefs.

The final redemption will be a much greater establishment of God's holiness in the world. After 1900 years of exile, the redemption will be a much greater revelation than ever before. The people will learn about the Torah and about Hashem's interference and involvement in this world. Hashem will eradicate evil and replace it with goodness in every single person's heart, not just in the Jewish People. As we say on Rosh Hashana, "*v'yeida kol pa'ul ki ata f'alto v'yavin kol y'tzur ki atah y'tzarto,*" Every human being will know that Hashem is the creator and shaper of every person, not just the Jewish People. Since the *galus* was so long and bitter, the *ge'ula* in parallel will be a great, universal event.

This was the idea of Avraham—to take the exile for Israel, the bitterness and suffering of Jews throughout the world. This will be a redemption of the very sins that led to the exile. They will become a part of the redemption.

Sins That Drive a Person to Holiness

The Chassidic masters presented a fascinating analysis of teshuva. The Gemara (*Yoma* 86b) says that if a sinner does teshuva out of love, his sins become mitzvos. What does this mean? People can have different motivations for teshuva. A person can repent due to fear of being punished. Or he may repent because he realizes the terrible immoral nature of his sins. He then realizes that the more he sins, the more he must return. The desecration of his character that his sins cause is the impetus for his repentance. In a strange way, his sins drive him towards good. Before sinning, his Judaism was probably boring. He did not feel commitment, and hence he sinned. But those sins caused him to reconsider and redirect his life. The sins caused him to care and to do teshuva. Chazal say that ba'alei teshuva are greater in some ways than tzaddikim. The ba'al teshuva has a passion that some good people lack, one which his sins helped to create within him.

This does not mean that a person should sin and then do teshuva. But if a person did sin and follows it with teshuva, then his sins become mitzvos. A sinner is not condemned. He can repent, which will give him power and energy to serve Hashem. This is something I have seen

year after year. The people who come back after sinning have an amazing fire and appreciation for Torah and mitzvos. People who come from plainer backgrounds often seem bored with their mechanical Jewish lifestyle. They exhibit a blasé attitude towards Judaism. I don't recommend sin; it is, after all, prohibited. We need to come up with other strategies to inspire people. But if someone made the mistake of sinning, he should realize that the sin made great trouble for himself. He can then use that realization to propel himself to heights of avodas Hashem. The sin then becomes a mitzva.

Galus Inevitably Leads and Contributes To a Ge'ula

Galus and *ge'ula* on a national level have a tremendous impact on us. The nature and essence of *galus* is *chilul Hashem*. We are the people of Hashem. If we are suffering in exile, then God is suffering in exile, too. His holy name, which is associated with us, is a target. People can say that God has abandoned us and chosen another people. Nonetheless, God made His choice of His people forever, and He does not change. But the saving grace of the exile is that it must conclude with a *ge'ula*. This was Avraham's suggestion that Hashem accepted. They committed themselves to a pact based on this idea at the *bris bein habesarim*. Hashem said to Avraham, "Your nation will be servants and slaves for 400 years, but afterwards I will take them out with great wealth." This promise of redemption holds true for every *galus* we are in, including the current long exile.

Yosef and his brothers fought with each other and caused the exile in Egypt to begin. When the people finally left Egypt, however, they received the great treasure of the Torah. In Egypt they learned the enthusiasm for the Torah, and when Hashem offered them the Torah at Har Sinai, they excitedly exclaimed, *"na'aseh v'nishma."* The people learned to appreciate the lessons of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov. They learned the lesson of the *galus*. They were comparable to an individual who does a sin but then does teshuva

Galus is indeed a terrible desecration of Hashem's name. But *ge'ula* is a reaffirmation of His relationship with the Jewish People. This brings about a sanctification of God's name, powered by the very questions the *chilul Hashem* of *galus* aroused.

Every *galus* leads towards a *ge'ula*. Being slaves in Egypt brought us to the Torah at Har Sinai. The knowledge of this secret makes it easier for us living in galus. The *Shem Mishmuel* lived around 1910, before the State of Israel, during the bitter years of European exile. He said that the suffering of his *galus* would lead to a greater redemption. The sanctification would be so much greater based on the problems of the difficult *galus*. This idea should give us hope while enduring our own troubles today.

The Weekly Galus and Ge'ula

The six days of the week are a galus of the soul from spirituality. During the six days of the week, we feel profane, alienated, and frustrated. We would want every second of the week to be spiritual, like Olam Haba. We crave sweet and pleasant Godliness. After the sin of Adam and Chava, though, Hashem saw that this was not the right prescription for humanity. People must be alienated and separated from spirituality for six days so that they will appreciate the sweetness of the spirit. The week is a spiritual galus for the soul. We face many difficulties that make us feel distant from Hashem and even, perhaps, from ourselves. This distance, though, helps us value and achieve on Shabbos the closeness that we missed during the week.

The Gemara (*Avoda Zara* 3a) teaches that whoever works on Erev Shabbos will eat on Shabbos. Whoever struggles to prepare food on Friday will eat and enjoy the meals of Shabbos. From a drush perspective, someone who struggles with the alienation and spiritual distance he experiences during the week will experience the connection and strengthening of Shabbos. He will enjoy Shabbos. He will even retroactively enjoy those six weekdays without the Shabbos. The galus itself will turn into a mitzva, into something good, because it makes a kiddush Hashem at the end.

The pasuk states, "*Mikolos mayim rabim adirim adir bamarom Hashem* — From the voice of the raging powerful waters and waves in the ocean is God powerful in heaven" (Tehillim 93:4). The Gemara (*Menachos* 53a) explains that the raging waters refer to the many nations who array themselves against the Jewish People. Egypt was the worst and most powerful of those nations. From these exiles, from these powerful waters, comes Hashem, the Ultimate Power. In the end, the *galus* produces a great sanctification of God's name.

Hashem Wanted Pharaoh to Just Say No

This explains why God willed that Pharaoh not succumb during the last five plagues. Hashem gave Pharaoh unnatural strength so that he would be punished five more times. And even if he had wanted to change, Hashem would not have let him do so. Removing someone's ability to change is an unusual punishment. The *Shem Mishmuel* explains that before Moshe went to speak to Pharaoh, Moshe protested, "I stutter. I am the wrong person to talk to Pharaoh." Hashem said, "Don't worry. I will be in your mouth." Some of the Sages have said that when Moshe opened his mouth, Hashem Himself spoke (*Shemos Rabba* 3). You can imagine that when someone would hear God's voice, he would feel compelled to comply. Even evil Pharaoh would have responded, "Yes, I will listen to my Master and Creator."

But Pharaoh defied Hashem, saying instead, "I will not let them go." This was a crazy perversion. Human beings can make themselves absolutely evil. We have seen Hitler and Stalin. Today, we see the religious jihadist murderers who want to destroy the Jewish People. Their hatred is fanatical and their wickedness is astounding. Pharaoh, Amalek, Hitler, and other scoundrels pervert even God's voice. They convert it into the power to do evil.

Thus, Pharaoh made things even worse after hearing God's voice emanating from Moshes mouth. He decreed that the Jews must gather their own straw. So Hashem said, "If you pervert even My voice to add power to evil, I will take away your power of teshuva. I will take away a fundamental human gift—the power to change." Before God created man, He created teshuva to be available to give man the ability to change. But Pharaoh wouldn't listen even to God Himself. So, Hashem took away his chance to repent and change.

Moshe needed to go to Pharaoh and bring the voice of Hashem to his ears. The *Shem Mishmuel* contends that God would have given Pharaoh 100 plagues, but the Jews were at the breaking point, so He took them out sooner.

How many plagues does a Hitler or Stalin deserve? Ten wasn't enough for Pharaoh. He deserved to lose the power of teshuva so that he could receive a few more plagues.

Why Did You Make Things Worse?!

Moshe challenged Hashem, "Why did You make things worse?" Hashem responded by explaining the promise He made to Avraham. There are many lessons to teach the world. The world needs to know that God is Creator of heaven and earth, that He controls water, earth, animals, and the skies. These lessons were taught via the plagues. People needed to learn of God's control over life and death, and even (in Pharaoh's case) over the human spirit. God is concerned with good and evil and ultimately will cause good to triumph. The sanctification of Hashem's name will thus be that much greater. The darker the *galus*, the greater the *ge'ula*. This was why it had to become worse before it got better.

This was Hashem's answer to Moshe. Today, we still need to get to the ultimate level of kiddush Hashem in order to justify the suffering of the Jewish People over the 1900 long years of our exile. This is why the Midrash criticizes Moshe. Moshe should have recognized this on his own. If God said, "I will strengthen Pharaoh's heart," then Pharaoh's heart would be strengthened, and Pharaoh would make things even worse. Nothing Moshe could say would convince Pharaoh to let the Jewish People go. Moshe, at his great level, should have understood this instead of asking questions.

A profound lesson is hidden in this idea of the *Shem Mishmuel*. As we go through the difficulties of life, the six days of the week, and the sufferings of the exile, we must have hope and feel encouragement that the *ge'ula* will be even greater than the exile. As we have faith in the coming redemption, we should take strength and encouragement during the exile. As we go through the sufferings of the covenant between Hashem and Avraham, the *eitza amukah* of the tzaddik buried in Chevron, we know the great future that is developing. This is the plan for Jewish history until the advent of the redemption, which we eagerly await.

Questions:

1. What was the *eitza amuka*, deep suggestion of Avraham Avinu?
2. How are galus and geula the basic history of the Jewish people?
3. What is the purpose of galus?
4. Explain the six weekdays and Shabbos using the galus and geula idea.
5. How does galus and geula affect tshuva?
6. Why did Hashem take away from Paro the ability to do tshuva?

Exercises:

How does galus affect your life? Does it affect you for better or for worse?

siman tov u'mazal tov
…we are 13!

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READING שפוך חמתך TODAY

RABBI SACKS ON THE PERSISTENCE OF EVIL

Dr. Erica Brown
Director, Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks-Herenstein Center for Values and Leadership

Dr. Shira Weiss
Assistant Director, Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks-Herenstein Center for Values and Leadership

The joy that we so often associate with Passover- the celebration of ancient freedom, the beautiful rituals, and the gathering of family – is clipped at the end of the Seder by the reality check of שְׁפֹךְ חֲמָתְךָ, the request that God pour out wrath upon our oppressors. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, in so many of his books, especially *Future Tense*, noted the progression of hatred for Jews throughout history-- in the Middle Ages when Jews were hated for religion, in the 19th – 20th centuries when Jews were hated for their race, and today for our nation-state, Israel, as antisemitism is commonly disguised as anti-Zionism. "No soul was ever saved by hate," he wrote in *Not in God's Name*, "No truth was ever proved by violence. No redemption was ever brought by holy war. No religion won the admiration of the world by its capacity to inflict suffering on its enemies" (p. 265).

Rabbi Sacks adjured us to fight against hate, especially any forces of enmity fueled by religion. In *To Heal a Fractured World*, Rabbi Sacks writes, "He [God] does not want the people of the covenant to be one that accepts the evils and injustices of the world as the will of God… In Judaism, faith is not acceptance but protest, against the world that is, in the name of the world that is not yet but ought to be" (p. 25-27). Rabbi Sacks contrasts passive optimism to active hope and emphasizes the value of human protest against immorality.

Throughout his works, Rabbi Sacks describes Judaism as God's call to

human responsibility to both the Jewish and the human story; he asks us to heal the wounds of an injured world with justice, compassion, and dignity. Not only do we need to protest and fight against the evil and immorality of our enemies, but we also ask God to subject them to the forces of justice.

And yet, when we recite the paragraph of שְׁפֹךְ חֲמָתְךָ as we open the door for Elijah at the end of the Seder, we string together three different verses joined by their passionate, even violent call, language that would seem to undermine Rabbi Sacks' premise about hate:

שְׁפֹךְ חֲמָתְךָ אֶל־הַגּוֹיִם אֲשֶׁר לֹא יְדָעוּךָ וְעַל־
מַמְלָכוֹת אֲשֶׁר בְּשִׁמְךָ לֹא קָרָאוּ. כִּי אָכַל
אֶת־יַעֲקֹב וְאֶת־נָוֵהוּ הֵשַׁמּוּ. שְׁפָךְ־עֲלֵיהֶם זַעֲמֶךָ
וַחֲרוֹן אַפְּךָ יַשִּׂיגֵם. תִּרְדֹף בְּאַף וְתַשְׁמִידֵם
מִתַּחַת שְׁמֵי ה'.

"Pour your wrath upon the nations that did not know You and upon the kingdoms that did not call upon Your Name! Since they have consumed Jacob and laid waste his habitation (Ps. 79:6-7). Pour out Your fury upon them and the fierceness of Your anger shall reach them (Ps. 69:25)! You shall pursue them with anger and eradicate them from under the skies of the Lord (Lam. 3:66)."

With the fierceness and brevity of only 32 Hebrew words, we come to the end of the Seder with little room for ambiguity, compassion, or hesitation.

Rabbi Sacks explains that these three biblical verses were added to the Haggadah during the Middle Ages, at one of the darkest periods of anti-Jewish persecution in the Diaspora. It began with the First Crusade in 1096 and the massacre of Jewish communities in Worms, Speyer, and Mainz, which led to centuries of persecution, culminating, in the Holocaust.

In the *Rabbi Jonathan Sacks's Haggadah* on this section of the Seder, he writes, "For centuries, Jews suffered a series of devastating blows - massacres, pogroms, forced conversions, inquisitions, confinement to ghettos, punitive taxation and expulsions, culminating, in the very heart of 'enlightened' Europe in the Holocaust. Yet these verses, two from Psalms, one from the Book of Lamentations, are almost the only trace left by this experience on the Haggadah, the night when we recall our past…"

Rabbi Sacks writes unambiguously that vengeance is antithetical to Jewish tradition: "Judaism is a religion of justice. It is also a religion of love, compassion, forgiveness, generosity and peace. But from the beginning it has wrestled with the question of how to bring the Divine presence down to earth, in the structures and institutions of society. The necessary precondition is justice. Once that exists, there is room for the many other virtues that humanise our world. But without justice, something fundamental is missing. 'Pour out Your wrath' is not a call for vengeance. It is not a call to human action at all. It is, rather, a prayer for Divine justice" (p. 68).

Rabbi Sacks suggests that we read these verses from a place of emotion rather than cognition. They emerge as a cry of pain coming to us from one of the darkest nights of the Jewish soul, as if to say: "Let us understand, one day if not now, the justice of Your world, Judge of all the earth."

We are still trying to understand the justice of God's world, especially in the shadow of Oct. 7 and the intense scourge of antisemitism worldwide. Where some modern, creative Haggadot have changed the language from "Pour out Your hate" to "Pour out Your love," the traditional Haggadah makes space for some of the most difficult, even contradictory feelings that surface when we think back on that night and its miracles. We remember – indeed are commanded to remember and relive – all the pain that necessitated those miracles.

We do not read שְׁפֹךְ חֲמָתְךָ at the beginning of the Seder; its sharpness should not cloud our entire holiday experience. We make room for the joy, the celebration, and the meal. Only then do we ready ourselves for some of the night's more complex feelings. We invite Elijah, a complicated, zealous, and towering prophet, into our homes to usher in the work we must do when the Seder is finished. The work of redemption that began that night continues.

"Memories of Elijah and the seder can be bittersweet, recalling the annual disappointment of not finding him at the door," writes Sacks Book Prize winner Daniel Matt in *Becoming Elijah*. Matt shares a Hasidic tale that the disciples of the Kotzker Rebbe complained year after year that Elijah never shows up. He promised them that Elijah would come. Expectantly they waited. They opened the door. "Crushed, they turned to their Rebbe, whose face was beaming. Seeing their distress, he asked, 'What's troubling you?' They told him. 'Fools!' he thundered. 'Do you think Elijah the prophet enters through the door? He enters through the heart'" (p. 133-4).

We make a small space for anger at the end of the Seder so that we can name it for what it is and beseech God to bring divine justice with an outstretched arm, the kind that is out of human bounds. And then, as we finish the Seder, we are poised and ready to continue the work of redemption that God lovingly puts in our hands.

Halachic Insight into the Maggid Section from Rav Soloveitchik:

Excerpted from Batei Yosef

Ha Lachma Anya

The passage "Ha lachma anya" doesn't appear in either the Mishna or the Gemara, but it can be found in the Haggadah of *Seder Rav Amram Gaon*, as well as in the Rambam's nusach of the Haggadah at the end of *Hilchos Chametz U'Matzah*. Why do we recite this passage?

Rav Soloveitchik explained that matzah actually embodies two distinct ideas. First, matzah is called "*lechem oni*" in a pasuk in Parashas Re'eh (Devarim 16:3). Rashi explains there (s.v. *lechem oni*) that this refers to bread that reminds us of the suffering we endured in Mitzrayim; according to several meforshim, this was the type of bread they actually ate there. This interpretation comes from the *Sifrei* (piska 130 s.v. *lechem oni*).

The Gemara in *Pesachim* (115b) offers another derasha on this expression: that matzah is *lechem she'onin alav devarim harbeh*, bread upon which many ideas are recited. This derasha also appears earlier in the Masechta (36b), and Rashi there explains (s.v. *she'onin*) that we complete Hallel over it and recite the Haggadah over it. The Rema rules (OC 473:7) that the matzah must remain uncovered during the recitation of the Haggadah. The Bei'ur HaGra notes (s.v. *veyihiyeh hapas*) that Rema's ruling derives from this derasha, suggesting that reciting the Haggadah over matzah is part of the mitzvah of matzah. If we accept that all the derashos derived from "*lechem oni*" are complementary, it makes sense that when beginning the Haggadah—which is recited over the matzah—we should first say Ha lachma anya to clarify exactly what the matzah represents: namely, that it comes to remind us of the poverty in Mitzrayim. [The *Bach* makes this point. (473 s.v. *u'mah shekasav umachzir hake'arah*).]

However, there's another idea relevant to matzah. The Rambam, in his nusach of the Haggadah, writes that before Ha lachma anya one should say "*bevehilu yatzanu MiMitzrayim,*" we left Mitzrayim in haste. Why did he add this expression and how does it connect to Ha lachma anya? Rav Soloveitchik explained that while matzah reminds us of the slavery—as we mentioned earlier—it simultaneously reminds us of the geulah. The Mishna in *Pesachim* (116b) brings Rabban Gamliel's statement that matzah is *al shem shenigalu avoseinu MiMitzrayim*, because our forefathers were redeemed from Egypt. Thus, matzah serves as both a remembrance of the slavery and of the geulah.

Batei Yosef (Hebrew) is a collection of insights into the laws and customs of the holidays through the rulings of The Rav as well as those of current Roshei Yeshiva at RIETS.
Batei Yosef is available at RIETSPress.org.

The Ramban writes explicitly in his commentary on the Torah (Devarim 16:3 s.v. *ubier be'kan*) that matzah helps us remember two things: first, that we were redeemed and we left Mitzrayim in haste; and second, that we ate poor man's bread in Mitzrayim. He mentions the passage of Ha lachma anya in this context.

Rav Soloveitchik pointed out that the word *b'chipazon*—which is used by the Torah to describe how we left in haste (Devarim 16:3)—is translated in Targum Onkelos as *bevehilu*. Therefore, when the Rambam opens the passage of Ha lachma anya with *bevehilu yatzanu MiMitzrayim*, he's emphasizing that we left Mitzrayim in haste. This should be mentioned together with the fact that we ate *lechem oni* in Mitzrayim (which is the first line of our version of Ha lachma anya), because in this way, before we begin the Haggadah (which must be recited over the matzah), we're acknowledging both of the ideas that matzah represents—the affliction and the geulah.

Mah Nishtana

In the Mishna in *Pesachim* (116a), it states that the son asks his father the questions of the Mah Nishtanah. If the son lacks understanding, his father teaches him. The Gemara there explains further: if the son is wise, he asks; if he is not wise, his wife asks him; if not, he asks himself. Even two *talmidei chachamim* who know the halachos of Pesach ask each other Mah Nishtanah.

The Rambam codifies this in *Hilchos Chametz U'Matzah* (8:2), stating that they pour the second cup and here the son asks. The *Shulchan Aruch* (473:7) says the same.

From this, it appears that only one person needs to ask the questions—the son, the wife, or the *baal habayis* when he's alone. The other participants don't need to ask. The Rema makes this point explicitly: When the son or wife asks, the *baal habayis* doesn't need to say Mah Nishtanah. Rather, he begins immediately with "Avadim Hayinu.

However, the Rambam there wrote explicitly that "the reader says" (*omer hakorei*) Mah Nishtanah, and it appears that his view is that the son doesn't say Mah Nishtanah, but rather, we make certain changes on the night of the Seder to elicit questions from the children, and after we pour the second cup, the children ask whatever questions they have about the Seder. There is no requirement for the son to specifically ask the questions of the Mah Nishtanah. In other words, there are two separate issues: the son's question and the recitation of Mah Nishtanah, and they're not the same thing. Therefore, first the son asks whatever he wants to ask, but he doesn't specifically say the text of Mah Nishtanah. Only afterward, the reader, who recites the Haggadah aloud, is the one who specifically asks those questions of Mah Nishtanah brought in the Mishna. Therefore, it makes sense that today, when there isn't just one person reading the Haggadah, and everyone reads it themselves, that each participant should say Mah Nishtanah. Rav Soloveitchik said that this was indeed the practice in his grandfather's home (Rav Chaim Soloveitchik), that each of the participants said Mah Nishtanah.

What emerges from this is that there are really two distinct halachos. The first halacha is that the child needs to ask what puzzles him. This apparently derives from the pasuk "*vehaya ki yishalcha bincha,*" and it will be when your child shall ask (Shemos 13:14). This teaches that every child needs to ask according to his unique understanding and style (this is the source for the concept of the four sons in the Haggadah).

The second halacha is that there is a detailed text of the Haggadah that includes specific questions, namely, what we know as the Mah Nishtana. In explaining this second halacha, Rav Soloveitchik suggested that *vehigadeta livincha*, which is the source for the mitzvah of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim*, implies that *sippur* must be specifically in a question-and-answer format (according to the plain meaning of the pasuk there). Therefore, the Rambam wrote that the "reader" of the Haggadah, who reads to all participants and fulfills the mitzvah of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim* on behalf of all the participants, needs to read the detailed text of Mah Nishtanah so that *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim* will be in a question-and-answer format.

Rav Soloveitchik proved this idea from the text of our Haggadah. In the Mishna in *Pesachim* (116a-116b), we learn Rabban Gamliel's halacha that one must recite pesach, matzah and maror and the reason we eat each one. Our Haggadah has an additional phrase before each one (this phrase doesn't appear in the Mishna): *al shum mah,* Why do we eat this? We recite this passage differently from how it appears in the Mishna, and the reason is that the mitzvah of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim* must be fulfilled specifically in a question-and-answer format. This isn't only because the son asks, for even two *talmidei chachamim* who know the halachos of Pesach ask each other. Therefore, it's clear that *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim* itself must be fulfilled through question and answer whether the son asks or doesn't ask.

Rav Soloveitchik offered a deeper analysis of the Rambam's language. As we noted earlier, the Rambam wrote "*hakorei omer,*" that the reader "says"

Mah Nishtanah rather than "asks" it. This proves that Mah Nishtanah isn't actually a question expressing difficulty or confusion, but rather an expression of wonder and amazement. We're inviting everyone to marvel at what is happening at the Seder, similar to the language used in pesukim like "*mah nora ma'asecha,*" how awesome are Your ways (Tehillim 66:3) and "*mah rabu ma'asecha,*" how great are Your ways (Tehillim 104:24)—expressions of amazement at Hashem's greatness. The same holds true for Mah Nishtanah: it's a language of wonder.

The *Aruch HaShulchan* (473:51) makes this same point, adding the pasuk "*Mah tovu ohalecha Yaakov,*" How great are the tents of Jacob (Bamidbar 24:5) as another example. He explains that here in Mah Nishtanah, the amazement focuses specifically on the night's remarkable changes.

Based on this, Rav Soloveitchik suggested that when the Haggadah reader recites Mah Nishtanah, it serves a dual purpose. Yes, it's part of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim* that must unfold through question and answer, as we discussed earlier. But there's more: the son asks his questions first, as the Rambam wrote, "*v'kan haben shoel,*" and the recitation of Mah Nishtanah actually functions as the father's initial response. The son asks about the changes he observes, and the father answers:

"Yes, there are indeed several striking changes tonight"—and then he details the four specific changes mentioned in Mah Nishtanah. This serves as an introduction and opening to the mitzvah of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim*, which formally begins with "*Avadim Hayinu*."

Lifting the Matzah and Maror

The Gemara in *Pesachim* (116b) states that one must lift up the matzah and the maror. Rashi explains (s.v. *tzarich lehagbiah*) that this means lifting the matzah while reciting "*Matzah zu she'ano ochlin* ... — This matzah that we eat." The Rashbam writes similarly (s.v. *tzarich lehagbiah*), adding that this practice is also found in the responsa of the Geonim. He notes that the same applies to the maror—one must lift it when saying "*Maror zeh she'ano ochlin*"—this maror that we eat—and explains that this is done to display the matzah and maror to everyone at the table, helping them connect with and appreciate the mitzvah. The Rambam rules accordingly in *Hilchos Chametz U'Matzah* (8:4), that one lifts the maror and the matzah.

The Gemara doesn't clarify who must lift the matzah, whether each person at the table or only the leader of the Seder who is reading the Haggadah. According to the Rashbam, since the entire purpose of lifting the matzah and maror is to show them to those at the table, it's clear that only the leader of the Seder needs to do this, since he is the one showing these foods to the other participants.

However, Rav Soloveitchik reported that in his father's home (Rav Moshe), all those at the table, even the children, should lift the matzah when saying "*matzah zu*," and the maror when saying "*maror zeh*." Rav Soloveitchik explained that the source for this practice is from the Gemara there, which implies that whoever recites the text of the Haggadah must lift the matzah and maror, not just the leader of the Seder. Therefore, today, when typically all those at the table recite the Haggadah together, it's proper that each person at the table should also lift the matzah and maror. Rav Soloveitchik himself continued this practice at his own Seder.

Uncovering the Matzah for Hallel

We mentioned earlier the ruling of the Rema, that one should leave the matzahs uncovered during the recitation of the Haggadah. We noted the comment of the Gra that this ruling is based on the derasha of the Gemara in *Pesachim* 36a: that matzah is called *lechem oni* because it is bread over which many things are recited; Rashi writes that this means one completes the Hallel over it and recites the Haggadah over it.

The Rema adds that even though the matzah must remain uncovered when reciting the Haggadah, we cover the bread when we reach the paragraph of "*Lefichach*." At that point, we hold the cup in our hand—as the *Tur* (OC 473) writes—because it is appropriate to recite *shira* over wine (as stated in the Gemara, *Berachos* 35a). Since this paragraph introduces the recitation of *shira* (namely, the first two chapters of Hallel), we raise the cup, and the bread must be covered at that moment. The *Magen Avraham* (473:30) explains that this is *shelo yirah hapas boshto*—so that the bread should not see its shame—when one holds the cup in his hand. This concept appears in *Shulchan Aruch* (OC 271:9), where we learn that when we recite Kiddush over wine, a cloth is spread over the bread. The *Tur* and the *Taz* (12) quote from the Yerushalmi—which is not extant in our version—that the reason for this is so the bread should not "see its shame" regarding the order of berachos. Generally, one should recite HaMotzi before Borei Pri HaGafen, but here we do the opposite. Therefore, we cover the bread so it doesn't "see its shame" when Borei Pri HaGafen precedes HaMotzi.

The same idea applies at the Seder. When we lift the cup, it eventually leads to the next Borei Pri HaGafen, which is recited before eating the matzah. Therefore, we cover the matzah once the cup is lifted.

Rav Soloveitchik noted that covering the matzah presents a problem. As we cited from Rashi, Hallel too must be recited over the matzah. If so, why should we be concerned about the shame of the bread? After all, we must recite Hallel over the matzah as well, and certainly it is proper that the matzah should be uncovered when we recite Hallel.Therefore, Rav Soloveitchik proposed that when the Rema here rules that one should cover the bread, his intention is that the matzahs should be covered only and exclusively when reciting the paragraph of "Lefichach," but when one begins to recite Hallel afterward, one must immediately uncover the matzahs again so that Hallel, too, will be recited over the matzah, even while still holding the cup (Rav Soloveitchik felt that the cup should be held from the recitation of "Lefichach through the conclusion of Hallel and the beracha of "Asher Ge'alanu"). Although at that time there is shame to the bread (since we are not yet reciting a blessing over it and we are reciting a blessing over the wine), nevertheless, since the halacha requires that we recite Hallel with "*lechem oni*" before us, we are not concerned about the shame of the bread.

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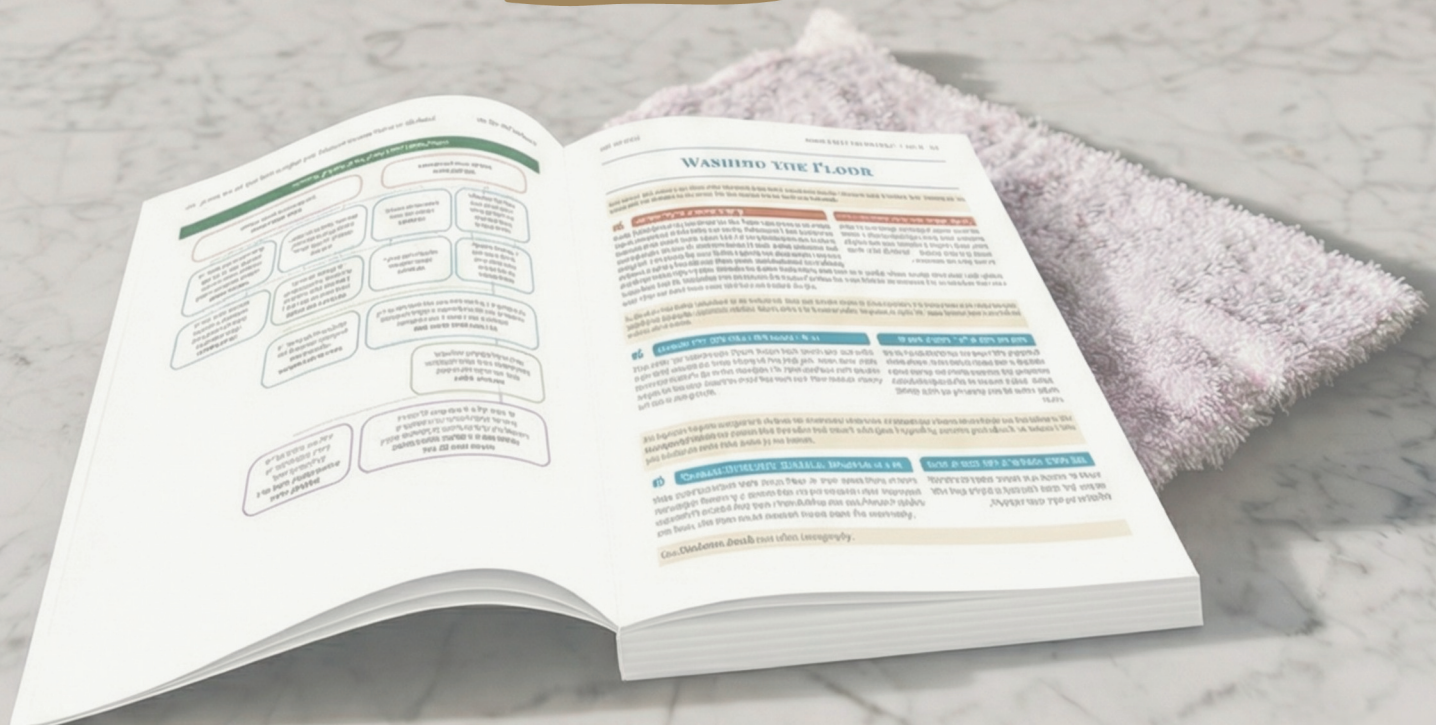

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From *Lachatz* to *Lifnim*

Pressure and Inwardness in the Haggadah

Dr. Danielle Bloom
Judaic Studies Faculty, SCW

The Haggadah famously glosses the biblical phrase "and they oppressed us" (ולחצנו) with the terse explanation: זו הדחק—this was pressure.[1] The choice is striking. Scripture could have emphasized slavery (עבדות), forced labor, or physical brutality. Instead, the Haggadah directs our attention to *lachatz*, a term that denotes not only coercion but compression. Egypt is remembered as a condition of pressure.

Why pressure? Rav Dov Singer[2] suggests reading *lachatz* (לַחַץ) in its most literal, spatial sense: not only as "pressure," but as a condition of being *lachutz* (לָחוּץ)—forced outward, pushed away from *lifnim* (לִפְנִים), the interior space of the self. Pressure, in this sense, is not merely an external burden; it is a movement that expels the human being from inwardness, leaving no protected domain for reflection, choice, or moral agency. Egyptian oppression, then, was not only a political or economic regime, but an assault on interiority itself. The slave is *lachutz*: driven outward into a world of urgency and constant demand, where nothing belongs to the self. This is why the Haggadah does not describe Egypt simply as *avdut*—slavery—but as *dechak* (דְּחַק): a reality with no inner space, no breathing room, no *lifnim* in which a person can exist as a moral subject.

This understanding resonates with Rav Joseph B. Soloveitchik's account of human dignity. In *The Lonely Man of Faith*,[3] Rav Soloveitchik insists that man is not defined solely by action and productivity, but by his capacity for inward experience and responsibility. A system of *lachatz* denies precisely this capacity. Pharaoh does not merely demand labor; he seeks to collapse the human being, erasing the self.

This dynamic is already anticipated in Pharaoh's own formulation of oppression. When he commands that the Israelites' labor be intensified, he explains his aim: *"Let the work be heavier upon the men, and let them engage in it, so that they will not pay attention to false words"* (וְאַל־יִשְׁעוּ בְּדִבְרֵי־שָׁקֶר,

Exod. 5:9). On its surface, Pharaoh dismisses the Israelites' hope of freedom as delusion. Yet *Shemot Rabbah* (5:18) offers a strikingly different reading, linking *yishu* to *sha'ashu'a*—play or delight. The midrash describes the Israelites as possessing scrolls containing a received tradition of future redemption, which they would pass among themselves and "play with" as a source of solace and hope. Pharaoh's escalation of labor thus emerges as a deliberate attempt to eradicate this inner dialogue—to leave no psychic space for memory or anticipation. What Pharaoh derides as "false words" are, in fact, the fragile practices of inwardness through which meaning is preserved under oppression. In Rav Soloveitchik's terms, this is an assault on the self: the effort to collapse the human being entirely into external action, stripping away the interior domain in which responsibility and redemption first take shape.

Here Viktor Frankl's insight becomes indispensable. Reflecting on life under totalitarian oppression, Frankl famously wrote that "everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms—to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances."[4] Egypt, in the language of the Haggadah, represents the attempt to take even that last freedom: to so dominate the external world that no interior domain remains.

The Seder becomes the annual restoration of the inner life Egypt sought to crush. We slow time, ask questions, tell stories and recline, reentering the space of *lifnim* in which freedom is first imagined. The Exodus is thus not only the story of a people who left Egypt, but of a people whose inner life God preserved when they themselves could no longer sustain it. Long before chains are broken, redemption begins when God reveals Himself in history, refusing to allow *lachatz* to have the final word.

Endnotes

1. The Passover Haggadah, Maggid section, commentary on Deuteronomy 26:7: "וַיַּרְא אֶת־עָנְיֵנוּ וְאֶת־עֲמָלֵנוּ וְאֶת־לַחֲצֵנוּ – זוֹ הַדְּחָק."

2. Rav Dov Singer, teachings on *lachatz* and *lifnim* in lectures and educational writings associated with Yeshivat Makor Chaim. Cited here as an interpretive and existential reading rather than a formal philological claim.

3. Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *The Lonely Man of Faith* (New York: Doubleday, 1965), esp. 8–10.

4. Viktor E. Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*, trans. Ilse Lasch (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006), 65.

A Snapshot in Time

בְּכָל־דּוֹר וָדוֹר חַיָּב אָדָם לִרְאוֹת אֶת־עַצְמוֹ כְּאִלּוּ הוּא יָצָא מִמִּצְרַיִם.

In every generation, we must see ourselves as if we left Egypt.

Shira Jackson
United Synagogue Educator, UK

The Seder is not a memorial; it is an immersive reenactment. We are meant to step into the story and recognise that Pesach is not a onetime event, but a recurring experience. So let us travel back 3,338 years, engage our imagination, and take our seats at the very first Seder.

It is the final night in Egypt as we enter the home of Family Levi. Sitting at the table are Aharon, Elisheva and their four sons. Miriam sits with Calev and Chur. Moshe Rabbeinu sits slightly apart with Tzipporah, Gershom and Eliezer.[1] At the head of the table sits Yocheved, the matriarch of this extraordinary family.

As the magnitude of the moment settles upon her, Yocheved lets out a sob. The room falls silent. She gathers herself and speaks.

"I was born the moment my grandfather Yaakov crossed into Egypt.[2] One of my earliest memories is sitting on his lap, as he told my father Levi about the promise—that we would one day leave this land. I asked him, 'Saba, how can you be sure?' He answered, 'Yocheved … my grandfather Avraham told me. And now I am telling you.' He whispered, 'You will live to see miracles I can only imagine.' And now, at 210 years old, I see he was right. בָּרוּךְ שׁוֹמֵר הַבְטָחָתוֹ לְיִשְׂרָאֵל—Hashem keeps His promises. I only wish I could capture this moment so my descendants could feel what I feel now, and know that sometimes, with hindsight, you can see there *was* a plan all along."

Moshe clears his throat. "Ima, if I may—that is what matzah is. A snapshot in time. Bread grows stale, but matzah tastes the same a year later. Every crunch will evoke memories of Seders from the past, especially of this night — the last night of slavery,

the first night of freedom. It is like a 'photograph' of *geula*."

He looks around the table. "Aharon, you welcomed me back with love. Miriam, your courage ensured I survived. Ima, the memory of your voice sustained me in Paroh's palace. Outside, I hear the cries of Egypt—the sound of our enemy's downfall. This night will be remembered forever. Children … והגדת לבנך."

Moshe continues…
"For centuries to come, our descendants round the world will gather for Seder night—in shtetls and ghettos; in DP camps and Soviet basements. They will bring with them stories of courage and survival, stories that echo ours. Families who fled the Inquisition, the Cossacks, the Nazis; those who fought Hamas and Hezbollah—will recline at their tables, eating the same matzah we are eating tonight, telling the same story, tasting the same promise."

בְּכָל דּוֹר וָדוֹר עוֹמְדִים עָלֵינוּ לְכַלּוֹתֵנוּ, וְהַקָּדוֹשׁ בָּרוּךְ הוּא מַצִּילֵנוּ מִיָּדָם.
In every generation, they stand over us to destroy us and The Holy One Blessed be He saves us from their hand.

"They will know—as we know—that they are part of a plan. That they are never alone. בָּרוּךְ שׁוֹמֵר הַבְטָחָתוֹ לְיִשְׂרָאֵל"

The promise we reference in the Haggadah is difficult. Hashem told Avraham that his descendants would become a great nation, but only after centuries of slavery in a foreign land.[3] Why thank Hashem for fulfilling something so painful? And why is it remarkable that "God keeps His promises"; surely that's expected?

Rabbi Baruch Epstein[4] explains that only God can keep a promise exactly as intended. Human promises depend on luck and circumstance; Divine promises unfold precisely. The challenge for us is that *we* don't know the plan. How long will it take? Why is suffering part of the journey?

So, what are we grateful for? Perhaps for those moments that allow us a glimpse of the plan.

On Erev Pesach 2024, as Israel faced a barrage of missiles, many feared catastrophe. Instead, that night marked the beginning of our enemies' downfall; Haniyeh, Sinwar and Nasrallah had no idea of the miracles we'd soon see—and neither did we. This year, finally, there will be no empty seats for hostages at our Sedarim.

Yocheved longed for us, her descendants, to experience that moment of *geula*; perhaps we are living through moments our ancestors could only dream of.

At the time of writing, watching events unfold, I pray we are witnessing the Iranian people on the brink of freedom and the dawn of a new era of shalom. IY"H, by the time you read this, I hope we'll be sitting down to Seder *b'Yerushalayim habenuyah*.

Endnotes

1. As we read at the beginning of Parshas Yisro, Moshe's wife and sons were not in Mitzraim, and would not have been present at this meal; but they certainly are there in my imagination!

2. Rashi on Bereishis 46:26.

3. Bereishis 15:13-14.

4. Author of the *Torah Temima*, and son of the Aruch HaShulchan. He suggests this answer in his work *Baruch She-Amar* on the Haggadah.

Navigating Hard Conversations at the Seder

Rabbi Michael Laitner

Director of Education at the United Synagogue (UK), and Interim Rabbi at Belmont United Synagogue

One of my early memories as a child at our *sedarim*, which some readers might share, was of the wide variety of people who attended, including some who professed not just a lack of interest but open disdain for the Seder and its mitzvot—yet were, of course, still happy to join and eat the food.

It was common for them to attempt to divert the discussion to solely contemporary topics, some of which were very far removed from *sipur yetziat Mitzrayim* to say the least. Navigating this required deft diplomacy from my parents to make sure the Seder was conducted properly whilst also ensuring that our guests felt welcome.

Given, though, that the Torah needs to be applied and understood in every generation, it is important to consider how unreasonable our "unreasonable" guests actually might have been.[1]

Their challenge, of how might we remain faithful to the mitzvah of *sipur yetziat Mitzrayim* and the relevance of the Torah in our time, whilst also welcoming those who seek to broaden the discussion during the *leil HaSeder,* is one we must address.

An answer may lay in one of the most well-known expressions which the Torah uses many times to direct our reaction to *yetziat Mitzrayim, ki gerim heyitem be'eretz Mitzrayim,* often explained colloquially as, "because we were slaves in Egypt" but more accurately explained in this context as "because we were foreigners in Egypt."

Even though this phrase does not directly appear in the Haggadah, perhaps because of the specific focus of the Haggadah on *sipur yetziat Mitzrayim,* it is present in the background and provides a framework to address our challenge.

During Maggid, after *Tzei ulmad,* one of the *pesukim* we explain is Shemot 3:10, which ends by God telling Moshe that He has seen the *lachatz,* the pressure, which the Egyptians inflicted on Bnei Yisrael. Both Ramban and Seforno explain that the even though Bnei Yisrael were destined to slavery in Egypt, their taskmasters' cruel behaviour overstepped even those boundaries and created such pressure that God 'saw' it. Immediately after this, the Torah describes God's command to Moshe to go and bring Bnei Yisrael out of Egypt.

Later in Shemot (22:20), Ramban observes when the Torah states the prohibition on mistreating a *ger—veger lo toneh velo tilchatzenu, ki gerim heyitem be'eretz mitzrayim*—the first reference to our phrase, the word *lachatz* is used again prior to God stating that He particularly listens to those who are mistreated.

According to Ramban, the juxtaposition of *lo tilchatzenu* with *ki geirim* instructs us to be aware of people who suffer in a foreign land and feel no hope of respite from their oppression, just as we felt no hope in Egypt. God heard and saw our pain and redeemed us. He will also listen to the cries of others who are oppressed. The Torah, explains Ramban, therefore enjoins us not to create such situations and warns of the consequences otherwise.

Ramban's position helps us learn about *yetziat mitzrayim* at the Seder and its ongoing impact through the lessons learned from the oft-used phrase, *ki geirim…*

It provides, we may suggest, a framework for how to navigate the challenge of being faithful to *sipur yetziat Mitrayim* at the Seder whilst also allowing space for broader application of its lessons to our times, including contemporary conversations, even those hard conversations which might not be entirely comfortable.

Of equal significance, it can also help different kinds of Jews sit together and tell our story around the Seder table year after year, to focus more on what unites and inspires them from the *leil HaSeder* and its mitzvot, rather than that which might divide them.

Endnotes

1. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, in the prologue to *Arguments for the Sake of Heaven* (1989, originally pubished as *Traditional Alternatives*), set out an imaginary, but entirely familiar, Anglo-Jewish family around the Seder table in the late 1980s, whose children were based on the *arba'ah banim,* as an introduction for the themes of that book. For example, one of these fictitious figures, Richard, a student at Oxford University who attends the family Seder under sufferance, argues that the Palestinians are contemporary equivalent of Bnei Yisrael in Egypt.

Chad Gadya:

A Final Lesson in Achdus

Rabbi Etan Schnall
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Rabbi, Young Israel of Hillcrest

The Seder night is a carefully choreographed and detailed demonstration of the story of the Jewish people. The fulfillment of the mitzva of *sippur yetzias Mitzraim* is carefully formulated in a particular legal framework, primarily through midrash expounding on pesukim describing the Exodus from Egypt. For generations, the inclusion of Chad Gadya at the Seder has remained a mysterious addition whereas the song or parable appears incongruent with the strict construction and purpose of the Haggada.

Our Haggada explains the events of *yetzias Mitzraim* in detail—including matters that preceded the Exodus, as well as the magnificent outcome that was formative for our people. We follow the retelling with Hallel to praise Hashem and recognize that ultimately He is the source of our salvation.

Against this backdrop, Rav Yehuda Kelemer zt"l[1] explains the relevance of Chad Gadya. The song depicts how in our world, one creature or force overpowers another that is smaller. The weaker cannot resist the stronger, and even the most powerful man cannot defend himself against the Malach HaMaves.

However, even human mortality, an expression of the dominance of nature, is nothing in the face of Hashem's great power. Nothing in the universe exists beyond His control, and it is He alone who directs history. In essence, this is the theme of the Haggada and Hallel, and it is a theme demonstrated through Hakadosh Barch Hu's nature-defying miracles of *yetzias Mitzraim*. It is a fitting elaboration of Hashem's singular existence, "One is Hashem," and so it appears in the Haggada most appropriately on the heels of the preceding song, Echad Mi Yodeah ("Who Knows One?").

Rav Kelemer suggests an added dimension. We will notice that in each successive stage of Chad Gadya, the

defeated force acts alone, and cannot prevail against a stronger nemesis. Perhaps, if the goat, cat or dog had collaborated with others, they could have overcome. Only Hashem can act alone and reign supreme.[2] Thus, Chad Gadya likewise amplifies the theme of Echad Mi Yodeah.

Indeed, this insight accentuates an underlying theme of the Seder night. Herein we find a crucial lesson for the Jewish people: our physical security and success depend on *achdus*. We must work together as a community to thrive and survive as Klal Yisroel. Moreover, to preserve the spirituality and *yiras Shamayim* of our people, we must partner with others and work together to combat the challenges of the *yetzer hara* in every generation. From its inception at *yetzias Mitzraim*, the Seder has centered on the gathering of a "*chabura*," family and friends whose unified aspirations and collaboration are the building blocks of the eternal Jewish covenant of *achdus*.[3]

See more shiurim and articles from Rabbi Schnall at www.yutorah.org/teachers/Rabbi-Etan-Schnall

Endnotes

1 *Sefer Torascha Shashuai*, pg. 317.

2 See *Pirkei Avos* (4:8).

3 See Rav Soloveitchik's exposition in *Festival of Freedom*, pg. 18.

The Hidden Demands of Sacred Time

Rabbi Aryeh Federgrun
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The experience of Shabbos as *oneg Shabbos* and Yom Tov as *simchas Yom Tov* evokes an image of religious life at its most serene. Ideally, the highlight of the week and the sacred rhythm of the *yamim tovim* should provide moments of tranquility, joy, and spiritual clarity. Yet life rarely unfolds in its ideal form. What happens when the experience is not so serene, such as when national upheaval or personal struggle intrudes upon these sacred moments?

For some, Pesach means leaving home entirely: a vacation at a resort or Pesach hotel. For others, it means remaining within the familiar comfort of their own home. Yet neither of these experiences fully captures the historic model of Pesach and the other regalim: *aliyah l'regel,* the journey to the Beis Hamikdash. That journey required effort and sacrifice. Families would leave their homes, sometimes leaving certain members behind, traveling long distances to Yerushalayim and soon afterward beginning the demanding return trip.

It is precisely this experience that the pasuk in *Shir Hashirim* (7:2) captures with an intriguing phrase:

מה יפו פעמיך בנעלים בת נדיב.

How beautiful are your feet in sandals, daughter of nobles.

Within the poetic depiction of the beauty of Klal Yisrael, the focus begins in an unexpected place: their feet, clad in sandals. Why praise something so seemingly mundane?

The Medrash (*Shir HaShirim Rabbah* 7:2) raises this very question:

אמר רבי יודן אפילו הדיוט מקלס בלשון זה גנאי הוא לו! ואת אומר: מה יפו פעמיך?

Rabbi Yudan observes that even an ordinary person would not praise someone by focusing on such a lowly part of the body. Why, then, does Hashem choose this language to praise Klal Yisrael?

The Gemara, *Chagiga* 3a, reveals the deeper meaning behind the imagery:

דָּרֵשׁ רָבָא, מַאי דִּכְתִיב: ״מַה יָּפוּ פְעָמַיִךְ בַּנְּעָלִים בַּת נָדִיב״ כַּמָּה נָאִין רַגְלֵיהֶן שֶׁל יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּשָׁעָה שֶׁעוֹלִין לָרֶגֶל. ״בַּת נָדִיב״ בִּתּוֹ שֶׁל אַבְרָהָם אָבִינוּ שֶׁנִּקְרָא נָדִיב... שֶׁהָיָה תְּחִילָּה לְגֵרִים.

Rava taught: What is the meaning of the pasuk "How beautiful are your feet

in sandals, daughter of the prince"? How pleasant are the feet of the Jewish people when they ascend to Yerushalayim for the pilgrimage festival. "Daughter of the prince" refers to the daughter of Avraham Avinu, who is called a prince, for he was the first of the converts.

The beauty of these feet, the Gemara explains, refers to the feet of Klal Yisrael as they ascend to Yerushalayim for *aliyah l'regel.* Hashem is praising not only the destination but the journey itself. There is something deeply meaningful not only about standing within the precincts of the *Makom HaMikdash* three times each year, but about the act of traveling there and returning home.

The *Meshech Chochmah* (Shemos 23:17) adds another dimension to this idea. Avraham Avinu was tested repeatedly so that his inner greatness could emerge. Similarly, Klal Yisrael faces a profound test when they ascend to the Beis Hamikdash. By leaving their homes and traveling to Yerushalayim, they leave their borders exposed and their land vulnerable. Enemies could exploit this moment of national gathering.

Yet Klal Yisrael travels regardless. They leave their homes and appear before Hashem in the holiest place on earth. In doing so, they demonstrate that their faith does not depend upon perfect circumstances. True emunah is not expressed only during times of security and prosperity. It is revealed precisely during moments of uncertainty and risk.

This idea parallels the nature of conversion itself. A prospective convert cannot join the Jewish people if doing so will lead to great prosperity, for such a choice would reveal little about true commitment. Authentic devotion emerges when the situation is difficult and uncertain. It is then that the relationship proves genuine.

Ironically, Jewish history often reflects this reality. Even during times meant for celebration, the Jewish people have faced open borders, threats of invasion, and national anxiety. The message of the Gemara therefore becomes clear: the sanctity and joy of the day are not determined by external conditions. Whether one celebrates Pesach in a luxurious hotel or amid the tension of difficult times, the essence of the Yom Tov lies in the inner relationship with Hashem.

The *Sfas Emes* (Chagiga 3a) offers yet another dimension. Klal Yisrael are described here as "*bas nediv,*" the daughter of the prince, referring to Avraham Avinu. Just as Avraham was commanded "*lech lecha,*" leaving behind familiarity and comfort in order to follow the call of Hashem, so too Klal Yisrael leave their homes three times each year and journey to Yerushalayim.

In doing so, they become seekers. They refuse complacency. Like Avraham, they embark on a journey toward something greater. Rus followed a similar path when she left her homeland, and Klal Yisrael did the same when they entered the desert (Yirmiyahu 2:2):

לכתך אחרי במדבר

[I remember] your following Me into the wilderness.

The Jewish people are defined by this willingness to search. They long for closeness to Hashem and pursue it even when it requires leaving the familiar behind. That aspiration is the praise embedded within *aliyah l'regel.*

There is, however, a third interpretation of this pasuk. Here the focus shifts not to the journey toward the Beis Hamikdash, but to the journey away from it.

Rav Shimon Schwab (*Ma'ayan Beis Hashoeva,* Shir Hashirim 7:2) develops this idea in his commentary on *Shir Hashirim.* In the Musaf prayer we recite:

והשב כהנים לעבודתם ולוים לשירם ולזמרם והשב ישראל לנויהם.

Return the Kohanim to their service, the Leviim to their song, and the Jewish people to their beautiful homes.

Rav Schwab asks an insightful question. We understand the request that the Kohanim return to their sacred service and the Leviim to their song. But why do we specifically pray that Yisrael return to their homes?

He explains that this refers to *aliyah l'regel.* After witnessing the remarkable avodah of the Beis Hamikdash and observing the Kohanim and Leviim fulfilling their sacred roles, the people return home. That return itself becomes an *avodah gedolah.* The challenge is to carry those memories, that inspiration, and that closeness to Hashem back into ordinary life.

This, Rav Schwab suggests, is the meaning of מה יפו פעמיך בנעלים. The beauty lies not only in the steps that

lead toward the Beis Hamikdash, but also in the footsteps taken afterward when one walks away and brings the experience home.

A similar idea appears after the dedication of the Beis Hamikdash built by Shlomo HaMelech. The pasuk (Melachim I 8:66) describes the nation's departure:

וילכו לאהליהם שמחים וטובי לב.

They returned to their tents with joy and with good hearts.

The Gemara in *Moed Katan* 9a, explains that they were *smeichim* because *shenehenu m'ziv Hasechina*, they had basked in the radiance of the Divine Presence. They were *tuvei lev* because they had children to whom they could transmit that experience.

מה יפו פעמיך בנעלים בת נדיב.

How beautiful are the Jewish people who carry sacred memories with them and bring them back into their homes. How beautiful are the footsteps that transform inspiration into daily life. And how beautiful is a nation that passes those experiences to the next generation.

Bas Nediv — We inherit this legacy from Avraham Avinu. It is woven into our identity to seek closeness to Hashem and then share that discovery with others, just as Avraham introduced faith in Hashem to the world and ensured that it would be transmitted to his own family.

Three dimensions of *aliyah l'regel* emerge, each reflecting a different aspect of Avraham's spiritual legacy: the courage to become seekers who journey in pursuit of holiness, the faith to remain devoted even amid danger and uncertainty, and the responsibility to carry those sacred experiences back into the home and transmit them to others.

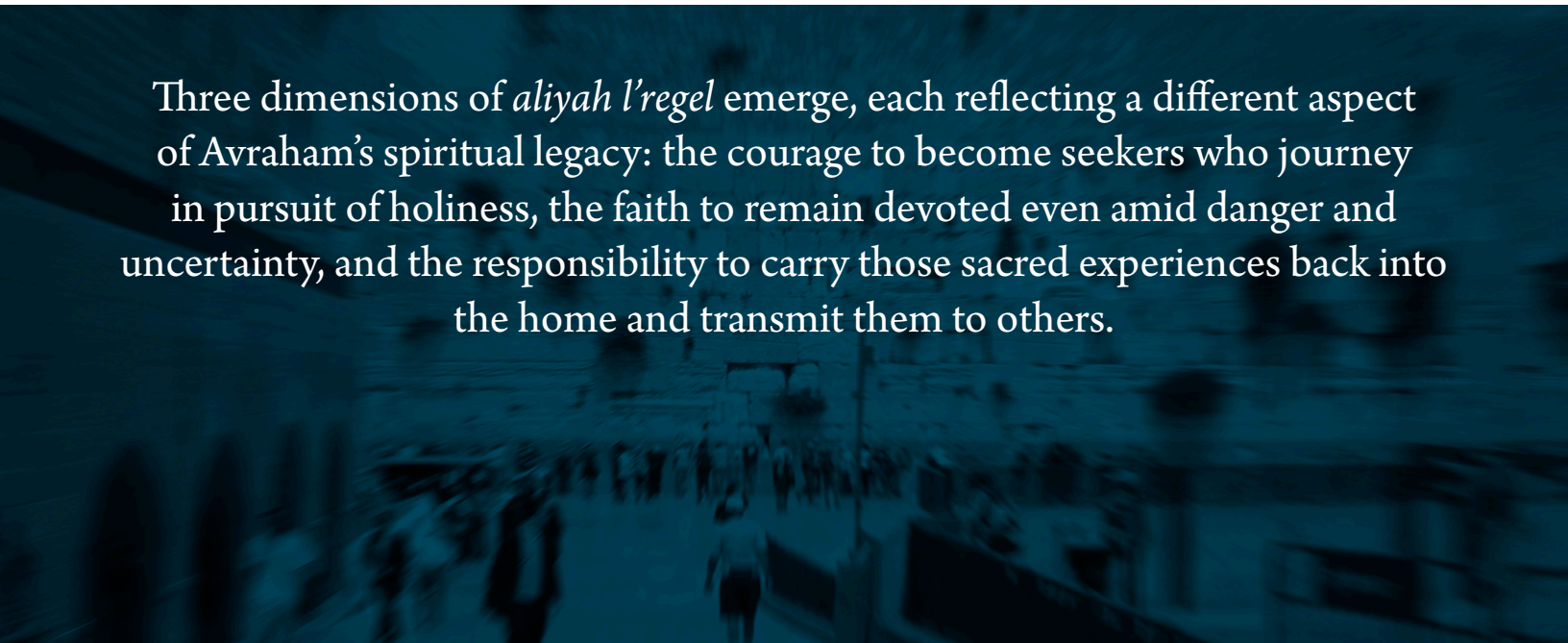
The past few years have brought their own challenges and opportunities for Klal Yisrael across the world. Fear, tension, and uncertainty have at times felt as real as the vulnerability of those ancient journeys to Yerushalayim. Yet many have also embarked on spiritual journeys that require stepping beyond comfort and becoming seekers of deeper truth. At the same time, countless moments of *hashgachah* have been witnessed, reminders of the guiding hand of Hashem even in turbulent times.

Although we no longer have a Beis Hamikdash, we have still been privileged to glimpse the *yad Hashem* in powerful ways. The question that remains is the same one faced by those who returned home from the Shalosh Regalim: will we carry those experiences with us into our homes and our daily lives?

The culmination of the Seder is meant to awaken deep feelings of love and praise for Hashem. It is only natural that we sing Hallel following Maggid, after reliving the experience of personally leaving Mitzrayim. We conclude with Nirtzah, expressing a longing for more and for the ultimate *geulah* and the days of Mashiach.

Many have the minhag to recite Shir Hashirim after the Seder. Often it is done privately. The Seder itself is experienced collectively: fifteen steps from Kadesh to Nirtzah, shared with family and guests. Then comes a quieter moment. After the communal experience, one turns inward. The recitation of Shir Hashirim becomes a personal reflection, a private dialogue of love and longing.

This Pesach, share the stories of emunah that emerged during difficult times. Reflect on the journey of searching, of *lechtech acharai bamidbar.* And as you recite Shir Hashirim, hold on to those moments and carry them with you, just as those travelling once carried the inspiration of Yerushalayim back to their homes.


Three dimensions of *aliyah l'regel* emerge, each reflecting a different aspect of Avraham's spiritual legacy: the courage to become seekers who journey in pursuit of holiness, the faith to remain devoted even amid danger and uncertainty, and the responsibility to carry those sacred experiences back into the home and transmit them to others.

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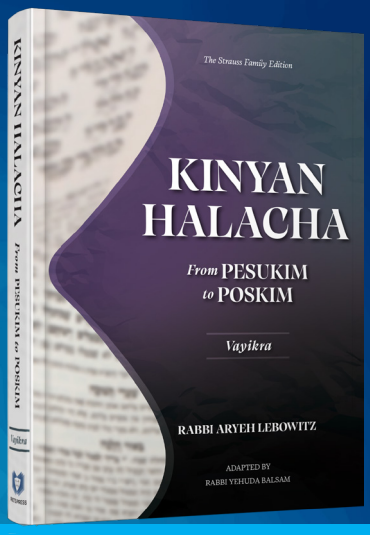

Kinyan Halacha Sefer Vayikra
by Rabbi Aryeh Lebowitz

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May My Daughter Be My Dentist?

Wounding a Parent & Halachic Applications

Rabbi Josh Flug
Director of Torah Publications, RIETS

The prohibition against wounding a parent has significant practical applications in contemporary life. Consider a scenario in which an individual requires dental work and his daughter happens to be a dentist. May the daughter perform the dental procedure on her father? This question touches on the fundamental halachic prohibition against wounding one's father or mother, and its resolution requires careful analysis of classical and modern halachic sources.

The Torah establishes in Shemos 21:15, that one who strikes his or her father or mother is subject to capital punishment. The Mishna in *Sanhedrin* 85b, states that one is liable for striking a parent only if the blow causes a wound. The Gemara in *Sanhedrin* 84b, discusses whether it is permissible for a son to perform blood-letting for his father. Two arguments are presented in favor of leniency. First, the prohibition is part of the broader mitzvah of *v'ahavta l'reiacha kamocha*, love your fellow like yourself. Rashi explains that we aren't prohibited from causing a wound in situations where we would not object to having the same done to us. Second, the Torah never prohibited wounding when it serves a therapeutic purposes.

Nevertheless, other amoraim were stringent on the matter. While it may be technically permissible, there is a concern that the child might accidentally cause an unnecessary wound. The Gemara asks: wounding someone is prohibited regardless of whether the victim is a parent or someone else. If we are concerned that a child might accidentally wound a parent, should we not likewise be concerned that any practitioner might accidentally wound a patient? The Gemara answers that accidentally wounding a parent is more severe than accidentally wounding another individual.

The rishonim offer different interpretations of this Gemara's ruling. Both Rif, *Sanhedrin* 19a and Rambam *Hilchos Mamrim* 5:7 write that it's preferable for a child to avoid performing a medical procedure on a parent. Rambam adds that if no one else is available and the parent requires a treatment, the child may perform whatever procedure the parent permits. R. Achai Gaon, in his *She'iltos* 60, takes a more stringent position, ruling that a parent's permission does not suffice in this case, since a parent may waive rights (*mechila*) to *kavod* (honor), but cannot provide *mechila* for a child to wound him. *Shulchan Aruch,* in *Yoreh De'ah* 241:3, writes that a child should not perform a procedure on a parent if it will cause wounding. This includes removing a splinter, bloodletting, or any medical procedure. Rama quotes Rambam's opinion that if no one else is available and the parent is in pain, it is permissible.

The Ba'alei HaTosafos (Tosafos, *Sanhedrin* 85a and Tosafos Shantz there) raise a fundamental question regarding this entire discussion: Why do we not employ the principle of *davar she'aino miskavein* (an unintended consequence)? Since the child's intention is to heal rather than to wound, and any wounding is merely an unintended consequence of the healing process, we should follow the opinion (*Beitzah* 23b) that

davar she'aino miskavein is permitted. There are three answers among the rishonim.

First, Tosafos suggest that even if the practitioner determines at the outset that the procedure may not cause wounding, circumstances may change during the procedure such that it becomes a *pesik reishei* (an inevitable consequence), and therefore the leniency of *davar she'aino miskavein* would no longer apply.

Second, Tosafos Shantz suggests that when a child removes a splinter from a parent, there may be two ways to accomplish this: one less aggressive, and which may not draw blood, and another that is more effective, but also more aggressive and will inevitably draw blood. If the child chooses the more aggressive option on the assumption that the parent doesn't mind, when in reality, the parent would prefer the less aggressive option, it is a violation.

Third, Rabbeinu Nissim, in Chiddushei HaRan, suggests that because of the severity of the prohibition against wounding a parent, the leniency of *davar she'aino miskavein* doesn't apply.

The issues addressed by the rishonim have practical implications. To what extent do we rely on *mechilah* when the parent does not mind being wounded by the child? As we noted, R. Achai Gaon is of the opinion that *mechilah* is ineffective in this context. *Minchas Chinuch* (43:3) suggests that according to the Rambam (*Sanhedrin* 26:6), the limitation on *mechilah* applies only after the child has violated the prohibition; at that point, the parent no longer has legal authority to grant *mechilah*. However, if the parent grants *mechilah* in advance, it is effective and the child would not be considered in violation of the prohibition.

As such, the whole discussion in the Gemara is about a concern that the child will perform the procedure in a more aggressive manner than the parent consented to. If, however, the parent gives blanket consent to the child to do whatever is necessary, then it is completely permissible. R. Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, in *Minchas Shlomo* 1:32, supports the position of *Minchas Chinuch* from a different comment of Rambam. Rambam, *Hilchos Chovel* 5:1, writes that the prohibition against wounding applies when it is done *derech nitzayon* (in the manner in which people fight). The implication is that if it is done for therapeutic purposes and permission was given in advance, there is no prohibition. While Rambam is discussing the general prohibition against wounding someone else, not about wounding parents, it seems that the parameters of both prohibitions are the same. Rav Shlomo Zalman is reluctant to fully accept *Minchas Chinuch*'s approach as a matter of halacha, but he says that it can be used as a mitigating factor when there are other reasons to be lenient.

What if the parent specifically prefers the child to perform the procedure and not someone else? The rishonim (Rabbeinu Nissim and Nimukei Yosef), commenting on the Gemara in *Nedarim* 41b, note that halacha gives weight to a patient's preference to use a particular physician, even when the matter is not considered life threatening. R. Mordechai Yaakov Breisch, *Chelkas Yaakov* 2:39, asks: Why doesn't the Gemara factor in the patient's preference in discussing whether a child can perform a procedure on a parent? He answers that the cases in our Gemara all involve simple procedures such as removing a splinter or draining pus from a wound, which don't require any expertise. If indeed expertise is required, we would factor in patient preference as grounds for leniency.

While the prohibition against wounding a parent remains a serious halachic concern, the analysis of the rishonim and acharonim reveals that there are a number of mitigating factors. These include the unavailability of alternative practitioners, the parent's explicit consent and preference, the therapeutic nature of the procedure, and the level of expertise required.

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Tza'ar Ba'alei Chayim in the Lab

The Halachic Limits of Animal Experimentation

Rabbi Kalman Laufer
Director of Graduate Halacha Programs, RIETS

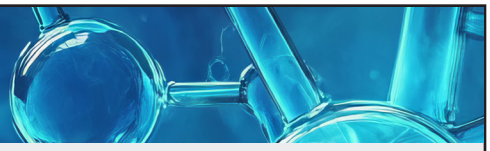
In 2022, the U.S. Congress passed the FDA Modernization Act 2.0, which removed the requirement to test all new drugs on animals as part of the approval process. While some new drugs can now be tested equally and perhaps more effectively in ways that do not require animal testing, many drugs rely on animal experimentation and testing in the development process. GLP-1-based medications like Ozempic were developed in large part through animal testing.. GLP-1s are drugs that, broadly speaking, inhibit appetite and thereby indirectly induce weight loss and help prevent obesity.[1] These drugs, when first developed, were tested on animals in such high doses that they were found to cause severe malnourishment and, in some cases, complete cessation of eating. The question I would like to address—despite the immense benefits we now derive from the availability of these drugs—is whether it is permissible to induce such a level of malnourishment in an animal for the purpose of developing medication.

The Torah teaches in numerous places that there is an obligation to assist another person and their animal. The scenarios described in the Torah vary, but generally involve animals that are suffering—whether from the load they are carrying, from having fallen, or from some other need for assistance—and bystanders are required to step in and help.[2] The Gemara infers from the wide-ranging application of these obligations that causing pain to animals—*tzaar baalei chayim*—is a violation of a prohibition *MiDioraysa*.[3] The challenge, of course, lies in identifying both the precise source and, perhaps more importantly, the parameters of this prohibition.

Meiri suggests that even though the Gemara derives this prohibition from the pesukim concerning loading and unloading a struggling animal, its true source lies in the prohibition against muzzling an animal while it threshes wheat.[4] The *Shitah Mekubetzes* suggests that there is no explicit pasuk at all, but rather that it is a *Halacha LiMoshe MiSinai*.[5] Rambam, in *Moreh Nevuchim,* goes even further, suggesting that the core prohibition against inflicting suffering on animals is derived from the cruelty Bilaam showed to his donkey.[6] None of these suggestions fully clarify the nature of the prohibition in any particular detail, yet they all agree on one point: there is a biblical prohibition against inflicting suffering upon animals. The question, then, is not merely whether *tzaar baalei chayim* is prohibited, but how its limits are defined within a halachic system that simultaneously permits—and at times depends upon—the human use of animals.

In numerous areas of halacha, the Torah grants humanity the opportunity to derive tangible benefit from animals. In Sefer Bereishis, God bestows upon Noach and his progeny both the blessing and the mandate to procreate and fill up the land, granting them dominion over[7] all the animals and creatures of the earth. In later parshiyos, the Torah requires the use of animals for korbanos, and many mitzvos revolve around eating meat. Yet killing is not a kind act. How, then, can the Torah so clearly prohibit cruelty to animals while at the same time requiring human participation in acts that necessarily cause them suffering?

One attempt to address this challenge



is a suggestion that appears in *Sefer HaChinuch*, mitzvah 451. There, the *Chinuch* suggests that the Torah offers us the mitzvah of shechitah because this method of slaughter minimizes the animal's suffering. The *Chinuch* explicitly addresses the tension between the slaughter of animals and the Torah's permission to derive benefit—monetarily or otherwise—from them. Following this logic, one might conclude that even the wanton use of animals for pleasure or profit would be permitted. In a responsum, the *Noda BeYehuda* suggests a slightly different logic to resolving the core issue.[8] The prohibition of *tzaar baalei chayim*, he suggests, applies specifically to cruelty inflicted on a living animal. When the act in question is the killing of the animal itself, however—since it results in the animal's immediate demise—it cannot be categorized as cruelty. Cruelty is defined by the way we treat living animals; killing them is inherently not cruel.

This fundamental distinction between cruelty and the negative impact such cruelty has on the perpetrator, and actions taken for purposes that are not inherently cruel, extends much further. The Rama, for example, explicitly permits the use of animals, even if the animal will suffer, when it serves a legitimate medical purpose.[9] He argues that "need," broadly defined, permits the infliction of pain on animals, because the prohibition was never intended to apply in circumstances where a legitimate purpose removes the element of cruelty. As an example of such a need, the Rama cites the plucking of feathers from a live bird to use as quills or down, even though it causes the animal pain. In comments on this ruling of Rama, however, Pri Megadim points out that avoidance of financial loss alone is insufficient. He was asked whether a bird keeper could break the small bones in a bird's wings to prevent it from flying away. He rules that it is not permitted.[10]

The question that remains is whether experimentation on animals to develop drugs that will most certainly benefit humans is broadly permitted. On the one hand, there is a clear argument that the benefit derived from such research constitutes a significant medical need to the human population. On the other hand, in the case of GLP-1 drug testing like Ozempic, animals were given medication that essentially forced them to starve themselves. In an analogous ruling, Rav Eliezer Yehuda Waldenberg permits the induction of cancer in mice for the purpose of developing treatments for those diseases.[11] However, although he allows the experimentation itself, Rav Waldenberg requires that anesthesia and pain killers be used to spare the animal any unnecessary suffering.

The principle thus permits the use of animals in pursuit of meaningful human benefit, yet halacha continues to demand adherence to the highest standards of moral sensitivity, lest we become cruel or callous in our effort to improve the world.

Endnotes

1. Liu, Qiyuan Keith. "Mechanisms of action and therapeutic applications of GLP-1 and dual GIP/GLP-1 receptor agonists." Frontiers in endocrinology vol. 15 1431292. 24 Jul. 2024.

2. Shemos 23:5.

3. *Bava Metzia* 32a.

4. *Bava Metzia* 32a.

5. *Bava Metzia* 32a.

6. *Moreh Necuchim* 3:17.

7. Bereishis 9:3-5.

8. *Noda BeYehuda, Mahadura Kama, YD* 83.

9. Rama *EH* 5:14.

10. *Pri Megadim, OC* 468:2.

11. *Tzitz Eliezer* 14:68.

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RIETS GRADUATE PROGRAM BIOETHICS & JEWISH LAW

Making Sense of Making Cents

A Halachic Perspective on Keeping the Change

Rabbi Josh Fagin
Assistant Director Graduate Halacha Programs, RIETS

Scenario: You go out for coffee with a colleague. The bill is $39.82. Feeling generous, you pay $40 with $20 bills, thereby loaning your friend $20. Later, your friend repays you with another $20 instead of the $19.91 owed. Is this prohibited under the laws of *ribbis*? If it is, what should be done with the extra nine cents?[1]

The Gemara in *Bava Metzia* (73b) discusses a comparable case where a person pays cash up-front for produce that will be delivered later, and the vendor, when upholding his end of the deal, gives extra produce. Although there are elements of this transaction that fall under the halakhic world of *mekach u'memkar* (sales), many commentators understand its primacy within the world of *ribbis*.[2] The buyer essentially loaned money until the produce could be delivered, and the vendor paid back more than the original loan by providing extra produce. The Gemara permits such additions, but the basis of this *psak* is opaque both in terms of its rationale and the text itself. Various Rishonim offer different explanations of this Gemara.

The fundamental dispute among the Rishonim seems to concern the status of a loan at the precise moment of repayment. When one borrows money, the loan remains outstanding until it is repaid (or, in the case of the Gemara, until the produce is delivered). Once repayment has been completed, the loan obviously is no longer extant. The question is whether, at the very moment the exchange is taking place, the loan is already deemed concluded, or whether it is considered concluded only after the exchange has been fully completed. This question manifests itself most starkly in the way Rishonim identify the level of *ribbis* at the time of payment. The discussion of whether additions in payment constitute *ribbis me'ucheres*,[3] interest that is usually only collected after the loan, or *avak ribbis*, any interest that is incurred during the time of the loan, is contingent on the status at the time of the payment.[4]

The Baalei HaTosfos[5] maintain that an additional payment given at the time of repayment is classified as interest *after* the loan term has ended (*ribbis me'ucheres*). Consequently, unless explicitly stipulated as connected to the loan, such an addition is presumed permissible. This presumption would not apply were the moment of repayment itself deemed connected to the loan itself, in which case any addition would be inherently suspect and potentially violate *avak ribbis*.

In contrast, the majority of the *Chochmei Sefard*,[6] who read Rashi and Tosafos accordingly,[7] hold that any addition at repayment is categorically prohibited and is considered *avak ribbis*, a heightened form of rabbinic interest. While the loan is being repaid, including the moment of repayment, the two parties still have a lender-borrower relationship, which leaves less room for leniency in the world of loans.

The *Shulchan Aruch* adopts neither of these positions and seems to articulate an intermediate approach rooted in Rosh's opinion.[8] Rosh concludes that the common leniencies that are permitted after the loan only apply if something additional is given at a later point in time. Giving more than the principal at the time of repayment is

prohibited, even absent an explicit stipulation linking payment to the loan.[9] Indeed, failing to return exact change—such as when a friend covers a meal—would appear problematic. Moreover, common leniencies associated with *ribbis me'ucheres* (e.g., small additions) are difficult to invoke, as all extra payments at the time of the loan seem to be prohibited, whereas payments after the loan would be considered *ribbis me'ucheres* and would be permissible.[10] Nevertheless, if Rosh is understood as characterizing the prohibition specifically as *ribbis me'ucheres*, more grounds for leniency may remain.

First, where an additional amount is given solely to avoid the inconvenience of making exact change, it is evident that no interest is intended. On this basis, *Nesivos Shalom* (160:4:8) and *Chelkas Binyamin* (Ribbis, n. 33; fn. 193) adopt a lenient position,[11] considering additional mitigating factors. Second, where close friends[12] routinely exchange small sums, such payments may reasonably be perceived as a gift rather than interest (*Dibros Moshe, Bava Metzia* Ch. 72, ha'arah 89).[13] Moreover, *bedi'eved*, if the case is classified as *ribbis me'ucheres*, there is neither an obligation nor a mitzvah for the lender to return the additional amount, even if its initial payment was improper.[14]

However, these leniencies are complicated by the difficulty of fully delineating Rosh's position. According to the most straightforward reading,[15] Rosh fundamentally agrees with Tosafos that an addition at the time of reimbursement constitutes only *ribbis me'ucheres*. He departs from Tosafos, however, regarding the presumption attached to a gift given at repayment: although formally outside of the loan period, the timing creates a perception that the additional payment is an interest payment rather than a gift. By contrast, other interpretations understand Rosh as fully aligned with the *Chochmei Sefard*, and treat the time of payment as on the level of *avak ribbis*.[16]

This ambiguity in the Rosh is not merely theoretical. All suggested leniencies—whether permitting the additional payment or dispensing with any obligation/mitzvah

of return—are framed by the assumption that Rosh treats the prohibition as *ribbis me'ucheres*, which is not entirely clear. It would be much more difficult to employ these or other semantic justifications if repayment at the time of a loan should be categorized as *avak ribbis*.[17] Practically speaking, returning exact change eliminates the issue entirely.

Few mitzvot are described as tantamount to the entire Torah;[18] the prohibition of *ribbis* is among them.[19] The prohibitive nature of *ribbis* is meant to affirm our faith in *yetzias Mitzrayim*[20] and help delineate the Torah's boundary between human effort and reliance on God's providence.[21] On Pesach, the holiday of *bitachon*,[22] careful attention to the laws of *ribbis*, laws that the Halakhic Man encounters on a daily basis, can help refocus our recognition of—and commitment to, actively living with Hashem's presence in our lives.

The prohibitive nature of ribbis is meant to affirm our faith in yetzias Mitzrayim and help delineate the Torah's boundary between human effort and reliance on God's providence.

Endnotes

1 I focus on a straightforward cash-for-cash scenario to avoid complicating the discussion with other payment methods like credit cards or cash apps. For a recent analysis of contemporary issues related to these payment methods, see Rav J.D. Bleich Shlita's two-part series on YUTorah, "Of Greenbacks, Monopoly Money, & Bitcoin."

2 However, see Ramban (ad loc., s.v. *V'Li*) and Rashba (ad loc., s.v. *U'Mistabra*) in the name of the Raavad who disagree. For explanations as to why the case does not raise concerns of *gezeilah* as well, see *Gedulei Terumah*, Sha'ar 46, Chelek 4, n. 16 and *Chasam Sofer* (ad loc., s.v. *Ravina*).

3 *Bava Metzia* 75b.

4 For what this argument may be based on, see R' Sholom Gelber's *Nesivos Shalom*, p. 55. Num. 59.

5 See *Or Zarua* (s.v. Ravina), *Piskei Ri'az* (s.v. HaNosen), and *HaAgudah* (s.v. Ravina) on *Bava Metzia* 73b as well as Rosh infra. and *Tur*, *Yoreh Deah* 160.

6 Ramban, s.v. V'ha (second answer); Ran, s.v. Ozulei (second explanation); Ritva, s.v. Ozulei; *Talmidei Rashba*, *Shittot Kama'i*, p. 1404, s.v. Mi Bava Metzia ad loc.; *Nemukei Yosef* to *Bava Metzia* 43b (Rif pagination) in the name of Tosafot [Rabbenu Peretz], s.v. Ozulei.

7 Raavad, as cited in the *Shittah Mekubetzet* (ibid., s.v. V'Yesh She'Pireish). Likewise, *Nemukei Yosef* (43b in Rif pagination, s.v. V'Kasvu).

8 *Bava Metzia* 5:67.

9 *Pilpula Charifta* (to Rosh, ibid., n. 7). Rosh uses the language "*mischazi k'ribbis*," it appears likes *ribbis*, which *Pilpula Charifta* explains that the prohibition could either be classified as *ribbis me'ucheres* or *avak ribbis*.

10 See *Shach* 160:10; cf. *Dibrot Moshe* infra, who partially disagrees. While a general leniency in *ribbis me'ucheres* permits characterizing an addition as a gift, this may not apply where the transaction closely resembles a loan like here (Shulchan Aruch 160:5; *Chochmat Adam* 131:5). Nevertheless, it may serve as a consideration alongside other grounds for leniency.

11 Cf. *Minchas Yitzchak* 9:88.

12 See *Bava Metzia* 75, *Rambam Hil. Malveh* 4:9, *Magid Mishnah* ad loc. Shulchan Aruch, *Yoreh Deah* 160:17.

13 Cf. *Machane Efraim*, Ribbis, 17.

14 *Chavos Daas* 160:2, *Shulchan Aruch* Yoreh Deah 161:2 and *Igros Moshe*, Yoreh Deah, end, Ha'arah 15.

15 *Tur* (YD 160), *Chavos Daas*, *Dibros Moshe* ibid. and the simple understanding of almost all commentaries on the Tur and *Shulchan Aruch*.

16 *Tiferes Shmuel* (Rosh ibid.); *Biur HaGra* YD 160:5; Rav Yosef Caro (himself) in *Bedek HaBayis* YD 160 s.v. U'Ma.

17 *Shulchan Aruch HaRav, Hil. Ribbis*, 7. It is possible that the Chelkas Binyamin's suggestion could be sustained even if we understand that additional payments at the time of loan repayment are generally a question of *avak ribbis*. If his point is that additional money was not given because of the loan but because it was more convenient than giving the exact amount, it is not an interest payment (*agar natar*) at all and wouldn't be subject to the prohibition of *ribbis*. If his reasoning is specifically because the convenience factor mitigates the prohibition of *ribbis me'ucheres*, then the argument would be limited to that context alone.

18 For a comprehensive analysis, see R. Shlomo Wolbe z"l, *Ha-Mitzvot Ha-Shekulot*; for an extensive anthology, see R. Michel Hominer, "*Mitzvot Ha-Shekulot Kechol HaTorah*," *Moriah* 6–7 (78–79) (5737/1977), 45–51, listing 71 such mitzvot.

19 *Shemos Rabbah* 31:13,15; *Yalkut HaMachiri*, Tehillim 15:18; *Baal HaTurim/Rokeach al HaTorah* Lev. 19:16; and Maharal, infra.

20 *Bava Metzia* 61b; *Sifra* Behar Parshasa 5 Hal. 3.

21 Maharal *Nesivos Olam*, *Nesiv HaTzedakah*, Ch. 6.

22 See Ramban, Exod. 13:16; for a contemporary introduction, see R. Shlomo Brevda, *Leil Shimurim*, 9–28.

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