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Wishing you a Chag Kasher V’Sameach,
Shimon Kolyakov
Rubin Kolyakov
Yosef Davis

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Rabbi Moshe Weinberger

The Royal Broom

It was not uncommon to find the great Reb Aryeh Levin zt”l standing early in the morning next to the Kosel in silent prayer. Yet, on one occasion, Reb Aryeh’s early morning walk had him cross ways with a man named Yehudah HaRush.

Yehudah, hired by the municipality, was delegated the job of cleaning the streets of Jerusalem. Every morning, he would circle around the streets and alleys of Jerusalem with his broom and sweep away any trash and dirt.

When Reb Aryeh, known for his care and concern about every Jew, saw Yehudah one morning, he ran over to him and said with a big smile, “Boker tov yehudi ha’yakar – Good morning, my dear fellow Jew.” Yehudah, caught off guard by the comment, immediately grew anxious. He appreciated Reb Aryeh’s kind remark, but was embarrassed as he was holding his broom at the moment. He would have rather kept it a secret that he spent all day cleaning the streets. And so, quickly, Yehudah hid the broom behind his back.

But then Reb Aryeh, in a moment of unbridled ahavas yisrael, spread open his arms and gave Yehudah a big hug. And, as might have been expected, Reb Aryeh felt the broom behind Yehudah. It didn’t take long for Reb Aryeh to put two and two together and realize the source of Yehudah’s embarrassed look on his face. Looking gently back at Yehudah, Reb Aryeh said, “What a special zechut (merit) you have!” Yehudah stared back at Reb Aryeh, wondering what exactly he meant. “You have such a zechut,” repeated Reb Aryeh, “because every morning you clean the streets of Jerusalem. Do you know that Jerusalem is Hashem’s special city? You are making it clean and beautiful for all Jews to come here!” Yehudah could not believe his ears. He had never thought of his work that way and had never been complimented with such encouraging words.

But Reb Aryeh was not done. “I am jealous of you,” he added. “Jealous of me!” exclaimed Yehudah. “I should be jealous of you! You have the opportunity to pray and study all day and you are so close to Hashem.” But all Reb Aryeh could repeat to Yehudah were those same words, “What a special zechut you have. You are cleaning Jerusalem, Hashem’s holy city!”

Twenty years later…

Yehudah continues to share this story with others, always emphasizing, “Reb Aryeh made me look at myself like a prince. And even now, many years later, I still feel the love and warmth he showered upon me and the importance and worth he ascribed to my job. Indeed, I am a prince and my broom, the royal scepter.”

As we take our brooms and clean our homes in preparation for the wonderful Yom Tov of Pesach, we ought to remember that we are achieving something similar to Yehudah. Every Jewish home permeates with holiness and is a place wherein Hashem’s presence rests. Our tasks of cleaning, dusting, scrubbing and everything else should be viewed with the greatest degree of pride and enthusiasm. We are doing no less than taking our royal brooms and ushering in our family, friends and indeed, Hashem Himself.

Rabbi Noach Isaac Oelbaum

Recounting and Making History

If we would have to identify the quality Hashem loved most about Avraham Avinu, what would it be? Quite likely, we would suggest a variety of answers: Avraham’s willingness to sacrifice his beloved son Yitzchak; his readiness to jump into a fiery furnace instead of renounce his faith in G-d; his hospitality to wayfarers; his dedication to travel away from his birthplace to an unknown land. However, the Torah does not highlight any of these aspects as the paradigm characteristic of Avraham.

The Torah tells us, “For I have loved him because he commands his children and his household after him that they keep the way of Hashem, doing charity and justice…” (Bereishis 18:19). That which was most cherished about our forefather Avraham was his commitment to transmitting to the next generation the teachings and values of Hashem.

The Torah tells us, “For I have loved him because he commands his children and his household after him that they keep the way of Hashem, doing charity and justice…” (Bereishis 18:19). That which was most cherished about our forefather Avraham was his commitment to transmitting to the next generation the teachings and values of Hashem.

On the night of Pesach, we are given the unique opportunity to follow in the ways of Avraham Avinu. Teaching our children and fellow Jews about our rich heritage and legacy, tonight is the time when we not only recount our history, but make history. Not only will we continue on as dedicated and proud observant Jews, but so will our beloved children.
When was the first Pesach seder in all of history? While we would assume it to be the first year after the Jews left Egypt, in truth, the night before they left they were already acting as a free nation eating matzah and the Korban Pesach. But why would Hashem command them to have a seder before actually leaving Egypt? It is akin to celebrating an anniversary before getting married.

During my time spent at RXR Realty, a New York based real estate company, I wound up giving a monthly class where people could ask any question about Judaism in an open forum. On one occasion, a broad-shouldered 6'6” man named Josh walked in and took a seat. After sitting through the class, he approached me. “Charlie, I want to thank you for that lecture.” “It’s my pleasure,” I said. “Would you mind if I come back again? You may not know, but I’m not Jewish.” “It’s fine,” I said, “you’re welcome to stop by again.”

Sure enough, at the next session, there was Josh. As I spoke about the power of speech and words, I asked if anyone had a personal story of someone saying or doing something to them which indelibly shaped their life. Josh raised his hand. “Come on up,” I said. Josh then proceeded to relate the following story:

“As a young kid growing up in the South, I was exceptionally big and strong. I had the perfect build for a great football athlete, although I was only a decent player. When I finally joined a team, my coach one day came to practice and said, “Josh, you think you can give me the death crawl?” I knew that a death crawl entailed crawling on the floor using only my elbows and knees without my hands and feet, something which I knew would be a challenge. But I would do my best. “Yeah,” I told the coach. “How far can you go?” he asked. “I don’t know, but I think the twenty-yard line.” “You promise you’ll go to the twenty?” “Promise,” I said.

“As I was about to begin, my coach called me over again. ‘Wait a minute, Josh. Billy is going to be placed on your back.’ ‘What?’ I exclaimed in surprise. ‘Josh,’ my coach reminded me, ‘you promised…’ With little option to argue, I agreed to carry Billy on my back.

“But don’t go quite yet,’ my coach added, ‘there is one more thing.’ He proceeded to pull out a handkerchief from his pocket and blindfold me. About to perform a difficult task with a guy on my back and my eyes blindfolded, I didn’t think I would get too far. I had thought I could make it to the twenty-yard line, but now I had my doubts.

“But I simply began to move. Inchng forward five yards and then ten yards, my coach yelled out to me, ‘Josh, you are doing great!’ I felt that I had gone so far, but then my coach signaled that I had reached only the ten-yard line. ‘Keep on moving!’ I heard him yell. ‘You’re at the fifteen!’ Working as hard as I could, I soon felt I could go no more. ‘I can’t do it coach! I have nothing left.’ ‘C’mon,’ he yelled, five more steps.’ Putting in a few more steps and getting closer and closer… I finally collapsed.

“Rolling over, I repeated, ‘Coach, I told you, I can’t even get to the twenty.’ But then my coach said, ‘Josh… turn around. You’re at the fifty.’

We often live our lives thinking that who we are is who we are. We become stuck in our own limitations. Before we left Egypt, Hashem had us visualize with a seder what it meant to be a nation free to carry out His mitzvos without restraint. Freedom does not merely mean changing your geography or altering your mode of dress. Freedom begins when you mentally decide that you are going to be free. Only when you can visualize such a reality will you experience true freedom and reach above and beyond your limitations.

I once came across a refrigerator magnet which sent such a simple yet inspiring message: “Who we are is a gift from Hashem; what we make of ourselves is our gift to Hashem and to ourselves.” Our inborn traits and characteristics – pretty, smart, musical, quick, organized – are gifts Hashem has given us and are to be embraced and appreciated. Yet, there is still much work to be done on our end. We are to take those qualities and use them to better ourselves and our surroundings, grow closer to Hashem and attain that spiritual greatness awaiting us all.
Carbasenim Amit Yaghoubi
*The Seder: Our Conversation with Hashem*

Generally, the order of the *seder* is understood as a progression, building step by step, one after another. But, in truth, there is an additional way in which the *seder* can be viewed: a dialogue between us and Hashem. We speak to Him and He speaks to us. As we draw lessons and messages from each step of the *seder*, we are doing no less than developing a deep and genuine relationship with our Father in Heaven:

**Kiddush over Wine (Kadesh)**

Us: We begin with Kiddush over wine wherein we usher in the holiness of the Yom Tov. We ask that Hashem infuse our lives with holiness.

**Wash our hands without a blessing (Urchatz)**

Hashem: Before you can attain sanctity, you must cleanse yourselves of all your preconceived notions and judgments of other people and life in general.

**Dip the Karpas vegetable in saltwater or vinegar (Karpas)**

Us: But it is difficult! I have experienced tragedy and insults which have brought me to tears. How can I cleanse myself when I cry from hardship?

**Break the middle Matzah and store away the larger half for the Afikoman (Yachatz)**

Hashem: You only see a small part of the picture. It is the smaller half of the broken *matzah* which remains on the table. The larger half is hidden away. We only see a small part of the full picture in life.

**Recount the story of slavery and freedom from Egypt (Maggid)**

Us: I understand that I only see a small part of the story, but please Hashem, explain it to me. How can we make sense of all the difficulties we face?

**Wash our hands with a blessing (Rachtzah)**

Hashem: If you wish for Me to explain it to you in a way that you can understand, you must first be connected to Me. You must wash your hands and make a blessing.

**Consume Matzah (Motzi Matzah)**

Us (Motzi): I have now washed my hands and am completely dedicated to You. Now, please give me a piece of “fresh bread” – answers which are clearly comprehensible and easily digestible.

Hashem (Matzah): I will not give you bread, but rather *matzah*. *Matzah* is the holiest of breads, yet it is sometimes difficult to chew and digest. The deepest and holiest of explanations are oftentimes very difficult to grasp and swallow.

**Eat Maror (Maror)**

Us: Hashem, I accepted that life is often difficult and I have lived with faith until this point. But I am greatly embittered and weary now.

**Dip the Maror into Charoset and make a sandwich (Korech)**

Hashem: You have made it through many difficult moments. Now, you will experience a sweet reprieve and all those trying times will be seen as meaningful opportunities for growth.

**Eat the Yom Tov meal (Shulchan Orech)**

Us: I am now experiencing high points in my life where everything being served is delicious.

**Consume the hidden Afikoman (Tzafun)**

Hashem: Even when everything seems to be going well, I will hide Myself again. Life will once again become challenging and you will struggle to find Me.

**Recite Birchat Hamazon (Barech)**

Us: Although You may be hidden, please nevertheless bless us and grant us prosperity.

**Say Hallel (Hallel)**

Hashem: I will bless you when you first decide to praise Me amidst your strife and difficulty.

**Next year in Jerusalem (Nirtzah)**

Hashem: I completely accept your dedicated service. Come close to Me and I will embrace you.
What is the meaning behind dipping the Karpas vegetable into saltwater? Pesach is known as “Chag Ha’Aviv,” the holiday of spring. In this respect, as we take a fresh vegetable, such as green parsley or celery, we indicate that the spring season of Pesach is a time of rebirth and rejuvenation. It is when the greenery of trees and plants blossom and we optimistically look forward to a beautiful season ahead.

And then we have the saltwater. Dipping the vegetable into saltwater, we recognize that even amidst all the tears, pain and challenges of life, everything is going to be okay. We have belief in Hashem that He will help us through times of suffering and bring us to one day experience the rebirth of spring. And in fact, although most of the time we only see half the picture in life, every once in a while, we are privy to seeing the other half fit right in.

I remember being unable to fall asleep one night. Deciding to read, I began perusing through the different Jewish newspapers I had from cover to cover. After a while, I finally got to the point where I had read just about everything, and all that was left was the Lost and Found section.

Looking through the various items lost, my eye caught one in particular: “Lost on 16th Avenue in Boro Park – Diamond Engagement Ring.” Thinking to myself, “Oh, poor lady,” my heart went out to the woman. I could only imagine the heartache she was going through. That announcement was in The Jewish Press.

Then I looked at another newspaper – Yated Ne’eman – and again reached the Lost and Found section. Looking through the items listed, I was shocked with what I saw. “Found in Boro Park – Diamond Engagement Ring.” As soon as I saw that, I thought to myself, “Why don’t I make a shidduch (match)?” Unable to wait until morning, I immediately contacted each newspaper. “I don’t know the exact story behind it all,” I said, “but one ring was lost in Boro Park and one ring was found in Boro Park. I am led to believe that there is some connection between the two.”

Both the one who had lost the ring and the finder were contacted, and a match was made between them. It indeed was the same ring. Soon afterwards, I received a phone call from both the finder and loser who told me, “I don’t buy the other newspaper. Thank you so much. If not for you, I might never have contacted the other person.” As I myself had subscribed to both newspapers, I was able to make the connection.

Even when there seems all the reason in the world to give in and give up, we mustn’t. We can never know, but sometimes, the salvation will be found on the very last page we are about to turn over. And then, instead of losing hope, we find hope. Those tears of sorrow are transformed into tears of joy and elation.

A Short Message From Rebbetzin Chana Silver

As I once entered a wedding hall and scanned from side to side for an open seat, I spotted one a distance away at which several people I knew were seated. “That’s perfect,” I thought to myself, “I’ll be able to catch up with a lot of friends.”

Yet, at the very moment I reached the table, so did another woman. She too had seen the empty seat and planned on taking it. Although I did not know this lady too well, we had always said hello whenever we saw each other and knew each other’s names. “Oh, it’s no problem at all!” I said. “Please take this seat. There are plenty of other places I can find.” Although I genuinely meant this, the woman without batting an eyelash turned to me and said, “I have an idea. How about neither of us sit here. I have seen you around many times and would really love to get to know you better. Let’s go sit somewhere else together and catch up.”

Agreeing to join her at a different table, we went on to have a beautiful time. We had such a nice and deep conversation and discovered that we had much in common. Now, she is one of my close friends. Here was someone who was on the lookout to make someone else feel appreciated and valued, and she did just that. I wouldn’t have faulted her one bit for taking the seat. But instead, she turned the tables around and realized that here was a perfect opportunity to think not about herself, but about someone else. She saw beyond what many others would have overlooked and seized the moment to reach out. What a beautiful attitude and outlook.
Yachatz

Rabbi Dovid Goldwasser
Broken for Greatness

For Yaakov, things were not going as anticipated. Again and again, a prospective shidduch offer ended rather quickly. Even after quite some time, he remained alone. No event or shadchan made a difference.

Every Friday afternoon after leaving yeshiva, Yaakov would continue on to visit his elderly grandmother. She lived in a special nursing facility in Israel, and undoubtedly, the highlight of her week was seeing her beloved grandson. He would sit with her, talk to her and cheer her up for two hours. Week after week, Yaakov consistently made the special trip to his grandmother no matter what. While most visits went well, at times, the grandmother was not in the best of moods and the time spent in the nursing home was unpleasant.

On one such occasion, while Yaakov sat by his grandmother’s bedside, she perked up. “Where did you put my teeth?” Needing to wear dentures, the grandmother was unable to locate them. “Savta,” Yaakov said, “I’m not sure; I haven’t seen them around.” “Don’t lie to me; you took my teeth!” she stammered. Knowing with certainty that he did not touch them, Yaakov tried to reassure her. “Savta, please, I didn’t take them.” But she wouldn’t hear of it.

“Why are you disrespecting me? Why are you telling me you didn’t take them?” and with that, she slapped Yaakov across the face.

With red marks on his cheeks, this visit only compounded Yaakov’s stressful predicament. His mind began to race through everything he was undergoing, and he now felt that he had hit rock bottom. Tears came to his eyes, as he turned his face aside so as not to hurt his grandmother’s feelings. He knew that his grandmother dearly loved him despite her harsh behavior. And so, he kept up a smile as best as he could to put his grandmother at ease.

He knew that his grandmother dearly loved him despite her harsh behavior. And so, he kept up a smile as best as he could to put his grandmother at ease.

The same is true of Yachatz. Breaking apart the middle matzah and setting aside the larger half for the Afikoman, we affirm that we often become broken in preparation for greatness. But there is one thing we must never forget: there will come a time when that greatness will be uncovered. Some time, perhaps late into the night, the Afikoman will be found and that large broken half will emerge. And when that happens, we will be able to think back to all our moments of gloom and despair and realize that they were part and parcel of our ascent to greatness.

A Short Message from Rabbanit Yemima Mizrachi

The Alshich interestingly notes that the words משפחה (family) and שמחה (happiness) share just about the same letters. The only difference is the letter pei, cognate to the word peh, meaning mouth. It is through expressing kind, encouraging and uplifting words to one’s spouse and children that happiness is infused into the home. The mouth is no less than the key to a happy home.
Rabbi YY Jacobson

4 Lessons for the 4 Sons

Concerning four sons did the Torah speak

These few words contain volumes of lessons about education and pedagogy. Among many, there are four messages our Sages mean to convey with this brief statement:

1) There are four sons. There is no one child because everyone is different. Never make the mistake that one cookie-cutter model encompasses all children.

2) They are all your children. Never look at any of these children and write them off or reject them. They may be from one extreme to another, but they are all your children.

3) Torah has something to say to each one of these children. No child is ever too far for Torah to inspire and uplift them and provide them with joy and wholesomeness in life. The Torah speaks to every child’s needs.

4) The conversation the Torah has with each of them is a different one. The Torah offers a unique message for every individual in every circumstance of life.

Rabbi Paysach Krohn

Thinking of You

You initiate him

When my grandson, Avraham Zelig, was seven years old, I reminded him, “Avraham, when you are ready for your first baseball glove, it’s on me. Just let me know and I’ll buy it for you.” Two days later, sure enough, there was Avraham Zelig.

“Zaidy,” he said, “I’m ready!” Keeping to my word, I told him that I would pick him up after school the following day and take him to Sports Authority, the local athletics store.

When we later entered the store, I was blown away. There must have been thousands of baseball gloves of all kinds for all ages. This was in addition to the hundreds of other basketballs and soccer balls. Everything you could imagine was in that store. Quite overwhelmed, I had no idea how we would ever be successful in finding a suitable mitt among countless others.

As we started walking up and down the aisles stacked with gloves from top to bottom, I began thinking back to my own very first baseball glove. I could still remember it. It was a Wilson glove, which had an unbelievable smell of leather. Between pitches, I used to take a whiff of it. It was incredible.

We continued making our way around the store, and soon enough, I spotted something familiar. It was a Wilson glove for a seven-year-old. All too excited, I picked it up and smelled it. Within seconds, I was transported back to my youth. “Avraham,” I called out, “this is your glove!” “Zaidy,” he said, “what do you mean? What is so special about it?” “Don’t worry,” I assured him, “just smell it; you’ll find out.” Although he had no clue what I was referring to, he compliantly put on the glove as we started tossing a baseball back and forth. Sure enough, Avraham took a liking to the glove. It fit him well, he liked the feel and he was happy. And so, Avraham happily returned home with his first baseball glove.

Three weeks later, to my surprise, my wife came home one night holding Avraham’s glove. “What are you doing with that glove?” I asked, worried that perhaps he had regretted his decision or that something was wrong with it. “Avraham said you can hold onto it for tonight,” she replied, “he knows you like to smell it.”

All parents and grandparents are in position to instill within their children and grandchildren wonderful values of kindness and concern for another. Yet how exactly can we achieve that? It all begins with one simple step: showing our kindness and concern for them. When we model the behavior we would like for them to follow and give them of our quality time and attention, we have taken the first step to imbuing them with such beautiful ideals.
Rebbetzin Esther Jungreis a"h

Our Eternal Mission

In every generation they stand to annihilate us, and the Holy One, Blessed be He, saves us from their hands.

On one of my previous trips to Eastern Europe, I was granted the unique opportunity of speaking before a number of well-respected officials in Hungary. After I concluded the talk, I was approached by one of the ministers with a probing question.

“Mrs. Jungreis,” he said, “are you angry?” Not exactly sure what he was referring to, I replied, “Do I look angry? I hope I don’t.” But that was not what he meant. “Are you angry in your heart? After all, isn’t this the country where many rules were enacted against your people?” Finally understanding the intent of his question, I went on to clarify a very important point he was missing.

“Let me tell you something about Jewish history. Thousands of years ago, I had brothers and sisters who were enslaved in Egypt. They had all the reason to get very angry and focus all their energy on avenging their ruthless masters. But they didn’t. Instead, they focused on rebuilding the nation. That is who we are as Jews. We have too much to accomplish than get angry. Instead of anger, we rebuild.

“Centuries later, we were again persecuted. Exiled to Babylon as slaves, as we left Jerusalem, blood flooded the streets and reached knee-high. Yet despite being beaten by our Babylonian tormentors, we still did not become angry and demoralized. We instead started to rebuild. We didn’t have time to be angry.

“And then came the Romans and they too tortured and sold us as slaves. Yet we surged forward and thrived as a nation. And thousands of years later, look what happened with Communist Russia? We weren’t allowed to freely practice Judaism, but we rebuilt Russian Jewry into a thriving force in the world today.

“And then there was Hitler ym”s with his Final Solution. But, as history has shown, he became the final solution and we are here today.

“And so,” I said in conclusion to the Hungarian minister, “we do not have time to be angry. We are the children of G-d who always look towards rebuilding a brighter future. Never do we allow our past to hold us down and prevent us from moving forward.”

Yet, despite this being absolutely true, we must ask ourselves one very important question. Where in fact do we derive such strength to carry on? What pushes us forward to march on with dignity despite the innumerable odds against us?

Let me share a story with you.

When I was a young girl in Bergen-Belsen, I stood for roll call every morning with my head shaved and dressed in rags. It wasn’t a pretty sight. We all just stood still waiting until the Nazis came. Yet as young as I was, whenever I would look at the Nazi guards, I would say to myself, “Blessed be G-d that I do not belong to this people. Thank G-d that my father is a holy man and not a murderer.”

While you might be wondering how I would be so perceptive as a little girl, allow me to tell you how I gained such insight.

Every day while in the camps, each one of us received a small portion of bread. It was a meager piece of bread meant for one person, and in no way did it remove the pangs of hunger. Nevertheless, my father would take his small ration of bread, make the blessing over it and eat just a tiny bit. He would then hide the rest away in great pains, and tell us in Yiddish, “Kinderlach (children), count the days until Shabbos.”

When Shabbos would arrive, in the middle of the night while surrounded by mice and rats, my father would gather us children together and say to us again in Yiddish, “Close your eyes, my dear children. We are home. Mommy just baked delicious fresh challah. It is still warm.” My father would then take out those remaining precious crumbs he had saved and give them to us. And then he would sing the beautiful hymn Shalom Aleichem and say, “Welcome to you, Angels of the Sabbath.”

On one such occasion, my younger brother pulled at my father’s arm and said, “Tatty, I don’t see any angels here. Where are the Angels of Sabbath?” My father, unable to hold himself back, started to cry. He then looked down at my brother and gently said, “You my children. You are the Angels of Sabbath.”

If you know who you are and you know that your life has meaning and purpose, then no matter what life brings your way, you will be able to walk with dignity. That was what my father inculcated within us as children. We live as Jews with an undying mission. Never are we to forget who we are. We are G-d’s precious children who lead lives of holiness, of kindness and of rebuilding.

No matter what challenges we endure nationally or individually, we surge forward with a vibrant vision of life and thriving. Even amid the harshest of
conditions, we remain positive of our future and confident about our life’s mission. And that is because the Jewish soul will never be extinguished. Even amidst the darkness of exile, our soul will always remain aflame with the hope and prospect of rebuilding upwards and onwards.

**Ms. Chevi Garfinkel**

*The Children of Struggle*

Throughout life, we will struggle and fall flat on our face again and again, yet we keep getting up. For the Jewish soul cannot be extinguished. Life is about fully dedicating ourselves to the process of growing and living, and being able to say, “Hashem, I fought the whole night and gave it my all.” We live as a *ben yisrael* and a *bas yisrael* and confidently say at the end of each and every day, “I fought today from start to finish. I struggled and gave it every ounce of effort I had.” We are not the Children of Success, but the Children of Struggle. The focus is on the process, not the product. And that, indeed, is true greatness.

**Rabbi Yigal Haimoff**

*On Condition*

A father of eleven children living in Israel was faced with a dilemma. It was time for his daughter to get married, yet he had no means of paying for the wedding.

Flying to America, he immediately headed to a number of *shuls* to receive assistance. But things did not progress as smoothly as he had hoped. And so, one day, he broke down in tears while saying *tehillim*. Noticing him crying in the corner was another man. “Can I help you?” he inquired. Looking up teary-eyed, the man sighed and began to detail his woeful story.

“Look,” the other man said, “there is one wealthy individual in this community who may be willing to help you.” “Really?” the poor father perked up. “Yes, he is very kind. But I must tell you, he can easily change his moods. If you catch him in a good mood, he will be more than gracious to you. But if you find him not in the best of moods, don’t expect him to be too generous.”

Making his way to the wealthy man’s home, he was immediately welcomed inside. “How can I help you?” “Well,” the man began, “my daughter is getting married soon and I cannot afford a wedding.” Hearing of the man’s plight, the gentleman said, “If I may ask, how many children do you have?” “Eleven,” replied the man. “Eleven children? How can you have eleven children when you cannot afford to support them? I have one child and can give him everything he needs!”

Sitting there, realizing that the wealthy man was now in a bad mood and that no money would be coming his way, the man fell silent. What could he say? And then it hit him.

“Allow me to respond,” said the man. “The Talmud says that there are three partners in the creation of a child: the mother, father and Hashem. That means that I am a partner with Hashem ten times. I have a contract
with Him with each of my children and I am fully confident that He will support my family and me in some way. My children are His children and I know that He will never abandon His children.”

Hearing these words, the wealthy man was taken aback. “I never heard such a thing before.” Taking out his pen, he went on to write a check to cover the cost of the entire wedding, stunning the poor father. All he could do was genuinely thank the gentleman for his generosity. “But I have one condition,” the wealthy man added; “I am also a partner now. From now on, any time you need anything for any of your children, you come to me.”

While this poor father received support for his family, he provided the wealthy man something just as valuable in return: the lesson of what it means to have a child. At times, a child can be viewed as a burden. But we would be much happier and wealthier if we would alter this line of thought. A child is the biggest gift we can have. He or she is worth more than all the precious diamonds in the world.

Rebbetzin Sarah Meisels
For Your Sake

And He saw our affliction

During one of my visits to my parents in New York, my father, the Bobover Rebbe, was scheduled to see the dentist. As Dr. Halpern examined him, he determined that it was necessary to administer a root canal. Having worked on my father before, he knew the procedure for getting him ready. Yet, on his way to find some Novocain to dull the pain of the procedure, he stopped in his tracks. “I forgot,” he muttered aloud, “the Rebbe doesn’t take anything for pain. He says that the pain he hears from other Jews hurts him more. He takes care of all his cavities without any medication.”

Hearing Dr. Halpern say this, I was startled. “Dr. Halpern,” I said, “this is not a cavity; this is a root canal.” With my face beginning to pale and looking as if I was about to faint, Dr. Halpern asked if I could use a chair. “No,” I said, “but I could use a phone.”

Calling my older sister, I began to hysterically panic. “It’s a root canal and Tatty doesn’t want to take anything. What should I do?” “Don’t let him go through the procedure without taking anything,” my sister urged me, “don’t let him!” As my father overheard the conversation I was having, he turned to me. “What’s wrong?” “Tatty, this is not a cavity; this is a root canal. You can suffer terribly from the pain!”

My father then looked at me and gently said, “I don’t need it; but I see you need it. I will do it for you.” And indeed, that was what he did. He took Novocaïn not for his sake, but for mine.

Such was the sensitivity and care of the Bobover Rebbe. The pain of fellow Jews hurt him more than his own pain. In our own way, as well, one of the greatest traits we can develop is that of empathy. The smallest show of care, concern and comfort can have the greatest of impacts, and leave a fellow Jew feeling loved and valued just as they deserve.

Rebbetzin Ruthie Halberstadt
Oh Rats!

A t one point in my life, things were very hectic. My family had just moved from one apartment to another in Jerusalem, besides which I was also expecting my third child and feeling very ill from the pregnancy. Upon returning home from a family occasion abroad, my husband and I noticed a funny smell in our apartment. The first few nights we were home, we also heard a scratching noise in our bedroom. We never met the creature, but it was clearly something of sizeable proportion. Moving our bed, we saw that it had made a hole and built a home for itself inside the wall. To our distress, we had rats in our apartment.

Unnerved, we contacted an exterminator who informed us that the biggest rat was the size of a small cat. This was not a comforting thought at all considering that we had two little children running around the house. We locked our bedroom door and slept in the kids’ room, and all I could do was panic.

I tried spending as much time as I could out of the house. Yet, one afternoon while I sat on a park bench, I simply broke down. I was really having a hard time. The exterminator was making little progress, and we...
felt like victims in our own home. Just then, a woman who I barely knew walked over to me and sat down. By the look on my face, she could tell that something was wrong.

“What happened?” she asked. “We have rats in our apartment and we need to get rid of them,” I despondently said. “Oh rats! That’s terrible. I myself learned a lot from rats. I remember how two weeks after I gave birth to one of my children and my family had moved apartments, we also discovered we had rats.” Listening to this woman who had faced a predicament like my own, I remained attentive. “Someone then told me to look up the rat in Perek Shira, where every creature in the world is described as singing its own unique song of praise to Hashem. You should also research the rat in Perek Shira. If this is the creature you are plagued with, you ought to find out what its message is to you.”

I was very intrigued. Heading home, I began sifting through my books on Perek Shira with its commentaries. When I found out what the rat’s praise to Hashem was, I was very humbled. The rat says, “Every soul will praise Hashem, Hallelukah!” Taken from the culminating lines and crescendo of Tehillim, the highest praise of Hashem emanates from the rat. This was particularly meaningful to me.

This song is said by the rat because the rat has the lowliest kind of lifestyle on earth. It lives in the gutters and sewers where even air is hard to come by, and toxic if any. But the rat appreciates its life and feels that it is worth living. Despite its struggles to stay alive and low quality of existence, it doesn’t give up. That is one lesson we learn from the rat: any type of life is worth living.

As I read this, I was moved. I was experiencing a hard time adjusting to our new apartment and dealing with my pregnancy and had forgotten to focus on this one simple thought: the greatest gift we have is life itself. I then proceeded to write an entire page of everything I ought to be grateful for. I was alive, carrying a healthy baby, and living in Israel with a roof over my head.

While I may have wished that the rats never entered my home in the first place, in hindsight, they taught me an invaluable lesson I will always remember.

*Every experience we have in life – even a so-called plague of rats – is there to teach us a lesson. While we may sometimes have to search high and low to find some meaning, we can be assured that nothing is coincidental. Even a lowly rat has a profound message to teach us.*

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**Rabbi Zecharia Wallerstein**

*From Wall to Window*

*These are the ten plagues … Darkness*

As Mr. Lefkowitz began to get on in his years, he decided that it would be best if he moved into a nursing home. There he could receive all the assistance he needed and be supervised by doctors and nurses around the clock. Aside from age, however, Mr. Lefkowitz faced another complication – his inability to walk around freely. Having lost his legs earlier in life due to a disease, Mr. Lefkowitz would move from place to place using a wheelchair. Yet that did not change his optimistic attitude. Moreover, as a wealthy man in his own right, he was the only gentleman in the nursing facility who had a room to himself. Yet that was soon to change.

One day, the head of the nursing home approached Mr. Lefkowitz with a request. “We have a man who would like to move into our home, yet there are no available rooms at the moment. Would it be possible that he move in with you for one month?” Lefkowitz, a sweet and considerate man, happily complied.

And so, the next day, there was Mr. Friedman situated in the room, across from Mr. Lefkowitz. Wishing to welcome his new roommate, later that day, Lefkowitz got into his wheelchair and rolled over to Friedman’s bed. “Hi!” Lefkowitz said with a big smile. “Friedman, you’re my new roommate for a month! It’s going to be great. I can just imagine that we will become best friends.” While Lefkowitz was full of joy and excitement, Friedman was just the opposite. A miserable, grizzly, old man, he had no interest in talking to Lefkowitz. “Can you please get away from my bed!” shouted Friedman. Getting the message loud and clear, Lefkowitz slowly made his way back to his side of the room. “He just needs a little time,” figured Lefkowitz. “I’m sure he will warm up soon.”

Later that night, Lefkowitz heard the sound of sobbing. Looking over across the room and seeing Friedman crying, Lefkowitz immediately got into his wheelchair and rolled over to Friedman. “Friedman, what happened? Why are you crying?” “Please get away from me!” said Friedman. “Can’t you tell what my problem is?” Unsure what Friedman was referring to, Lefkowitz just sat there in silence. “I’m blind!” said Friedman, “and I don’t want to hear your stories. Please don’t come over to me and act like you’re the happiest man alive. Five years ago, I lost my eyesight, and since then I...
haven't been able to see my children and grandchildren. Just do me a favor. Let me live as I am in my dark world."

Lefkowitz, listening to Friedman's story, was left in a total state of shock. Rolling back towards his bed, all Lefkowitz could think about was what he could do for Friedman. Within a few minutes, there was Lefkowitz back at the bedside of Friedman. “Friedman!” called out Lefkowitz, “I have an idea. You are blind and I have no legs. In a couple weeks from now, when we will be good friends, you know what we can do? You can place me on your shoulders and we will go all around the nursing home cheering people up. I will be your eyes and you will be my feet. We will be the funniest pair in this entire facility.” Not receiving any response from Friedman, Lefkowitz continued.

“But if you are not in the mood for that right now, I’ll tell you something else. I have been an artist my whole life and have a keen perception for detail. So let me do you a favor. I will go over to the window every day and be your eyes. Whatever I see outside, I will describe what it looks like. We’ll try it out for two days. If afterwards, you no longer want me to describe the outside view to you, I will immediately stop. Just give it a little bit of time.” To Lefkowitz’s delight, Friedman agreed to the plan.

The next morning, at 5:30 am, Lefkowitz woke up and called out to Friedman. “Sunrise, sunrise…! It’s pretty dark out there, but I see a little pink… Just off to the north, there is a large cloud… and there is a man walking a dog…” Describing in vivid detail everything he saw, Lefkowitz covered the entire panoramic view from the woman holding the umbrella, to the fire hydrant, to the trees, benches and children playing in the park.

This continued for some time that day, as well as the following day. And then for a third day, and then a week and then a month. Friedman was absolutely mesmerized by Lefkowitz’s descriptions and began to slowly but surely take a liking to him. Sure enough, within a short while, Friedman and Lefkowitz were best friends.

And there they were. Running up and down the halls of the nursing home cheering up everyone they came across, besides for having a great time themselves, everyone else was too. This went on for a year, with Lefkowitz talking about the snowflakes, the changing color of the leaves and everything else in between. Friedman could not get enough of Lefkowitz’s optimism and beautiful depiction of the world he saw.

One morning, Friedman called over Lefkowitz. “Lefki,” he said, “for my whole life until five years ago, I was able to see like everyone else. But I have to tell you something. I never saw a sunrise in my whole life, I never looked so closely at a snowflake and I never appreciated the beauty of a tree blooming in the spring. Being blind in this room with you, I have seen more than I did when I had my eyesight. I would just like to thank you.” Listening to the kind words of Friedman, Lefkowitz let out a smile. As could be imagined, Friedman’s mood by now had entirely changed and the friendship he enjoyed with Lefkowitz was cherished above all else.

Yet, one morning, Friedman awoke slightly later than usual. Having a feeling that he had overslept and wondering why Lefkowitz had not woken him up earlier, he called out across the room, “Lefki, where are you? It’s late. Did you oversleep?” But there was no response. Panicking, Friedman called over the nurse. “Nurse, where’s Lefkowitz?”

“I am very sorry to tell you Mr. Friedman, but Mr. Lefkowitz passed away last night. He had a heart attack in the middle of the night while you were sleeping and we did not want to wake you. We rushed him to the hospital, where he passed away.” Friedman could not believe his ears. “The funeral is today,” continued the nurse, “at 11 o’clock.” “What time is it now?” panicked Friedman. “I must go to his funeral!” “It is 9:30,” said the nurse. “If you would like, we will make arrangements for you to attend.”

While Friedman remained resting in bed shocked, before the nurse left the room, he had one request to make. “Nurse, could you please do me a favor? In memory of my friend, Lefki, could you go over to the window and describe what you see outside. Is it raining? Are there clouds? Lefki used to do this for me every morning. If you could please do me this favor and just let me know what is going on.” Standing there a bit confused, the nurse said, “I’m sorry, but what exactly would you like me to do?” “You know,” repeated Friedman, “go over to the window and describe what you see.”

The nurse looked back at Mr. Friedman with a blank stare. “Mr. Friedman, I am very sorry, but there is no window in this room.”

Friedman remained silent. “What do you mean? Don’t play around with me. There’s no way that can be! Every morning, Lefkowitz would tell me in such great detail everything that was going on!” Asking the nurse to help him out of bed, Friedman proceeded to inch his way towards Lefkowitz’s bed and begin touching the wall all around in search of a window. “Yet, he could not find one anywhere.

And then Friedman realized. “I cannot believe it. For an entire year, Lefkowitz stood by a wall and pretended it was a window? He was describing such spectacular sights when all he was doing was looking at a wall!” Friedman could not believe that this was true, but in fact, it was.

Now at the funeral of Mr. Lefkowitz, Friedman asked if he could say a few words. “If the Jewish nation knew who Mr. Lefkowitz was, this would
be a funeral similar to the funeral for the greatest of leaders. And that is because my dear friend, Mr. Lefkowitz, did something for me that no one could imagine. Every single day for the past year, he would sit in front of a wall and turn it into a window. He would share a beautiful world with me that even when I could see, I didn't see. I will forever be grateful and indebted to him. He not only turned the physical wall in front of me into a window; he turned my life, which was a wall, into a window.”

Every single Jew holds the capability of taking somebody else’s wall and making it a window. We can take the wall of one who is undergoing a challenging time and create a window full of breathtaking color and opportunity. We can become the artists who add color to the dark life of a fellow Jew who is distant from Hashem, depressed or grumpy and enlighten their world to the true beauty of life and its endless potential. And even if we ourselves do not have our own window, but struggle with our own problems and have our own wall to deal with, we can take that wall which we, along with so many others stare into, and turn it into a window of beauty, of opportunity and of life meaning.

Rabbi Daniel Glatstein
The Amazing Discovery

"אל שם מקדש והודות בורח ח implode על המטרה במטרה
These are the ten plagues which the Holy One, Blessed be He, brought upon the Egyptians in Egypt"

What was Hashem trying to demonstrate by performing countless miracles and striking all of Egypt with plagues?

As illustrated by Pharaoh's response to Yosef after Yosef interpreted his prophetic dreams, “Could we find another man like him in whom there is the spirit of G-d?” (Bereishis 41:38), it appears that Pharaoh was not a complete heretic. While he certainly doubted Hashem, there was something about G-d which he recognized. Yet what was it exactly? What did Pharaoh believe in and what did he not?

The Arizal (Shaar HaKavanos) and Shelah HaKadosh (Parshas Va’eiros) write that Hashem is referred to by two names — Elokim and Yud-Kay-Vav-Kay. Elokim refers to G-d’s ability to set nature into motion and create natural processes. The numerical value of “HaTeva,” nature, is in fact 86, the same as “Elokim”. The natural workings of the physical world were something Pharaoh believed in and accepted. Hashem’s four-letter ineffable name of Y-K-V-K, on the other hand, refers to His ability to override the system of nature. That was something Pharaoh did not acknowledge.

In this vein, we can greater appreciate a marvelous insight as noted by Rav Pinchas Zalman Ish Horowitz in his sefer Ahavas Torah. Looking to determine how many times Hashem’s four-letter name appeared in the Torah, he came up with the number 1,820.

But Rav Horowitz did not stop there. He writes how he went on to count the number of words in the Haggadah from Ha Lachma Ania through the concluding blessing in the Maggid section, and amazingly arrived at 1,820 words.

There are the same number of words in the Haggadah as there are mentions of Hashem’s four-letter name of Y-K-V-K in the Torah.

What is the significance of this?

As mentioned above, Pharaoh believed G-d to be the source of natural occurrences, but not capable of overriding nature. He believed in Elokim, but rejected Y-K-V-K. However, as Pharaoh witnessed outright, he was terribly mistaken. Hashem is the all-powerful G-d Who can break the forces of nature. This is the hidden message of the Haggadah. Corresponding to every word of the Haggadah is the four-letter name of Hashem overriding nature and teaching the world that G-d exists. While Pharaoh says, “Who is Hashem?” the Haggadah says, “I am Hashem.”

Rabbanit Yemima Mizrachi
A Message Just for You

"אבסע אלהים הוה
It is the finger of G-d"

At my grandson’s Pidyon HaBen, a photographer from Beitar was present taking pictures of his parents and me holding him. While our entire family was overjoyed by the occasion and numerous pictures were taken, little did I know what impact one such picture would have thousands of miles away.

Later that week, a student of mine, who routinely attends my Thursday classes, approached me. “Rabbanit, I have to thank you.” I was unsure what she was referring to, until she explained.
She had grown up in a religious home in Beitar, yet as she grew older, unfortunately drifted away from her strict adherence to Yiddishkeit. It was just the other day that she had taken a trip to Thailand and thought of doing something she would later regret. All of a sudden, though, her phone buzzed. Looking downwards, she noticed that she had received a picture from the photographer who had earlier taken pictures at my grandson’s Pidyon HaBen. The photographer was her neighbor and figured that since she was a student of mine, she would appreciate having a picture of her teacher happily holding her grandson on such a momentous occasion.

“When I saw your picture,” she continued, “I immediately thought to myself, ‘How can I do something like this when I am going to see the Rabbanit on Thursday! How will I be able to look her in the face?’”

“And so,” she concluded, “I immediately changed my mind and walked away from what I wanted to do. I am forever grateful for having seen that picture of you, Rabbanit. Thank you.”

Through the click of a finger on a button, Hashem was sending this girl a message. “Never forget who you are. You are My beautiful daughter with a pristine neshama and you are never alone. Even at the threshold of sin and disconnection from Me, I will look after you and send you messages. All you must do is answer the call.”

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**Rabbi Lazer Brody**

**Emuna from a Tattoo**

A s a rabbi once delivered a lecture at the Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, he asked if anyone was familiar with the word *emuna*. One boy raised his hand and said, “Emuna means complete belief in G-d.” The rabbi thought that perhaps the boy was religious, and so he continued to ask, “Did you go to yeshiva?” “No,” he replied. “Are your parents religious?” “No,” he said again. “Well, how then did you ever hear of *emuna*?”

Getting up in front of the class, the boy went on to explain. “A couple of weeks ago, my friends and I took a road trip from Cleveland to New Orleans. On our way, we stopped off in Alabama and entered a restaurant. As we sat down, a waitress noticed my Magen David. ‘You are wearing a Magen David,’ she said, ‘you must be Jewish.’ ‘Yes I am,’ I responded. ‘Want to see something?’ the woman continued to ask. ‘Look at this!’ Extending her arm, she pointed to a tattoo spelling *emuna*.

“As I looked at the word on her arm, I wondered what in fact it could mean. ‘Is that your name?’ I asked. The waitress stared back at me. ‘You mean you don’t know what *emuna* is? It means complete faith in G-d,’ she explained.

“And so,” the boy concluded telling the class, “that was my first introduction to the word *emuna* and how I learned what it means.”

Now you may be wondering why a woman in Alabama would have a tattoo spelling *emuna* on her arm. So allow me to reveal the secret.

Two months before this boy from Case Western Reserve University met this waitress, I received an email from her:

**Dear Rabbi Brody,**

Allow me to share the following with you. For some time now, I have lived in Alabama and gone out with a rich boy who worked in a big law firm and drove a fancy car. After a while, we decided we would get married. I was thrilled. He promised that he would buy me a big, white mansion up on a hill in Birmingham. I was going to live luxuriously with everything I have ever wanted. But then, all of a sudden, he left me. My heart was broken, and I was depressed. Life was over for me.

But then, the owner of the restaurant where I work said to me, “You look depressed; here, read a book. It’s called ‘The Garden of Emuna.’” I took the book and read it from cover to cover.

But, Rabbi, I have a question. How can G-d have done something like this to me? How could He allow the man of my dreams to leave me like that? I am devastated and my dreams are shattered.

Thank you,

Ms. _____

After reading this email, I wrote back to her:

“This is what I wrote: Sometimes in life, we do not understand the whole picture. But we must remain living with emuna. And perhaps, in fact, some day you will find out why this occurred.”

**Lazer Brody**

Two weeks later, I received another email from the waitress with a link leading to an online newspaper article from the Birmingham Gazette. Along with the link, she wrote the following:

**Rabbi Brody,**

I must tell you. Just the other day, my friend called me and said, “Did you read..."
about that boy who left you in the Birmingham Gazette? They just caught him involved in illegal business dealings. He is no lawyer; he needs a lawyer.”

I couldn’t believe it. Here I thought G-d had abandoned me, when in fact, He was looking after me the entire time. I now understand that everything G-d does is for the best. It was the biggest blessing that this boy left me.

And in fact, I was so inspired that I looked up to heaven and said, “G-d, that book this rabbi wrote is true. You’re looking after us all the time. I have emuna.”

And so, I picked myself up and went to the tattoo shop and told them, “Put a tattoo on my arm and write e-m-u-n-a.”

So now, Rabbi, I have a tattoo on my arm which says emuna.

Sincerely,
Ms. _________

And now you know the rest of the story.

Even when a situation may look depressing and unfortunate, Hashem is always there. Sometimes we just have to wait and see. Emuna can be learned from the strangest of places. Yes, even from a tattoo.

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Rabbi Mordechai Becher
Shabbat Shalom

Growing up in a non-observant home, Dave wound up in yeshiva at Ohr Somayach. As time progressed, he began observing Shabbat and growing in his understanding of Torah and mitzvot. After spending a period of time in yeshiva, he decided that he would return home to his parents.

“If you return home,” a rabbi of his explained, “it will be very difficult for you to observe Shabbat. There you have no rabbi, no shul and a non-observant home. We recommend that you stay here for longer.” After some back and forth, Dave chose to leave.

Finally at home, Shabbat was to begin in just a few hours. “What am I going to do? Stay at home all day?” Dave wondered. “My parents watch television, and it will be very challenging for me to keep Shabbat.” And so, he turned to G-d. “G-d, if everything they taught me in yeshiva is true, please give me a sign. If You give me a sign, I promise I will keep Shabbat for the rest of my life.”

Shabbat began, but no sign. “You know what G-d? I’ll give you an extension until midnight. If by midnight You give me a sign, I will not break Shabbat.” Came midnight, but no sign. “Okay G-d, I’ll give you one more extension so you won’t say I’m unfair. 12:15.” Fifteen minutes later, still no sign. And with the click of a button, on went the television.

As Dave turned the television on, he immediately came across the David Letterman show. Friday night at 12:15 am, David Letterman was interviewing Tom Hanks, a well-known filmmaker. “So,” David Letterman asked his guest, “what have you been up to lately?” “I just got back from Israel,” Tom replied. “Oh really, did you learn any Hebrew?” “In fact, I did.” Turning towards the camera, Tom said, “Shabbat Shalom Dave!”

Dave was shocked as he stared into the television. With his very own eyes he had just seen exactly what he needed: Shabbat Shalom Dave!

Sometimes we are looking and looking all over the place for a message, yet we seem to be unable to find it. But then the switch goes on and lights up right before us exactly what we needed to see and hear. “I am here,” Hashem says, “make sure you don’t forget.”

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Rabbi Zev Leff
The Greatest Blessing

When Hashem wished to impress upon the Jewish people the greatness of the Land of Israel prior to their entry, He said, “For the Land to which you come is not like the land of Egypt…it is a Land of hills and valleys; from the rain of heaven will it drink water” (Devarim 11:10-11). As underscored by this passage, there exists a great difference between the Land of Egypt and the Land of Israel. While the Nile River overflows and provides a readily available water supply to all of Egypt, Israel is a land of hills and mountains and its only water supply is rain. If, however, it does not rain, there will inevitably be a shortage of water.

But it seems strange. If Hashem intended on convincing the Jewish people to enter a new land, such a presentation does not appear to be the greatest sales pitch. Why would telling them that the land they are entering is unlike Egypt because there is a shortage of water be an encouraging reason to go
there? Hearing this, one would in fact be inclined to turn around and return to Egypt.

While I was a Rav in Miami, a congregant of mine taught Hebrew in the local public high school. One day, she called me with a dilemma. She was afraid that a seventeen-year-old boy in her class who had tried to commit suicide twice unsuccessfully, would try a third time and, on this occasion, be successful. “Nobody is able to get through to him,” she told me, “would you like to try?” I told her to bring him to me and I would do my best.

As the boy walked into my office, I took one look at him and my heart sank. I had never seen a sadder human being in my life. “You are only seventeen years old,” I said to him; “what has happened in your short life that you look so depressed and despondent and you are ready to take your own life?” He proceeded to tell me, “My father raised me alone after my mother abandoned us when I was an infant. My father, a very wealthy man, has however recently met someone he intends to marry. The woman agreed, but on one very clear condition: I am not in the picture.

“A few weeks ago, my father called me over and handed me a set of keys. ’I bought you a very plush, fully furnished apartment in a nice neighborhood in Miami. It is yours; enjoy it.’ He then took out another set of keys and said, ‘You are going to need transportation; I bought you a sports car. Here are the keys; enjoy it.’ From his wallet, he then took out a credit card on his name and said, ‘If you need food, clothing or entertainment, just put it on the card. But please do me one favor: don’t call or visit me. It has been nice knowing you, but I will no longer be seeing you and you will no longer be seeing me. Goodbye.’”

As I considered the life circumstances of this young man, I thought to myself, “If I had my own apartment, sports car and unlimited credit, I don’t think I would be suicidal.” I felt like telling him that everyone comes into this world with their own set of challenges. You have your problems an unlimited credit card, car or apartment, but ourselves. Because when they have that, they have everything.

As we enter the holiday of Pesach and enjoy the unique opportunity of spending special time with our family, we would be wise to remember one idea. What our children yearn for most is a relationship with us as their parents. The most precious gift we can give them is not the unlimited credit card, car or apartment, but ourselves. Because when they have that, they have everything.

**Rabbi Gavriel Friedman**

**One Penny**

If you were to be offered $347,000 or the value of one penny doubled every day over the course of thirty days, which one would you choose?

Let’s say you choose the penny. Now what if you would be offered $1 million or the value of the penny doubled for thirty days?

Still the penny? What if you would be offered $2.5 million or the penny? 4 million? 5 million?

If you’ve stayed with choosing the penny this long, you’re doing well.

One penny doubled for thirty days is: $5,368,709.12. Just imagine.

Pesach is a time when, like Hashem did in Egypt, we can make quantum leaps. It is the time when we can go above and beyond ourselves and achieve the extraordinary. Yet, how can we practically achieve this? The answer is simple. In life, we tend to dream about the big and major accomplishments. Yet we cannot forget that it is the small, consistent things which grow over time and eventually add up to something we never imagined. One penny added up day after day is more than five million. And that’s just one penny.
Rabbi Benzion Klatzko

Seeing the Blessing

লেফক আনহত হিবস লহোড়া লহলল লেশয়াল...কলর

Therefore, we are obligated to give thanks, to extol, to praise… to bless

When my wife and I decided to move from Jerusalem to Boro Park, my father-in-law agreed to give us his old brown station wagon to drive. After a while of using his worn-out car, I mentioned to my wife that maybe we should consider buying a newer and nicer car.

Surprisingly, not too much later, I noticed an ad announcing that a car auction was being held in Queens, New York. It was a Police and Bank Reclamation auction where cars were being sold for pennies on the dollar. The ad mentioned that a down-payment of a quarter of the car’s price needed to be provided immediately, while the remaining amount paid by the following week. At the time, I was learning in Kollel and had just about $1,000 in savings. And so, off we headed to the auction to see what we could find.

As we arrived and began imagining how just about every car could suit our family’s needs, my wife asked where I had put the money I brought along. “In my pocket,” I replied. “Don’t leave it there,” she cautioned, “someone might pickpocket you!” Telling her not to worry, I explained how I had already taken preventive measures by crunching the money up and sticking it deep into my pocket. On top of the money, I placed several paper towels. “If anyone tries to reach into my pocket,” I told her, “by the time they get through all the paper towels, I will feel it.” But my wife wasn’t too thrilled. “I’m really not comfortable!” After a little back and forth, my wife relented and the money remained in my pocket beneath a stack of paper towels.

Five minutes into the auction, as I excitedly stood in the front row, I felt a tap on my shoulder. “Excuse me, sir,” a man said, “but I think someone just went into your pocket.” As I heard those words, my stomach dropped. I put my hand in my pocket and began to feel paper towels, paper towels, paper towels… paper towels. That was it. Within five minutes, a thousand dollars was gone. Turning to my wife who had begged me to put the money in my shoe, I said, “I think we have to go home now; I was just pickpocketed.”

Waiting for her to begin yelling and screaming, I was surprised to hear nothing. She didn’t say a word. As we headed back to our past, and now future, beat-up brown station wagon, I could only think, “Now, I’m really going to get it.” But then she inhaled and said, “Don’t feel bad; it’s from Hashem.” I was not expecting that reaction in the least. “Everybody can make a mistake. It’s okay.” The entire way home, my wife tried to calm me down and make me feel better. When we finally pulled into the driveway, I turned to her and said, “I will never forget what you did today. I will always stand by you, and you can count on me. You had every right in the world to yell and scream at me, but you didn’t. Thank you so much.”

For years, I always wished to somehow repay my wife for the understanding and care she had shown me that day.

A short while before my younger sister planned on getting married in Cleveland, I mentioned to my wife the thought of getting a new suit. She agreed to my idea, and so I began a quest to find the suit of my dreams. I went from one store to the next, yet struggled to find what I was looking for. Finally, though, I found it. It was even better than what I had imagined.

The day before the wedding, my wife called me and said, “Please do me a favor. As soon as you come home tonight, let’s start driving to Cleveland. I think we should leave before it gets too late. I already packed your clothing, my clothing and the kids’ clothing.” “Sounds great,” I said. And so it was. Half an hour after returning home, we were on our way to Cleveland.

The next day at noon, I received a phone call from my father. “All the children and grandchildren need to be in the wedding hall in an hour all dressed and ready for family pictures.” As soon as I hung up the phone, I stopped my wife and asked where she had packed my suit. Pulling out the luggage, she began looking. “Looking, looking, looking, looking...looking.” She then ran to the car and looked some more. “Don’t feel bad. It’s from Hashem.” I was not expecting that reaction in the least. “Everybody can make a mistake. It’s okay.” The entire way home, my wife tried to calm me down and make me feel better. When we finally pulled into the driveway, I turned to her and said, “I will never forget what you did today. I will always stand by you, and you can count on me. You had every right in the world to yell and scream at me, but you didn’t. Thank you so much.”

As I started thinking how I had spent a week searching for the suit and paid a fortune, my mind flashed back to years earlier. And then it hit me. The auction moment had arrived. Immediately, I told my wife, “Listen, don’t feel bad. I actually drove here in another suit and it will be fine.” I then quickly got ready and put myself together.

On my way back from washing up, I noticed that the door to the room my family was staying in was halfway open. Peeking inside, I saw my wife sitting on the bed with our children around her. “I need to tell you something about tatty,” she gently whispered. “This is his sister’s wedding and he bought a new suit. It was so important to him and he spent a lot of money and time to get it. But I made a mistake and I didn’t bring the suit. Do you know what many tattys would have done? They would have gotten angry and yelled. But not your tatty; he didn’t get angry, yell or make me feel bad.
Kinderlach, gather around me. I want to give each of you a beracha that you grow up to be just like your father.”

And with that, as our children stood in a row, she placed her hands on their heads and gave each of them the blessing customarily given on Shabbos, “Yesimcha Elokim k’Ephraim V’k’Menashe – May Hashem make you like Ephraim and Menashe.”

Every person has blessing in their life. Sometimes, however, we just have to open our eyes a little more and see. If we want, we can choose to see the negative and yell at our spouse, children and friends. But we would be much wiser and happier if we would positively look upon all that happens and see the blessing. And in fact, that is the best way to model behavior for our children. When they see how we treat others with respect and patience, they will look to follow in our ways and do the same. And when they do so, that is the greatest blessing we can have as parents.

Rabanit Amit Yaghoubi
The Family Reunion

In the early 1900s, while bleak financial situations beset Europe, life was challenging. Still though, many families worked on raising enough money to send one of their children, often the eldest, to America. It was in America where opportunities for a brighter future were hopeful. Of course, procuring sufficient funds was trying, but it was something many families dreamed of doing. The goal was to send each child in the family across the ocean one at a time.

One such family, who managed to save up their last nickels and dimes, decided to send their eldest daughter to America. With tears in their eyes, the parents of Anya, a sixteen-year old girl, said goodbye to their daughter. While Anya wished to remain with her family, her parents reassured her that everything would work out. In fact, they planned to eventually send over her other siblings until the entire family would unite in America. And so, all alone, young Anya journeyed across the ocean to America where a new life awaited her.

Anya arrived in Baltimore, Maryland, where she was met by her cousins who took her in and helped her adjust to a new life. She slowly began to learn the language, go to school and educate herself. Meanwhile, letters were sent from her parents back home informing her of joyous occasions, such as her sister’s marriage, brother’s bar mitzvah and the birth of a new nephew. As the years went by and Anya grew more accustomed to her new life, she wrote back home:

Dear Family,

Everything is going well here. I have grown comfortable and adjusted quite well. I miss you all very much and would love for you all to come to America. I will teach you everything you need to know, you need not worry at all.

Love,
Anya

Sealing the envelope, Anya addressed the letter to her family back in Europe and sent it off, eagerly anticipating their reply.

But it never came.

Waiting week after week, Anya began wondering why her family hadn’t written back. And then she heard the rumor. There was a war in Europe and letters were being censored. But that wasn’t the worst news. A few days later, Anya learned from a former neighbor that her entire family had tragically perished.

Anya didn’t know what to say or do. Here she had been anticipating reuniting with her family and building a future life in America with them, but now it all came to a halt. Anya was now left as a young woman without any immediate family.

But Anya was determined. She would not allow this tragedy to depress her, but rebuild her. She would get married and name each of her children after her lost siblings, some of whom she had barely known. And sure enough, after some time, she met a lovely young man who shared the same values and aspirations as she did and got married.

Excited to begin building her family’s life, she eagerly awaited the birth of a child. But as one year went by, and two years, and then three years and still no child, Anya began to worry. After seeing numerous doctors, Anya was sadly informed that she was incapable of having children. Now, she was utterly devastated. Her dreams of rebuilding her family would never materialize.

Eight years later, after seeing countless doctors and undergoing dozens of tests, she finally told her husband, “Maybe we should consider adoption.” He agreed. Anya and her husband proceeded to phone the Jewish adoption agency in New York, which to their delight, had a newborn baby up for adoption. A young mother was unable to care for her baby and wished to give it up. Heading to New York at their earliest possibility, Anya and her husband soon found themselves holding a little newborn baby in their arms.

It was not before long, though, that the adoption agency broke the news to Anya and her husband. “We are very sorry to tell you, but the grandmother has
decided to raise the child. The infant is no longer up for adoption."

Although disappointed to find out that they had made an unnecessary trip, Anya and her husband figured that perhaps they would see if any other child was available for adoption. "We do have another girl up for adoption," the agency said. "Her name is Miriam and she is eight years old." Although excited for a moment, Anya quickly told the agency, "Thank you very much for the offer, but we are looking for a newborn. We would rather not take an eight-year-old child." But the agency prevailed upon Anya and her husband to at least meet Miriam, to which they agreed. And, indeed, Miriam seemed very sweet and considerate. She found a special place in their heart, but their feelings did not change. "We really cannot take her," Anya repeated. "We are looking for a little baby, someone who will only know us as their parents." And so, without further delay, Anya and her husband traveled back to Baltimore.

One year later, and still childless, Anya turned to her husband and said, "Maybe we should have adopted that little girl. She really was sweet. Here we are a year later and still have no children. Do you think she is still available?" With her husband agreeing to contact the adoption agency once again, Anya went on to inquire about Miriam. And sure enough, she was still available. But, now, there was one added factor.

"You are welcome to take Miriam," the agency said, "but there is one complication. Her six-year-old brother found his way to our orphanage and he is inseparable from her. We promised that we would find a home for them both together." Although adopting two children was not something Anya had considered, it was neither an option she was ready to dismiss. "We’ll come and meet them both," she told the agency.

Traveling back to New York, Anya and her husband met the now nine-year-old Miriam and her six-year-old brother, Moshe. The two children were shy and reserved, but adorable. Immediately falling in love with them, Anya and her husband agree to take them both. They went on to pack the children’s suitcases with their few belongings and head home.

After arriving at home, Miriam and Moshe slowly entered inside as their new father carried their suitcases into their rooms. It was a completely new environment for Miriam and Moshe, who could do no more than stand motionless and look around. Within minutes, Miriam began exploring the house, taken by the new scenery. But then, all of a sudden, she stopped and began to stare. Something had caught her attention; something she couldn't take her eyes off.

"Why do you have a picture of my bubbby on your piano?" Miriam asked Anya. Anya, lovingly staring down at Miriam and the picture of her mother, assumed that Miriam must have thought that all ladies from Europe looked like that.

Gently laying her hand on Miriam’s shoulder, Anya softly whispered, “This is a picture of my mother. Do you miss your bubbby?” But Miriam simply repeated, “That is a picture of my bubbby.” Continuing to try and comfort Miriam, Anya soothingly said, “It is okay, you can miss your bubbby.” But nothing seemed to help.

Suddenly, Miriam broke loose from Anya and ran into her room. Tearing open her suitcase, she grabbed a hold of a picture and ran back to Anya. “You have the same picture as I do,” Miriam said. As Miriam pulled out the picture of her bubbby, Anya looked on incredulously. “That’s my mother,” Anya gasped.

“You want to see a picture of my mother?” asked Miriam. Taking out a tattered, old photo, she handed it to Anya. With tears in her eyes, Anya looked closer. “Sarah? This is my sister.”

Anya had unknowingly adopted her sister’s two children.

While we can never know Hashem's plans for certain, we can rest assured that He is always looking after us. Imagine if Anya had been able to have children, or if she would have adopted the first baby… Putting our trust in Hashem and believing that in our own personal lives and the affairs of the world there is a Divine plan, we may pleasantly be surprised to one day experience something we never thought we would. And just sometimes, that may mean reuniting with our long-lost beloved family.
Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Who am I?


He raises the destitute from the dust; from the trash heaps, He uplifts the impoverished

Rav Shimon Shkop, in the preface to his brilliant sefer Shaarei Yosher, writes that each of us is defined by our “אני,” who “I am. For some people, their sense of self – their “אני” – includes me, myself and I. The scope of their care and concern is confined to themselves. For others, their “אני” expands and includes more than just themselves. It incorporates their wife, children, grandchildren and family relatives. And yet for others, their “I” extends to their neighbors, community and friends. A friend’s joy or sorrow is felt personally and identified with.

But, above all else, who is the true adam gadol? What is the measure of the greatest of people? It is the individual whose “אני” includes all of Klal Yisrael. It is the person who cares not only about themselves, their wife, their children, their friends and their community, but the world. It is the one whose heart goes out for a fellow Jew he has never met, never heard of and lives on the other side of the world.

With this, explains Rav Shimon, we can fully appreciate the profound words of Hillel, “If I am not for myself, what I am? And when I am for myself, what am I?” (Pirkei Avos 1:14). Of course, we must take care of our own needs, for if we do not, we will struggle throughout our journey in life. But if that is the extent of who we are and if that is how far our “I” reaches, then what are we? The true adam gadol is the one who realizes that life is not only about himself, but about others.

Now you may be thinking, “But, I am not in the position to solve other people’s problems!” And that may be true. You may not be able to find someone a job, get their child into yeshiva or seminary, give them a baby or get them married. But there is something we all can do. We all can pick up the phone and give someone a call, reminding them that we are thinking about them and that they are not alone. And that is the definition of a great person: thinking about somebody else.

Let me give you an example of someone who thought about someone else when it is not so common to do so.

Years ago, a woman working as a pediatric emergency room physician made aliyah to Israel. One day, while working in the pediatric ward, in walked a woman. But she was not just any woman. She was a bride on the day of her wedding. One day, while working in the pediatric ward, in walked a woman. But she was not just any woman. She was a bride on the day of her wedding. How did the physician know this to be true? Because she walked in fully dressed in her gown.

If you can remember when you, your sister or your daughter were a kallah, there is one thought which stands out on the day of the wedding. The mascara must be perfect; it cannot be smudged in the slightest. Understandably so, brides on the day of their wedding tend to be into themselves.

But, as this kallah walked into the emergency room, she had a different agenda in mind. “What can I do for you?” asked the physician. “A kallah on the day of her wedding has the power to give blessings,” the woman said. “I would like to give each and every child in this room a refuah sheleimah (complete recovery)!”, and said, “May Hashem and the angels always be with you and your children and your children’s children forever.”

A show of mutual compassion and final appreciation from a zaidy, a grandfather, and a little girl. That is what parenting is all about. It is about the little moments of kindness and gratitude and letting a child know that you hear and that you care and will be there forever with a legacy for life. Indeed, each of our children shine forth like a bright star and deserve to be applauded for all that they do.

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On a day when it would be most expected to think about oneself, this kallah was different. It was not simply “her day;” it was the day of each and every sick child in that hospital. This is what it means to step out of your own world and care for your fellow Jew as yourself. And that indeed is greatness.

Rabbi Chaim Dahan
The Perfect Prayer

He transforms the barren wife into a glad mother of children

Rabbi Nachman Bulman, having originally grown up in Manhattan, moved to Israel in 1975 with his family. Known for his inspiring Torah classes, large crowds used to gather and eagerly listen to his every word.

After one such class, a woman approached Rabbi Bulman. “Rabbi, can I talk to you privately?” “Sure,” Rabbi Bulman answered, “how can I help you?” “I have now been married for over eight years,” the woman said, “and I do not have any children. Could you please give me a blessing?”

Listening to the heartfelt plea of the woman, Rabbi Bulman replied, “It is not so simple to give an effective blessing to have a child. I think you should instead go to someone greater than me and ask for a blessing.” But the woman was persistent. “Rabbi, I do not know anybody and I want a blessing from you. I come to your class every week; please give me a blessing!”

Torn by the sincere words of the woman, Rabbi Bulman stood there, unsure of what to do. “I will make you a deal,” he said. “I do not feel that I am on the level that my blessings for such an important matter should help, but let us arrange something. I have a daughter who lives in Atlanta, Georgia, and has been married for ten years without any children. Let us make a switch. I will give you her name and you will pray for her to have a child, and you will give me your name and I will pray for you to have a child. We do not need to tell anyone else about this. With G-d’s help, our prayers will one day be answered. As Chazal teach, ‘One who prays for his friend when he himself has the same problem, he will be answered first’” (Bava Kama 92a).

For two years, Rabbi Bulman heard nothing from or about the woman. Yet, one day, he received a phone call from his daughter in Atlanta. “Rabbi,” said a woman on the other line, “do you remember? Two years ago, I mentioned to you that I was unable to have children and you offered me a suggestion.”

“Sure, I remember,” replied Rabbi Bulman. “I just wanted to tell you that I have friends in Atlanta, Georgia, and for the past two years I have been keeping tabs on your daughter and inquiring about her. Just today, I heard the wonderful news that your daughter had a baby girl. Mazel Tov! I am so happy for you and your family.”

Rabbi Bulman was delighted to hear from this woman after so long. “Thank you so much for calling. Your thoughtfulness is much appreciated,” he said.

“But Rabbi,” continued the woman, “I have something else to tell you. I also had a baby. Four days ago, I gave birth to a baby boy.”

This woman living in Israel, and Rabbi Bulman’s daughter living in Atlanta, both gave birth, one to a baby girl and one to a baby boy, on the very same day.

Thinking about a fellow Jew and offering them our sincerest encouragement, comfort and deepest prayers does more than we might expect. For these women who had never before cuddled a child of their own, a miracle occurred. And it was all because one Jew thought of another.

Rabbi Mashiach Kelaty
In Your Merit

When the Jewish people left Egypt, the house of Jacob...
Aharon, took the drum in her hand and all the women went forth after her with drums and dances” (Shemot 15:20). Following this, in the very next Pasuk, the Torah continues to relate how Miriam rallied the women together in song, “And Miriam spoke up to them, ‘Sing to Hashem for He is exalted above the arrogant; He hurled horse with its rider into the sea’” (ibid. v. 21).

Upon analyzing this passage, it is unclear what exactly Miriam said which prompted the women to sing praise to Hashem. What did she mean when proclaiming to the Jewish women, “Sing to Hashem for He is exalted above the arrogant; He hurled horse with its rider into the sea”?

Moreover, in examining this verse, one aspect particularly stands out: “He hurled horse with its rider into the sea.” While it is understandable that the Egyptian riders drowned in the Yam Suf, what did the horses do to deserve drowning as well?

I once heard a beautiful idea in explanation. Chazal tell us, “In the merit of the righteous women of that generation, the Jewish people were redeemed from Egypt” (Sotah 11b). Besides bolstering Klal Yisrael’s spiritual level and population growth throughout the long and harsh exile, the Jewish women remained firmly convinced that Hashem would one day redeem them. It was in the merit of such self-sacrifice and belief that the entire nation was released from slavery.

When the Jewish people left Egypt and the men took the lead in the forefront, the women began to wonder what had happened. “Wasn’t Klal Yisrael freed in our merit? We should receive equal glory as the men!” It was in response to this that Miriam answered, “Do not think that you are any less important than the men and any less a part of the redemption. To the contrary, it was rightfully in your merit that we were redeemed. Just look at the fate of the Egyptian horses. Why did they drown? Because they enabled the Egyptians to reach us at the Yam Suf. If not for the horses, the Egyptians would not have been able to pursue us. The same is true of us all. Had we not facilitated the redemption and enabled it to come to fruition, we would still be in Egypt. On that account, we have all the reason to be proud and exult.”

We would be greatly remiss were we to overlook the tremendous degree of gratitude we owe our wives, mothers, daughters and sisters for making such a Yom Tov possible. For over three thousand years, they have been the stronghold of Klal Yisrael on all fronts. Creating the infrastructure of the Jewish home within and without, in their merit we were redeemed from Egypt, and in their merit we will soon herald our future redemption.

Rachtzah

Rabbi Yisroel Belsky zt"l

The Diamond Ring

Years ago, a student of mine bought a house from a non-Jewish woman who was getting on in her years. As the elderly lady was about to leave the house for the last time, she confessed in the young man that she had once lost a diamond ring inside but never found it.

Shortly after moving in, my student decided to make a number of repairs to the kitchen and repaint the walls. And so, he called a repair company and asked them to evaluate the work entailed and offer a price quote.

A few days later, a repair man made his way over to inspect the house. Walking all around, he eventually wandered over to the sink in the kitchen. The sink was quite old and clearly in need of replacing. Fidgeting with the sink, the repair man soon noticed a ring pop out. Surprised by the discovery, he brought the matter to my student’s attention, who figured that the ring must belong to the woman who had previously owned the house.

When I received a call later from my student asking what to do, I told him that it would be a tremendous Kiddush Hashem (sanctification of G-d’s name) to return it. And so, he did. When the elderly woman heard what had happened, she was beside herself. She could not stop thanking him again and again for his kindness. For some time afterwards, different members of the woman’s family called to thank him. “Thank you so much,” they all said, “G-d bless you. You made grandma so happy.” Pleased that he could help and be the source of a Kiddush Hashem, he was surprised when he received one final call. This time it was not a family member; it was the priest.

“I just wanted to say that blessed be the G-d of the Jews.”

In Judaism, one simple physical act can have the greatest of spiritual ramifications. Whether it be returning a lost item, making a Kiddush Hashem or washing our hands with water to purify them, we can never underestimate the impact and effect of our actions. And, of course, on a most practical level, if you remove your rings when washing your hands for Netillas Yadayim, be sure to put them in a safe place... Otherwise, you might return next year for Pesach cleaning and surprisingly find somewhere hidden in your sink a diamond ring.
Dr. David Pelcovitz

Saving a Life

Y
ears ago, after briefly speaking about the life and times of the Piacesner Rebbe, a man came over to me with tears in his eyes. “The reason I am alive today is because of the Rebbe,” he said. “One night during the war, my father who was then thirteen years old fell asleep next to a window, allowing a cold draft to make its way in.

“In the middle of the night, my father opened his eyes only to see the Piacesner Rebbe gently approach his cot and move him away from the chill to the middle of the room. The Rebbe then tucked my father in again and tiptoed away.”

But that is not the end of the story.

“Two years later, on the fateful day the Piacesner Rebbe and his students were taken to meet their end, my father stood in the selection line. And he knew what that meant. He was puny and malnourished and would almost certainly be sent to his demise.

“But just as they were about to direct him to the gas chambers, an SS guard ran out and began loudly announcing, ‘Carpenters, carpenters, I need carpenters! Could anyone volunteer?’ My father thought to himself, ‘I am a klutzy young boy who can barely hammer a nail into a piece of wood. Forget it.’ So he decided he would not say anything.

“But then, almost involuntarily, an image flashed through his mind of two years earlier. He remembered the Rebbe so gently and lovingly moving him away from the cold and tucking him in. And then he thought to himself, ‘I am somebody! I am worth something! I am not just here one day and gone the next. The Rebbe cared enough about me to tuck me in…’ And so, my father raised his hand.

“The SS guard selected my father to be a carpenter and his fellow Jews protected him. They taught him the trade and he survived.

“Many times during those horrible years,” the man concluded, “my father was on the verge of despair. But, just as he was about to give up, the image of the loving tuck of the Piacesner Rebbe came forward to save him.”

Even the smallest of loving gestures can go far beyond our greatest expectations. We can never know, but just sometimes, it may in fact save a life. As we now prepare to eat the matzah, it would behoove us to take a moment and reflect upon its meaning. It is the bread of affliction, yet also the bread of faith and freedom. Because even amid the darkest of conditions, Hashem deeply loves us and cares for us and will surely one day save us.

Rabbi Yehoshua Hartman

The Holiday of the Belt

As IDF commandos carried out the hostage-rescue mission at Entebbe airport in Uganda on July 4, 1976, a near death scare turned into another chance at life. Taking place at night, Operation Entebbe successfully rescued over one hundred hostages from the airport building they were locked in within a mere ninety minutes. The hostages were loaded onto a plane and safely transported to Israel, saving many lives.

Among those taken hostage was a friend of mine, Chizkiyahu ben-Aran. While most of those whose lives hung in the balance probably did not get much sleep that night, Chizkiyahu was different. He went to sleep. At 1:30 am, he took off his glasses, watch and belt and lay down to rest, unsure of what was to come.

An hour and a half later, he awoke to the noise of Israeli soldiers. All those inside were told to quickly make their way to the airplane prepared to take them to Israel. As Chizkiyahu awoke to the frenzy, he hurriedly grabbed his glasses and watch. And then he looked for his belt. And then again. But he couldn't find it. Not ready to risk his life for a belt, he held onto his pants and raced to the airplane. Upon landing in Israel, the hostages were met by the media and throngs of people who took relief in their rescue.

One year later, I received a phone call from Chizkiyahu. “Would you like to come to a seudas hoda’ah (meal of thanks) I am making in honor of my rescue a year ago?” Of course I agreed to attend, but then Chizkiyahu added, “If you don’t mind, please come without a belt.” Chizkiyahu explained that he wished to commemorate the way in which he ran to the plane without a belt.

After arriving at his house with a number of other men, none of us could understand why Chizkiyahu was so obsessed about not wearing belts. And so, when Chizkiyahu stepped out of the house for a moment, we turned to his wife and asked for an explanation. “You should know,” she said, “that
there is no belt in our house now. Neither my husband, myself nor any of our children have belts. And in fact, he even gave this anniversary day a name. He named it Chag Ha’Chagurah, “The Holiday of the Belt.”

When the Jewish people left Egypt and did not have enough time to bake bread, they were left with matzos. From that time on, the Pesach holiday celebrated in commemoration has been called Chag Ha’Matzos. But it is quite interesting. Why do we have an entire Yom Tov focused upon the haste in which we left Egypt and its result that we were left with matzah? Isn’t the greater importance the fact that we went from slavery to freedom and not that we ate matzah? Why not name the Yom Tov after that aspect? While we find it odd that Chizkiyahu ben-Aran came up with the name “Chag Ha’Chagurah” based upon the minor detail and triviality of his belt, don’t we do the same by calling Pesach Chag Ha’Matzos?

The truth, however, is that the haste we experienced as we journeyed out of Egypt did not simply occur to us, but is what defines us and exemplifies who we are as a nation. More than three thousand years ago, we were born on this very night and it occurred amid haste. The beginning of our inception as a nation set the tone and bespeaks, as represented by the matzah, our eternal identity as an intrinsically timeless nation.

In the words of the Maharal, our leaving in haste allowed us to overcome time, because we were using less of it. We were not slaves to time, but masters of it. Just as matzos are made within a minimal amount of time, so do we, the Jewish people, exist above mundane and temporal considerations. In this vein, R’ Yehuda HaLevi poetically articulated, “עבדי זaman עבדי עבדים הוא לברוד חפיי – Slave of time are slaves of slaves; a slave of Hashem is a free person.” Many people are slaves to time. Time dictates their life and everything around it. Am Yisrael, however, transcends beyond time.

Someone who eats chametz, for this reason, is not simply failing to commemorate what food was eaten when we left Egypt; he is rather not commemorating who we are as a nation. Matzah is the physical manifestation of what happened to us spiritually when we speedily left Egypt and became unrestricted by time. It is this ever-important reality that we relive on this timeless night of Chag Ha’Matzot.

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**Maror**

Rabbi Fischel Schachter

*A Familiar Face*

בָרוּךְ אַתָּה ... אֲשֶׁר קִדְשָנוּ בְמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ עַל אֲכִילַת מָרוֹר

*Blessed are You… Who has sanctified us and commanded us concerning the eating of maror*

It was during those difficult and dark years in Auschwitz that the Nazis gathered together a group of girls and women and transported them in cattle cars to the hills to construct a dam. Stopping at the bottom of the hill, the women disembarked and began making the long trek all the way to the top. It was an exhausting walk of many kilometers, and yet it was only the beginning of their day’s work. Exerting themselves for hours on end, at the end of the day, they had to retrace their steps back down the hill.

On one occasion, one sixteen-year-old girl could no longer take it. Emaciated and weak, she told her friend that she would not be returning with her down the hill. Although she was well aware that such a decision would be endangering her life, she remained undeterred. “I cannot do it,” she said; “let them take my life if they so desire.” But her friend would not hear of such a thing.

“She, I am not leaving you here. You need to live and you are going to live!” “I can’t!” the girl persisted. “Okay, I will help you,” said her friend. Without delay, the sixteen-year-old girl was flung over her friend’s shoulders, herself tired and frail, and carried kilometers back to the cattle cars.

Fast forward forty years later…

_Mazel Tov! Mazel Tov!_ My daughter had become a _kallah_. Amid the feelings of joy pervading our home, in walked my mother, the _bubby_ of the _kallah_. With a smile on her face, she stood still, holding her walker and looking on at the many people who had gathered together for her granddaughter’s _vort_.

From the other side of the room, the grandmother of the _chassan_ entered. She too was elated to participate in the joyous occasion of her grandson’s _vort_. And then their eyes met. The grandmother of the _chassan_ looked at my mother, the grandmother of the _kallah_. It was a familiar face. Quite familiar… from forty years before.
“Mrs. Schachter,” called out the grandmother of the chassan, “throw away your walker. I will carry you.”

The grandmother of the chassan was none other than the friend who had carried my mother in Auschwitz and saved her life. The woman who had re-invigorated my mother and reminded her never to give up on life, no matter how difficult and dark it may seem, was later privileged to see the fruits of her encouraging words and tireless efforts. Reuniting together where they could share mutual nachas, they both realized that from the bitterest of moments, the happiest of moments had grown forth.

Never give up on life, even when it is your last breath, for you never know where that last breath may take you.

Rabbi Yossi Mizrachi
The Perfect Match

It was a beautiful day for one twelve-year-old girl who decided to take a walk and push her little sister sleeping in a stroller. However, that was about to change. A short distance away stood a number of boys who figured it would be fun to pick on her. And so, they began making their way over in her direction. The girl proceeded to stroll along, however, unaware of anything else going on beside her.

Yet, soon enough, there were the boys blocking her path for no other reason than to give her a hard time. Then they came up with another idea. They grabbed the stroller held tightly in her hands and thrust it away from her.

Now growing quite nervous, the girl remained helpless. Not far from them, stood another twelve-year-old boy who had been watching the entire scene unfold. He noticed the girl worrisome and nervous, and began running towards the group of boys, telling them that if they would not leave the poor girl alone and return the stroller, he would take action himself. As he firmly stood his ground and motioned to the girl to grab the stroller and run, the boys grew apprehensive and themselves began scurrying off.

While the girl took off running and soon turned the corner, a scuffle ensued between the twelve-year-old boy and the others. And before the boy knew it, he suffered a hit to the head, leaving a scratch on his forehead. Despite this, the boy continued to bravely face the other boys, ensuring that they would never again bother the girl. And with that, he returned home and ended an eventful day.

Years later, this same girl looked to get married. Meeting one boy after another, even after quite a while, she had still not found the right one. When a certain suggestion came from a shadchan, though, she decided to pursue it. And in fact, things went well. He was kind, considerate and sweet. Yet there was one detail which bothered her: his face. Appearing quite prominently on his forehead was a scar. Although he seemed to be a wonderful boy, the girl could not get over the scar which she stared at every time she looked at him.

Relating this fact to the shadchan, she was told to give the boy another chance.

Now sitting together for the second time, the boy had something to tell her. “I hope you weren’t pressured to see me again. I know what you were bothered by. It is my scar, isn’t it?” “I will be honest with you,” said the girl. “I was not forced to see you again, but that scar of yours does bother me. I hope you don’t mind me asking, but how exactly did you get it?”

Not wishing to hide any facts, the boy began to relate the story of what happened years before. Within less than a minute, the girl was in tears.

“I was that girl,” she said.

And sure enough, this boy and girl went on to get married. After many years of trying to find her future husband, this girl had finally found him. The boy who had helped her once would now always be there by her side to support and protect her.

Sometimes we look at something or someone, and we immediately discount and disregard them. “I do not like that,” “They are not for me,” “It doesn’t look good.” But then we look again, and see and hear the true story. And then we recognize just exactly who and what we were looking at. The story we were facing, the very bother we wish never existed and the very person we never wished to look at is exactly meant for us. That struggle will only lead to our growth, that nuisance will improve our character and that person will perhaps become our spouse. That very bad and bitter “scar” which we felt so disturbed by is precisely what will lead us to true happiness and fulfillment in ways we never imagined.

A Short Message from Rabbi Label Lam

I remember once being given a cold drink from a friend on a hot summer day. I took a look at the can and, to my surprise, saw that the drink was called ספרינג (Summer). “Suffering?” I thought to myself. “Who would give that name to a drink!” But then I turned the can around and realized. “Spring,” it said. Chuckling to myself, I realized that oftentimes the difference between an experience of suffering or spring is our point of view. Our attitude and outlook is what determines how we interpret our life’s events.
**Korech**

Rebbetzin Esther Baila Schwartz

_All from Hashem_

So did Hillel: he would combine Pesach, matzah and maror in a sandwich and eat them together.

What is the underlying message of Hillel’s sandwich?

As the Torah tells us, the Paschal Lamb was to be eaten together with matzah, representing freedom, and maror, symbolizing the bitterness of slavery. In this way, Klal Yisrael emphasized that both the bitter reality of slavery and the magnificence of freedom all come from the same G-d.

This forms one of the most fundamental aspects of Pesach. Everything that happens to us throughout our lives—from the bitterest tragedy to the greatest triumph—emanates from Hashem.

In light of this, we can fully appreciate why matzah represents freedom. Freedom can be defined as a lack of dependence on externalities. The less one needs, the freer they are. The matzah’s limited ingredients in contrast to the wealth of ingredients used in chametz symbolizes freedom. Chametz needs flour, oil, sugar, salt and eggs, while matzah, on the other hand, needs only flour and water. It does not take much to be matzah, and this is exactly what freedom is about. We are satisfied with the bare minimum and precisely with what Hashem has given us in life.

This is the lesson of Hillel’s sandwich. By bringing together the Korban Pesach, matzah and maror, we emphasize the unity of the above concepts. Through realizing that whatever we have in life is what we need, we will be happy with our lot. The messages of the Korban Pesach, matzah and maror, in this regard, go hand in hand. Since Hashem gives us everything in life, even if it is very little, as represented by the matzah, and we experience some bitter moments, as symbolized by the maror, we will remain perfectly content.

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**Shulchan Orech**

Rabbi Fischel Schachter

_The Special Secret_

While some people enjoy the taste of fish, others do not. And some, in fact, not only dislike the taste of fish, but it makes them nauseous. A cousin of mine was one of those individuals. He literally loathed fish. On Shabbos when his mother would serve fish, he couldn’t stand to smell or taste it.

One day, he became a chassan. Planning to get married and become part of a new family, his own family reminded him of his repugnance of fish. “You know,” they said, “you are going to have to eat fish when you get married. What will happen when your wife tirelessly works to prepare fish, and you say you don’t like it? You will hurt her feelings!” Fully convinced that his like or dislike of fish would make or break his marriage, the poor boy forced the fish down his throat. Week after week, he slowly adjusted himself to the smell, taste and texture of fish. And indeed, after a while, he was somewhat able to tolerate it. And then came the big day of his wedding.

As the chuppah came to a close, he headed to the yichud room where the chassan and kallah spend their first moments together as husband and wife. Known to be a very special time, my cousin of course was as happy as could be. But then his kallah had a surprise for him.

“Can I tell you something personal?” she said. Thinking that she had something serious and worrisome to tell him, my cousin prepared himself for the worst. “Yeah, sure, what is it?” “I know it is a Jewish thing to eat fish, but I really cannot stand it. The smell, taste and texture really make me feel sick.”

Oftentimes we worry how others will perceive us. We tend to tailor our behavior and act in ways in order to please others. But then we come to realize that people will appreciate us for who we are. We need not be untrue to ourselves in order to curry favor and win the respect of others. There will indeed be someone who loves us despite all our foibles and dislikes. And in fact, sometimes we will be pleasantly surprised to find out that they love us precisely because of our dislikes.
Tzafun

Rebbetzin Esther Jungreis a”h

The Hidden Dessert

During Tzafun, we finish off our meal with the Afikoman, the larger half of matzah we hid away earlier in the seder during Yachatz. While our ideas of dessert may include sherbet ice cream, fresh fruit or a piece of cake, the lingering taste of food which remains in our mouths is that of matzah.

There are two questions which must be addressed upon reaching Tzafun. Firstly, why do we eat matzah again? Moreover, why do many have the custom that the children search for the Afikoman?

The Afikoman symbolizes the Paschal sacrifice. Four days prior to the Exodus from Egypt, each Jewish household took a lamb, the animal deemed holy and worshipped by the Egyptians, and tied it to their bedpost to be used for the Paschal offering. On the fourteenth of Nissan, the Jewish people publicly roasted their lambs, which were consumed later that night. Nowadays, however, with no Temple, the Afikoman is eaten in commemoration of the Korban Pesach which used to be eaten on this very night all those years ago.

When will we have the Paschal sacrifice again? When we have Mashiach. When will he arrive? This is what Tzafun (lit. hidden) comes to address. The time of his arrival is hidden. However, as the Navi tells us, it is the children who will herald his forthcoming. “Behold, I send you Eliyahu the prophet… and he will turn back to G-d the hearts of fathers with their sons…” (Malachi 3:23-24).

In this last generation before Mashiach, children will awaken their parents and inspire them to return to Torah. And indeed, many parents will follow their children and join the observant ranks of Klal Yisrael. As the above verse indicates, it is through the sons that the hearts of fathers will turn back to Hashem (Rashi ibid.) It is therefore the children who search and find the hidden Afikoman, symbolic of the Paschal sacrifice and Temple times, for it is they who will spur the Jewish nation to repentance and usher in the redemption. And when that is achieved, we can rest assured that Eliyahu HaNavi and Mashiach are just around the corner.

Barech

Rabbi Label Lam

A Wise Blessing

And you shall eat and be satiated and bless Hashem your G-d.

Years ago, I had the privilege of visiting a man named Mr. Levy in Manhattan every Tuesday morning. Each week, I would make my way over to his apartment and teach him about the basics of Torah and Judaism for an hour or two.

My routine was to stop off at Mom’s Bagel and pick up a muffin and coffee on my way to see Mr. Levy. However, on one occasion, the bus was late and I was unable to eat anything before arriving. It was only after teaching him that I finally had a moment to take a bite. And so, I took a seat in the reception room and finished off my muffin and cold coffee.

I then began reciting the after-blessing of Al Hamichya. And of course, it was exactly as I was making the blessing that the receptionist began asking me something. But, since I could not stop in the middle, I continued on, knowing that in just a moment I would respond.

After finishing the blessing, I walked over to the receptionist and explained that I was not trying to be rude, but had been in the middle of making an after-blessing. “After-blessing?” she said in her Baptist-ministerial tone of voice. “We say Grace, a blessing before we eat.” “We also make a blessing before we eat,” I replied, “but who remembers to make a blessing after they eat?”

Listening intimately to my response, her jaw dropped open. “That’s wisdom,” she said.

As we sit down to this after-blessing, we would be wise to take a moment and reflect upon the countless steps entailed in preparing a meal. From falling rain to planting, plowing, harvesting, sifting and cooking, each and every bite of food is no less than a miracle. Yes indeed, there is much wisdom to recognizing after our stomachs are full and plates put away that we have much to be grateful to Hashem for.
Hallel

Rabbi Dovid Orlofsky

My Brother

Not for our sake, Hashem, not for our sake...

Years ago, as a young man enjoyed the smooth ride in his new car, he pulled up to the local supermarket to buy some groceries. While looking for a place to park, he caught sight of his friend's younger brother gazing at his car. Rolling down his window, the young man called out to the boy, “Do you like the car?” “I really do,” said the boy. “Where did you get it?” “My brother bought it for me,” the man replied.

Still entranced by the sight of the car, the boy stood there. The man figured that he would respond as any other typical boy would, “Oh, I wish I had a brother like that!” But this boy was different; he had a different look on the matter. “Wow!” he said, “I wish I could be a brother like that.”

Caught off guard by such a comment, the man said to the boy, “Would you like to go for a ride?” With his face breaking out in a smile, the little boy excitedly nodded his head. “Can we drive to my house?” he asked. The man figured that the boy wished to show off the elegant car to his friends, to which he happily complied.

When the man finally pulled into the driveway of the house, the boy turned to the man and shyly asked, “Could you wait just a moment?” Running inside, the little boy soon came out carrying his younger brother who could not walk. He had polio. As he brought him close to the car, he clenched his brother tightly and said, “Can you see that? His brother bought him that car. One day I will buy you a car like that so it will be easier for you to get around. Right now it’s a bit hard for you to do so, but that will one day all change.”

Just listen to the beautiful message of this little boy: “Everybody wishes they had a brother like that; but how many people wish they could be a brother like that.” We would live as much happier, thoughtful and selfless people if we would only adopt such an attitude.

Rabbi Bentzion Shafier

Open Your Eyes and See

When reading the Haggadah, one very simple question must be asked. How was it possible that despite witnessing overt miracles, the Egyptians did not come to terms with believing in G-d?

In addressing a more global question, Rav Elchanan Wasserman hy’d discusses how there can be a positive mitzvah to believe in Hashem altogether. If a person believes in G-d, what need is there for a commandment? And conversely, if a person does not believe in G-d, how can he be forced to do so?

Rav Elchanan explains that the mitzvah of belief in G-d is that one put aside his or her personal agenda and be critically honest when looking at the world. He must ask himself, “What do I see? Could this world have evolved by accident?” The reason people find it difficult to believe in an Intelligent Designer is because of the consequences of doing so. They realize that admitting to a Creator requires one to adhere to rules and regulations and not follow the desires of their heart.

The greatest manifestation of this was the Egyptian people. After witnessing miracle after miracle, they still stubbornly denied G-d’s existence. It wasn’t that the miracles were unclear, but that they did not want to see what was in front of their very own eyes. They had an agenda and were therefore unready to make any changes in their belief system.

Months before my daughter was born, my family enthusiastically became involved in learning about the miraculous development of a baby as presented by a series called “The Nine Month Miracle.” From vivid pictures of a fetus’ fingernails forming to its brain developing, observing the process of a child’s formation was truly unbelievable.

After my daughter was finally born on Yom Kippur, in a moment of elation and appreciation to Hashem, I commented to the nurse, “What a miracle! Can you believe it?” “I know,” she said, “isn't it amazing how nature evolved.”

As I heard this, I could not help but wonder how someone could interpret such a miracle as a mere fluke of nature.

But the answer is quite simple. Just like the Egyptians stared at open
miracles, yet chose to see what they wanted to see, the same can be true of any person. That which is amazing can leave one unmoved if they are not ready to capitulate on their foregone conclusions and views. Blood, frogs, lice, hail and darkness will do no good if one has conclusively decided that G-d is not part of the picture.

Throughout the seder night, we are meant to ingrain within ourselves the fundamentals of emunah in Hashem and learn to recognize that the marvelous world bespeaks of an omnipotent G-d Whose wisdom is infinite.

Rabbi Aryeh Sokoloff
Thank you, Thank you

When considering which school would best suit my son with Down syndrome, my wife and I toured one particular school which we thought might be suitable.

Almost immediately upon entering one of the classrooms, an energetic sixteen-year-old boy came running over to me. “I have a dvar Torah for you!” he exclaimed. “I’m all ears,” I replied, “go ahead.” “There is a Pasuk in Tehillim which we say as part of Hallel, ‘I thank You Hashem for You answered me and became my salvation.’ We repeat this phrase twice. But do you know why we say it twice?” After hearing the question and thinking about it for a moment, I realized that I had never even considered it.

“That’s an excellent question!” I said. “Well,” the boy continued, “let me tell you the answer!”

“If someone came over to you and offered you an orange, what would you say?” Although unsure where the boy was going with this question, I went along. “Thank you,” I answered. “But what if someone came over to you and offered you an iPod; what would you say then?” Before I could get out a word, the boy continued, “I’ll tell you what I would say! Thank you, thank you, thank you, thank you. I would never stop saying thank you.

“Don’t you understand? That’s why we repeat this Pasuk twice. When Hashem took us out of Egypt and made us a free nation, it was the greatest thing possible! It was like getting an iPod! So what do we say to Hashem in return? Thank you, thank you. We can’t stop saying thank you!”

For the king, his personal map of the world was his most cherished possession. He stored it in his private room and only occasionally used it when an important need arose. Yet, one day upon returning home, he was met by an unpleasant surprise. His young son had taken apart the map into countless parts. Quite distraught, the king could not believe his eyes.

It wasn’t too long before the little boy noticed his father’s despondent mood. Understanding what the source of the distress was, the boy ran over to his father and said that he would return in just a few minutes. The king could only wonder what his son would do now.

A short while later, out came the son directing his father into the other room. Following behind his son, the king entered the adjacent room only to be even more surprised than he had been before. The map was on the table all put back together. Amazed, the king exclaimed to his son, “You must be a child prodigy! How did you fix it?” Innocently looking back at his father, the boy replied, “Father, it wasn’t difficult. When I was playing with this map of the world and taking it apart, I noticed that on the other side of the map there was a picture of a man. All I did was put together the picture of the man and the whole world fell into place.”

The same is true of each and every one of us. All that we must do first and foremost is fix ourselves and put ourselves together. And when we do so, our whole world will fall into place.

A Short Message From Rabbi Akiva Tatz

One of the greatest attitudes we can develop in life is appreciating the present moment. Many years ago, I had the privilege of hearing Arthur Rubinstein play the piano in St. Louis. After his performance, someone went up to him and asked, “What is your favorite piece?” “The one I’m playing right now,” he replied.
At the conclusion of Shemonah Esrei, we add a short prayer asking that the Beit Hamikdash be speedily rebuilt in our days – “יִבָנֶה בֵיהַמִקְדָש בְיָמֵינ.” While the word וּיִבָנֶה is typically understood to mean “in our days,” the prefix letter bet can also mean “with.” We are thus asking that the Beit Hamikdash be rebuilt “with our days.” What does this mean?

Each and every day when we wake up, we must think to ourselves, “I am going to use this day constructively to contribute to the bringing of Mashiach and the rebuilding of the Beit Hamikdash.”

My mother a”h used to tell my siblings and me that whenever we performed an act of kindness, spoke nicely to one another, prayed or did a mitzvah, we were pulling down a brick from the heavenly Beit Hamikdash and helping build the Beit Hamikdash here on earth.

Years later, I followed in my mother’s footsteps and shared with my grandchildren the same idea.

When my grandson received his first siddur, I made a velvet bag for him with his name, Shlomo, embroidered on it. On the other side of the bag, I fashioned a picture of the Kotel and a golden brick. I then asked him, “Do you know why I added a picture of a golden brick? It is because every time you daven, you are bringing down a brick from heaven and helping build the Beit Hamikdash.” As his ten-year-old little sister, Rina, looked on, she asked me, “Savta, can you give me something too?” Taking another piece of velvet, I fashioned a bag with a tzedakah box and a golden brick on top. “Rina,” I said, “do you know why there is a brick here?” Having already learned the lesson, she replied, “Yes Savta, every time I give tzedakah, I am bringing a brick down from heaven.”

Every moment of life offers us the precious opportunity to pull down a brick from heaven and help build the magnificent Beit Hamikdash we all yearn for. All that we must do is maximize our days to the fullest and make each one golden.

RABBI EYTAN FEINER

Do You Know Nine?

Nine Months of Pregnancy

After concluding the Haggadah, we come to the fascinating song of Echad Mi Yode’a. Highlighting the numerous attributes unique to the Jewish people, we emphasize our special status as the Chosen Nation of Hashem. The fact that there are two Luchos, three Avos, four Imahos, eight days until performing a bris mila, ten commandments, twelve tribes and thirteen attributes of G-d all relate specifically to the Jewish nation.

Yet there is one facet mentioned which stands out as strange: nine months of pregnancy. Why is this something unique to the Jewish people? Don’t all women experience nine months of pregnancy?

The first mitzvah Klal Yisrael received while still in Egypt was that of Rosh Chodesh. Being empowered by G-d to determine when the New Moon would be sanctified and holidays observed, the Jewish people summarily rejected the sun g-d of the Egyptians. They were handed the ability to control time itself and establish the months of the year. It would no longer be the world of the sun, but the world of the moon.

The Sefer Sugah Ba’Shoshanim writes that women are exempt from time-bound mitzvos because they are always intrinsically sanctifying time. Living biologically with a cycle consisting of days of purity and impurity, women internally count time and bring sanctity to the world of time. Women, for this reason, are not required to perform positive mitzvos which are defined by time for they already automatically and internally do so. They are already living with a built-in sanctification process. Men, on the other hand, must actively make the effort to infuse time with spirituality.

A woman’s monthly cycle follows not the solar cycle, but the lunar cycle, as does the gestation period. Nine months of pregnancy correspond to nine months of the moon’s cycle.

That which we highlight in Echad Mi Yode’a are the months of pregnancy because they follow the moon. We were the ones to establish the Lunar Calendar’s centrality and override the monumental importance attached to the sun and Solar Calendar indigenous to Ancient Egypt.

We can now appreciate the profundity behind the answer, “Who knows nine? I know nine. Nine are the months of pregnancy.”
**Rabbi Avraham Schorr**  
*What’s on your Mind?*

... אֶחָד מִי יוֹדֵעַ אֶחָד אֲנִי יוֹדֵעַ

Who Knows One? I Know One…

As we conclude the *Haggadah* and reach the crescendo of the *seder*, one of the last recited refrains is that of *Echad Mi Yode’ia*. On the surface, this song seems to be relatively simple and straightforward. We all know that there is one G-d, two *Luchos*, three *Avos*, four *Imabos* and so on. It cannot be that the *Haggadah* is merely reminding us of these common knowledge facts. What place then does such a song have as we reach the highpoint and climax of the *seder*?

The answer is that *Echad Mi Yode’ia* is far deeper than it seems. It is placed at the very conclusion of the *Haggadah* because precisely then we have reached the highest of heights, and feel tremendously uplifted and close to Hashem. Imagine then if someone were to ask you, “Who knows one?” What will be the first thing which comes to mind? After an entire *Leil Ha’Seder*, permeated with sanctity and spirituality, our almost automatic reaction will be “Hashem.” That is the only answer we think of.

The same is with two. “Who knows two?” “Two *Luchos*,” we say. We do not respond to two or three or four, “I have two swimming pools, three cars and four houses.” We ask and answer such simple questions because we intend to highlight that these most fundamental concepts are so ingrained within us. When we think of “one,” “two” or “three,” all that we think about are these ideas. Occupying our mind front and center with utmost clarity are these facts – there is one G-d in heaven, two *Luchos*, five books of the Torah and so on. There is nothing else on our radar after such an exhilarating and inspiring *seder*.

And now you can answer the ultimate question, “Who knows why we sing *Echad Mi Yode’ia*?” “I do.”

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**Rabbi Zecharia Wallerstein**  
*The Strange Stick*

I was once about to write out a check for a tzedakah collector who came to my office when he asked if I could wait a minute. “Before you give me a check, would you mind if I ask you a question on the *Haggadah*? It is the easiest question you have ever heard. If you can answer it, I don’t want the check; but if you cannot answer it, please double the amount.”


“In *Chad Gadya*, we read how a man purchased a goat for two *zuzim*. Along came a cat and ate the goat; along came a dog and ate the cat; along came a stick and hit the dog; fire then burnt up the stick; water then extinguished the fire; the cow then drank the water; the slaughterer then slaughtered the cow; the angel of death then killed the slaughterer; and then Hashem smote the angel of death.

“Everything naturally makes sense in the sequence of events. Cats eat goats, dogs eat cats, water extinguishes fire, cows drink water and so on. But I have one question. How did the stick hit the dog? Sticks don’t walk. It should have said that a person came with a stick and hit the dog. But it doesn’t say that.”

Thinking to myself how I have been reading the *Haggadah* for decades and never even considered this question, I sat there silently. “Double the check please,” he said. And I did.

“Let me tell you the answer,” he continued. “The *Haggadah* was written in this way for a reason. When you read the story of *Chad Gadya*, everything appears to occur naturally. But there is something the author of the *Haggadah* inserted into the middle of the story that doesn’t make sense at all. A stick appears on its own and hits the dog. When you read this, you immediately raise your eyebrows and say, ‘Wait a second! How did the stick get there?’ And then you realize that it must be Hashem holding the stick. And if that is so, the same is true of all the other ‘natural’ events. Even the cat eating the goat and the water extinguishing the fire is the hand of Hashem. Nothing is natural and happens by itself.”

After the man finished explaining this, I said, “I will triple your check.” I was taken aback by this answer.

Throughout all the hardships in our lives, we can never think it is natural. At the end of the *Haggadah* when we read about the events of *Chad Gadya*, we are meant to think of all the incidents in our own personal lives. And then we are to realize that even the stick that hits and the hardships that confront us are from Hashem. He is behind our lives every step of the way.
As we come to a close of this inspiring and transformational seder night, it is crucial that we consider how we can retain the beautiful messages for the long term. What can we do to ensure that the spiritual high we achieved tonight remains with us and does not fade away?

Let us ponder for a moment a site often visited by Jewish families over Chol Hamoed: the playground. Observing the many children running around on a playground and having unlimited fun, one is left wondering what in fact differentiates a grown adult from a child. What hallmarks a youthful boy or girl? The answer is that children tend to live in the moment. For them, something is either very fun or very boring. They only see the immediate here-and-now. Adults, on the other hand, can see the larger picture and understand the overall context into which everything fits.

This is reflected by the respective Hebrew words for a child and an adult. A minor under the age of bar mitzvah is called a katan, deriving from the word katu’a, meaning cut or broken off. A katan lives within an isolated moment of time. This is why Jewish Law does not recognize the transactions of a minor as binding. Since they have no sense of the larger picture and are therefore more prone to making rash and unwise decisions, any transaction they make is null and void. An adult, however, is someone who can see past the present moment and make deliberate decisions. For this reason, an adult is called a gadol, the root of which is gad, meaning flow (see Rashi, Eruvin 89a). A gadol is larger than where he is right now because he sees the bigger picture.

This is the secret to retaining that which we gained throughout Yom Tov. Pesach is not merely to be viewed as one isolated point in time. Pesach is just the beginning of our travels leading up to Shavuos, when we received the Torah. The ultimate freedom we are striving for is the ability to freely carry out Hashem’s will and live a life dedicated to His Torah. That is the larger picture we immediately embark upon starting from the second night of Pesach. With the counting of the Omer, we begin taking one step at a time until we reach the apex of Shavuos with the Giving of the Torah on Har Sinai. All that is left for us to do is start taking those steps.

Conclusion

Rabbi Efraim Stauber
Playground Ponderings

The family who opens their door year after year, who encourages asking questions – even the hard ones, who knows that jeden nad czy Bug and who challenges us all to understand what freedom means, both on a personal level and a national one.

With admiration and gratitude,
Mindy and Rivi
לזכר נשמה
our parents and grandparents

Harav and Rebbetzin Teitz
Mr. & Mrs. Shlomo and Shoshana Ashkanazy
Mrs. Fay Fruchter

They were each true ישראל אוהבי and are sorely missed.

The Teitz Family

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for their outstanding dedication to the success of all Am Yisrael.

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