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# Pesach: Meaning and Mystery

וְהָיָה כִּי-תָבֹאוּ אֶל-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר יָתַן ה' לָכֶם כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר וְשָׁמַרְתֶּם אֶת-הָעֲבֹדָה הַזֹּאת: וְהָיָה כִּי-יֹאמְרוּ אֵלֵיכֶם בְּנֵיכֶם מַה הָעֲבֹדָה הַזֹּאת לָכֶם: וְאָמַרְתֶּם זִבְח־פֶּסַח הוּא לַה' אֲשֶׁר פָּסַח עַל-בְּתֵי בְנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּמִצְרַיִם בְּנֹגְפוֹ אֶת-מִצְרַיִם וְאֶת-בְּתֵינֵנוּ הִצִּיל וַיִּקַּד הָעָם וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּ:

And when you enter the land that Hashem will give to you, as He has promised, you shall observe this service. And when your children shall say to you, ‘What is this service to you?’ you shall say, ‘It is the passover sacrifice to Hashem, Who passed over the houses of the Children of Israel in Egypt when He smote Egypt, and our houses He saved...’

*Shemos - Exodus 12:25-27*

שִׁבְעַת יָמִים תֹּאכַל מַצֹּת וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי חַג לַה': מִצּוֹת יֹאכַל אֶת שִׁבְעַת הַיָּמִים וְלֹא-יֵרָאֶה לָּךְ חֶמֶץ וְלֹא-יֵרָאֶה לָּךְ שָׂאֵר בְּכָל-גְּבֻלְךָ: וְהִגַּדְתָּ לְבִנְךָ בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא לֵאמֹר בַּעֲבוּר זֶה עָשָׂה ה' לִי בְצֵאתִי מִמִּצְרַיִם: וְהָיָה לָּךְ לְאוֹת עַל-יָדְךָ וּלְזִכְרוֹן בֵּין עֵינֶיךָ לְמַעַן תִּהְיֶה תּוֹרַת ה' בְּפִיךָ כִּי בְיַד חֲזָקָה הוֹצֵאתָ ה' מִמִּצְרַיִם: וְשָׁמַרְתָּ אֶת-הַחֻקָּה הַזֹּאת לְמוֹעֵד הַמַּיִמִּים יְמֵימָה:

Seven days you shall eat Matzah, and on the seventh day there shall be a festival for Hashem. Throughout the seven days Matzos shall be eaten; no *chametz* (leavened bread) shall be seen with you, and no chametz shall be found in all your borders. And you shall tell your son on that day, saying ‘It is because of this that Hashem did for me when I went out from Egypt.’ And it shall be for you a sign on your hand and as a reminder between your eyes—so that Hashem’s Torah may be in your mouth—for with a mighty hand Hashem took you out from Egypt. You shall observe this statute at its set time from year to year.

*Shemos – Exodus 13:6-10*

## Passover Haggadah – The Four Sons

רָשָׁע מָה הוּא אוֹמֵר? מָה הָעֲבוּדָה הַזֹּאת לָכֶם. לָכֶם – וְלֹא לוֹ. וְלִפִּי שְׂהוֹצִיא אֶת עַצְמוֹ מִן הַפֶּלֶל כְּפָר בְּעֵקֶר. וְאֵת אֶתְּהָה הַקֶּה אֶת שְׁנֵי וְאָמַר לוֹ: "בְּעִבּוֹר זֶה עָשָׂה ה' לִי בְּצֵאתִי מִמִּצְרַיִם". לִי וְלֹא לּוֹ. אֱלוֹ הִיָּה שָׂם, לֹא הִיָּה נִגְאָל.

The wicked son -What does he say? “What is this service to you?” “To you” rather than to himself. And because he has excluded himself from the group he has rejected the foundation of our faith. Consequently, you must blunt his teeth and say to him: “It is because of this that Hashem did for me when I went out from Egypt.” “For me” rather than for him, - had he been there, he would not have been redeemed.

**Questions addressed by the Bais HaLevi** (1820-1892) Rosh Yeshiva of Volozhin, Rabbi of Slutzk and Brisk

- 1) It seems that the wicked son’s question implies a lack of basic understanding regarding the meaning of the Pesach Mitzvos and the story of the exodus. If this is so, where is the answer and explanation? Even if there is something wicked underlying his question, an explanation should still be provided.
- 2) Furthermore, if in fact he isn’t familiar with the basic story, how can he be considered wicked? If anything perhaps his parents should be considered wicked for not teaching him properly?
- 3) Why is the verse that provides an answer for the wicked son in a different place than the verse with the question?
- 4) Why in verse 13:10 are the Pesach Mitzvos referred to as “statutes”? We know the reasons for the Pesach mitzvos!

### **Bais Halevi –Parshas Bo**

And *in the Haggadah’s answer* is a response to all his claims. That is: Even though the reason is true, that Israel brought the Passover offering at that time, as a directive to nullify the Egyptian idol worship, it must be taught that even with mitzvos that we know the reason, (for example with matzah, that there was no time for the dough to rise until we were freed and so too with maror, that the Egyptians embittered our lives, and the Passover offering, to remember that G-d passed over the homes of our forefathers) for sure this is not the basic foundation of the mitzvah and it is not for this reason that the mitzvah was given. The reason is *why is it an obligation on us to fulfill this mitzvah* and that we not be ungrateful, or non-appreciative.

The main foundation of the mitzvah, *why is this the mitzvah*, is not because of Egypt, because the Torah preceded the world, and before the world was created it was written in it the mitzvah of matzah, and also Abraham our father, and all of our forefathers, fulfilled the complete Torah before it was given. And on the night of the 15<sup>th</sup> of Nissan, Abraham our father ate matzah and maror, even though it was before the Exodus

from Egypt. These mitzvos did not emerge from the redemption from Egypt, but just the opposite, in the merit of the mitzvos of Pesach, matzah and maror that were observed that night, we merited to be redeemed on that night. And this is what we say to the evil son. *It is because of this that Hashem did so for me when I went out of Egypt.* And we **do not say because we went out of Egypt I performed this mitzvah.** And this is the rule with all mitzvos, that the mitzvah did not come because of the explanation but because of the mitzvah, came the explanation.

As we see in the merit of Pesach, matzah and maror that night, we merited to be redeemed, and there was no time for the dough to rise. And so too we merited to nullify the Egyptian idolatry with pomp and publicity before everyone's eyes. And with this, the questions of the evil son claiming that the reason is nullified and that the mitzvah, G-d forbid, is nullified, have no validity. And the mitzvah itself, is a *chok*. We do not know the core of its reason, but it exists forever.

## Freedom

### Pirkei Avos – Ethics of our Father 6:2

וְהִלָּחַת מַעֲשֵׂה אֱלֹקִים הַמָּזֶה וְהַמְּכַתֵּב מִכְּתַב אֱלֹקִים הוּא חֲרוּת עַל הַלְּחַת, אֶל תִּקְרָא חֲרוּת אֶלָּא חֲרוּת, שְׂאִין לָךְ בֶּן חוֹרִין אֶלָּא מִי שְׂעוּסָק בְּתַלְמוּד תּוֹרָה.

And it says, “And the tablets were the work of Hashem, and the writing was the writing of Hashem, engraved upon the tablets” ([Exodus 32:16](#)). Don't read the word as חֲרוּת Charus [‘engraved’] rather read it as חֲרוּת Chairus [‘freedom’]. For there is no free person except one that occupies himself with the study of the Torah.

### The Fourth Cup

#### Exodus 6:6-7

“Therefore say to the Children of Israel “I am Hashem and I will **take you out** from under the burdens of Egypt and I will **save** you from your labors and I will **redeem you** with an outstretched arm and with great judgments . And I will **take you to be My people** and I will be your G-D. ....”

**S’forno:** and I will take you out from under the burdens of Egypt- From the day the plagues will begin the work will cease. **And I will save** – On the day you leave their borders. **And I will redeem-** with the drowning of the Egyptians in the sea...Because after the death of those who enslaved you, you will no longer be runaway slaves. **And I will take you to be my people** – with the revelation at Mt. Sinai.

### Passover Haggadah

“Originally our ancestors were idol worshippers and now G-d has brought us close to His service.”

“Blessed are You Hashem our G-d, King of the universe, Who redeemed us and redeemed our forefathers from Egypt and brought us to this night to enable us to eat Matzah and Marror...”