



not a haggadah

New York NCSY



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A Message from NCSY's Teen President

Sarah Engel

"I can do it."

Four words. Eight characters.

A simple statement that encompasses the core of leadership. NCSY creates the next generation of Jewish leaders. NCSYers constantly learn about vision, goal-oriented programming, management and public speaking, however in my opinion the most important lesson we learn is the power of taking initiative.

At the end of the day, one can plan, deliberate, ruminate and design for hours and hours, but no program will ever happen unless someone says "I can do it". When people tell me that they are frustrated that their chapter board didn't run a certain event, or that their committee never organized a shabbaton, I always respond, did someone just do it?

They may have had the most incredible plans, they might have thought about this event for months, but unless someone actually decided to call the bus company themselves, no one is going anywhere. We emphasize the planning aspect of leadership to the point that we lose touch with our natural drive to take initiative. It ultimately stems from a lack of self-confidence and self-assertiveness, we ask ourselves, "I'm just a kid, who am I to run an event?"

Nachshon Ben Aminadav is an oft-unsung hero of the Passover story. As a young man, perhaps an NCSYer in the Ancient Egypt Region, he was leaving Egypt with his family and the rest of the Jewish people after too many years of pain and suffering in slavery. After a few days of travel, they arrive at the Red Sea. Soon, they hear the Egyptian army storming towards them. The Jewish people are trapped, on one side there's the sea, and on the other, the menacing Egyptian army. There's no hope. Moshe is busy praying for a solution. Everyone is panicking. Nachshon, our hero, takes in the scene that is unfolding before his eyes, and walks into the Red Sea. A young boy, a nobody, walked authoritatively into the Red Sea until it almost covered him entirely. And then, the sea split. The Jewish people had an escape route. The entire nation crossed the sea, the Egyptians drowned, and the Jewish people kept traveling through the desert and began preparing to receive the Torah.

Nachshon's heroism? He took action. He looked around, and did not make excuses for himself. He saw a need, and took the initiative to make a change.

This beautiful compilation of Pesach inspiration to me embodies the spirit of Nachshon ben Aminadav. New York NCSY leaders saw a need, and decided to jump in and take the initiative to develop quality Pesach educational content. Learn not just from the beautiful ideas on these pages, also learn from the very fact that you are holding a compilation created by teens themselves. This is the product of initiative, and the can-do spirit which separates the real leaders from those who have big dreams but never take action.

Wishing you and your families a Chag Kasher V'Sameach!

Parts of the Seder: My Name and My Purpose

Kadesh קדש

The Seder begins with Kiddush, (reciting a blessing over the first of the four cups of wine), declaring the holiness of the holiday, Passover.

Urchatz ורחץ

We wash our hands without the customary brachah (blessing.)

Karpas כרפס

A piece of celery or onion is dipped in saltwater. The word “karpas” alludes to the backbreaking labor experienced in Egypt, and the saltwater represents the bitterness and tears of our ancestors.

Yachatz יחץ

Now, the middle matzah on the seder plate is broken into two pieces and the larger piece is put aside for the afikoman (the matzah that will be hidden.) This broken middle matzah symbolizes humility and will be eaten later.

Maggid מגיד

A second cup of wine is now poured. During this time, the children ask many questions, which lead us into an integral part of the seder and an important mitzvah of Passover-telling the story of יציאת מצרים (exodus from Egypt.) It includes a detailed account of our ancestors' slavery, a listing of the ten plagues inflicted on Egypt and the countless miracles Hashem performed for the redemption of the Jewish People.

Rochzah רחצה

We drink the second cup of wine and then wash our hands again, but this time with a brachah.

Motzi Matzah מוציא מצה

Hold the three matzot, with the broken one in between, and recite the brachah used for bread, “המוציא לחם מן הארץ”. Then, let the bottom matzah drop back onto the plate, hold the whole matzah with the broken one and recite the special brachah for the matzah, “על אכילת מצה”. Break at least an ounce from both matzot and eat the two pieces while reclining.

Maror מרור

Take bitter herbs, dip it in charoset (חרוסת) and then bless “על אכילת מרור.” You eat it without reclining.

Korech כורך

This is a custom established by Hillel, the great Talmudic sage, in which we still keep today. We break off two pieces of matzah and put herbs, dipped in charoset, in between the two pieces. Then, we say “בן עשה הלל” and eat the sandwich while reclining.

Shulchan Orvech שולחן עורך

The meal is now, finally served. We begin the meal with a hard-boiled egg dipped in salt water, because an egg symbolizes a Jew. Why is that? A Rabbi once explained, “The more an egg is boiled, the harder it gets.”

Tzafun צפון

Now the half-matzah, which has been hidden for the afikoman, is taken out or found by the children and eaten. It must be eaten before midnight. A person is forbidden to eat or drink after having a piece, except for the remaining cups of wine.

Berach ברך

A third cup of wine is filled. Then, we bench and afterwards bless over the third cup of wine and drink it. Next, we fill the cup of Elijah (אליהו) and our own, fourth cup of wine. We open the door and invite the Prophet Elijah (אליהו הנביא), the harbinger of the coming of Moshiach (משיח), into our homes.

Hallel הלל

After recognizing Hashem’s might, we go further and continue praising and glorifying His Name by singing. We proclaim and acknowledge the fact that Hashem is the G-d of the entire universe. Afterwards, we recite the brachah over the fourth cup of wine and drink it while reclining.

Nirtzah נרצה

Bringing the seder to a close, we say, “לשנה הבאה בירושלים”- Next year in Jerusalem!

Kadesh Game-On!

Avi Okin

A unique feature of our Shabbos and Festival meals is that they all begin with a ritual of blessing the wine, also known as Kiddush. The first section of the Seder, referred to as Kadesh, is named so because we make Kiddush on a cup of wine to begin our account of the Exodus from Egypt. The question that we should ask ourselves is, in general, why do we begin our Shabbos and Yom Tov meals with Kiddush, and why do we begin the Seder with Kiddush tonight, in particular?

I believe that we begin our meals with Kiddush because we are making it clear that the meal that follows is not simply a fancy kind of a family reunion. The act of making Kiddush signifies that the meal is to have a sense of religious significance and meaning. This applies especially to the Seder. The rabbis teach us that the Seder is a time of tremendous spiritual potential, a time where we can experience the Exodus from Egypt on a personal level as we recount the events of the Exodus on a national level.

There is a ton of potential present in the Seder, so let's get our game faces on and make the most of the opportunity!

Explanation of “Vatiten Lanu Hashem Elokeinu B'Ahavah”

Avi Okin

During Kadesh, as well as within every Yom Tov Kiddush, we make a very bold statement. We say, "Vatiten Lanu Hashem Elokeinu B'Ahavah"- that Hashem, Our L-rd, gave us [this Yom Tov night] with love. But if Yom Tov is supposed to be a gift, why are there so many restrictions on the things that I would prefer to do? How is Yom Tov and Shabbos a gift if I cannot drive a car or use my Android to text my friends?!

I believe the answer is that Hashem asked us to abstain from certain activities in order to give us the opportunity to bond with Him. If we were to have the ability to perform the full range of our normal weekday activities on Yom Tov, we would not take advantage of the tremendous closeness to Hashem that is possible to obtain, feel and experience during this special time. We mention that Hashem gave us Yom Tov as an opportunity to grow just after the Yom Tov begins, so that we remember to take advantage of this great gift. If we look at Yom Tov as an opportunity, the day will be more enjoyable and meaningful. It's up to us to look at Yom Tov in a positive light!

Slavery in the 21st Century

Avraham Tsikanovski

The Haggadah's biggest theme is, redemption. During magid, we talk about how G-d took the Jews out from slavery to freedom. We recount the countless miracles that G-d had performed when redeeming us from Egypt. By the time one is finished with magid, one would think that the story ends. The Jews have been redeemed, and now they can go to The Promised Land and serve G-d.

But the saga doesn't end there. After being freed from Egypt, the Jews end up in the desert. And then, the complaining begins. They begin to complain about how G-d supposedly took them to the desert to starve and die. They complain about the water being bitter. Then, we come across the complaint that reveals to us why the Jews were always complaining.

The Jews complain about how, in Egypt, they had meat, fish, cucumbers, leeks, and several other things. The questions we can ask are: wasn't the slavery terrible? Why were they lamenting about all the things they didn't have? Didn't G-d set them free? Isn't that more than enough to be grateful about?

The answer is simple. The Jews were still stuck in a slave-mentality. A slave-mentality is when a person is so used to a certain situation, that even the thought of change leaves him or her scared. The Jews were so familiar with their surroundings and accustomed to being taken care of by the Egyptians, with regards to food and shelter, that even though they were cruelly enslaved, they still wanted to go back. They were scared at the prospect of freedom. They were scared of the unknown.

A similar phenomenon occurs nowadays when someone is freed from prison. In most cases, the person will end up going back to prison. They simply can't handle the responsibility of freedom. It's simply easier to go back to a place where you're provided with your basic life necessities, even if you don't have freedom.

This happens in our lives as well, when we prevent ourselves from growing because it's not convenient or it's something that we aren't used to. Of course it's easier to remain in your default state, but if you do, you will never be able to grow and actualize your potential. We should try to seek out and grab opportunities to change. We shouldn't remain slaves to ourselves and our mentality.

The Four Cups

Kayla Evans

Each cup we drink throughout the Seder symbolizes a different part of redemption. They are based on the famous promise given and reminded to Bnei Yisrael by Hashem, “Vihotzeiti, Vihizalti, Vigaalti, Vilakachti Etchem Li La’am”. The first cup signifies the initial redemption taken from the word “Vihotzeiti”, I shall take you out. This represents the physical bondage, the escape from the lash of the taskmaster. Once we were physically removed, we still had the mental mindset of a slave, and, therefore, had to spend forty years in the desert with the One above.

Unfortunately, the second part of the initial redemption did not work, therefore, the Jews coming out of Egypt were not able to enter the Land of Israel. The Talmud states when talking about Purim, “But we are still slaves Achashverosh!” This proves that even many years later, the first redemption was not truly completed. The second cup represents the second part of the redemption with the word “Vihizalti”, I shall rescue you. This is a mental recovery from traumatic memories. This will stop the wallowing and bitterness of the nation. It also prevents entitlement, which will eventually cripple the ex- slaves just as much as the physical hardships did. The ability to rise from the ashes is a hallmark of the Jewish people and is what we continue to see every day nowadays.

Unlike the geula (redemption) represented by the first cup, the second cup embodies freedom that panned out. The third cup illustrates the freedom of the soul with the word “Vigaalti”, I shall redeem you. This cup deals with having a Divine purpose in life. This can be explained further with a quote from the Mishnah, “There is no freedom for anyone who is not engaged in Torah.” Our souls thirst for purpose and fulfillment. We must always integrate Torah learning into our lives in order to keep our sanity as we grow old. Torah will give us meaning and a purpose to live when in retirement. The moment Hashem fulfilled the promise of “Vigaalti” is when Matan Torah took place. This was a moment of freedom for all of Klal Yisrael. It has given our Jewish souls purpose and direction ever since.

The fourth cup represents the ability to live alone in a world of conflicting cultures and values through the words, “Vilakachti Etchem Li Laam”, I shall take you for Me as a people.

Throughout history, the we, Jews, have been a minority surrounded by large, foreign nations against our beliefs and way of life. If the physical survival of our nation in these conditions is miraculous, how much more so is the spiritual survival and loyalty to Hashem. The spiritual survival can only continue if we have this fourth freedom of self-worth and identity. This freedom gives us all the strength to proclaim our love and loyalty to Hashem every single day. As a prospering nation, we must take all the lessons from the four cups to heart, and only then will our nation survive this time of intense galut.

Dear Pharaoh

Molly Meisels

Dear Pharaoh,

I've been meaning to thank you for some time now. Yes, I know what you must be thinking – “Why is this irritating Jewess awaking me from an eternal slumber in my cozy catacomb to thank me, 3,328 years after subjecting her people to centuries of bitterness and oppression?” And honestly, you'd be right. I should have no reason to thank the pygmy sized tyrant who puts Saddam Hussein, Kim Jong-un, and Joseph Stalin to shame. I should have no reason to thank the abominable dictator who dumped our baby boys into the crocodile-filled rushing waters of the Nile River, coerced us into performing menial and degrading tasks at midnight, as our bodies yearned for sleep, and had us construct sinking pyramids on an acre of quicksand just to see the light escape our eyes, over and over and over again. Please don't take this the wrong way, but I hope you're in a “better place”, if you know what I mean.

I'd like to thank you for being the first to try our nation. Us Jews are a resilient and enduring people. For the past three millennia, countless kings and queens, dukes and duchesses, and tyrants and dictators have thrown obstacle after obstacle our way; murdering us and attempting to annihilate the very foundations of faith and morality on which we stand. Yet, we are like a swarm of hornets – the more you try to threaten us, the stronger we get; the grander we get; the better we get. Each fantastical empire that has ruled this Earth, whether it was the Holy Romans, the Egyptians, or the Persians, all perished centuries after their formations. Many have been completely forgotten, others merely remembered by the skeletons they left behind. But we Pharaoh, we are invincible. And you my friend, squeezed the first drop of dauntlessness into our bucket of immortality.

After you let my people go, with the assistance of G-d's ten plagues, the power in our bucket of immortality continued to rise, and then overflow. With every lash of your whip, we grew mightier. When we finally fled the grasp of Egyptian cruelty, we were thrust into a never ending loop of terror and suffering at the hands of appalling rulers. My people were massacred time and time again, but each time collected the shards of the dead and rebuilt our nation.

The Holy Roman Empire and their lofty Crusaders slashed their glistening blades into the bellies of innocent men, women and children to quench their bloodlust on the “arduous” journey to the Holy Land. Thousands of Jews were slaughtered mercilessly; thousands more rose from their ashes. The Spaniards and their “righteous” inquisitors burnt helpless Marranos by the dozen, chuckling as the dancing fiery flames and putrid odor of burning flesh snuffed the lives from its victims. Countless Jews were murdered arbitrarily; countless more were reborn. The Germans and their systematic genocide, viciously gassed, shot, starved, and dehumanized Jews of every walk of life. They attempted to eradicate the Jewish spark, killing six million of our people. Today, our people have surpassed the number of those who we had lost not so long ago.

These nations all fell soon after persecuting and slaughtering my people. As they each fell, we absorbed all of their mighty indomitability, growing stronger with each epoch. Pharaoh, if it weren't for you and your hatred for my people, we may not have survived for as long as we have. Thank you.

-A Grateful Jew

Questions

Tzippy Feldman

Q: Why do we, as Jews, call it Passover but the Torah calls it חג המצות?

A: We call it Passover because it complements the actions and powers of G-d and what He did for us in Egypt. But the Torah calls it חג המצות in order to compliment what the Jews did when they left Egypt (attempted to bake bread, but since the Jews were in a hurry to leave, the dough only baked into a flat bread, which is matzah.) Since we have such a strong and unconditional love for G-d and, likewise, G-d's love for us is bountiful and limitless, we assign different names for Passover in order to show the mutual concern and love that we have for each other.

Q: Why didn't Moshe start the plague of blood and lice?

A: Moshe didn't initiate the plague of blood because the water had to be struck in order for it to begin. When Moshe was a baby, Pharaoh demanded all Jewish baby boys be killed and would then bathe in the blood of these babies. Since Moshe was born three months early, his mother, Yocheved, had to hide him for those months. So, after three months, Moshe's mother put him in a basket in the Nile River. Since the water saved him while he was in the Nile, he specifically did not want to hit the water because he had הברות הטוב (gratitude/thanks) to the water.

Moshe also did not initiate the plague of lice because then Moshe would have had to hit the ground in order to start the plague. One day, he saw an Egyptian hitting a Jew, so Moshe killed the Egyptian and buried him in the ground. Then, two Jews saw what Moshe had done and ran to tell Pharaoh what had happened. Pharaoh was so angry about the event that had occurred that he wanted to kill Moshe. But since the sand covered up the dead body of the Egyptian, Moshe's life was saved. Moshe did not start the plague of lice because he, again, had הברות הטוב (gratitude/thanks) to the sand/ground for saving his life.

Since the water and the sand both saved Moshe's life, Moshe did not initiate these plagues. Instead, his brother, Aaron, did. From this, we can learn a major life lesson. We learn that even the smallest thing can make a huge difference and possibly save your life, so you must always be grateful for everything.

Hallel Bisas Yisrael

Elana Feldman

Bisas Yisrael is the 114th chapter in Tehillim. It is also the second paragraph of Hallel, which we recite as part of the service on holidays, as well as during the Passover seder. This chapter speaks of the events that occurred to Bnei Yisrael after they left Egypt. It describes the sea "fleeing," the Jordan River "retreating," and the mountains and hills "dancing" in the presence of G-d. According to the RaDaK, these images refer to the events of the splitting of the Sea of Reeds, the splitting of the Jordan River, and Matan Torah (the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai). The Sea of Reeds (Yam Suf) split in order to allow Bnei Yisrael to escape from the pursuing Egyptian army (Shemot: Chapter 14). The Jordan River split when Bnei Yisrael entered the Land of Israel under the leadership of Yehoshua (Yehoshua: Chapter 4). At Matan Torah, Mount Sinai, as well as the surrounding hills, shook as the Divine presence descended upon the mountain.

This chapter of Tehillim declares (Verse 2) that when Bnei Yisrael earned their freedom from slavery and left Egypt, they became G-d's "sacred nation" ("Hayeeta Yehuda Le'kodsho") and His "governed people" ("Yisrael Mamshelotav"). The event of the Exodus involved much more than simply an oppressed nation earning its freedom; it meant the transformation of Am Yisrael into G-d's special nation, with all the privileges and responsibilities that this entails. The miraculous events that followed – such as the splitting of the sea and the Jordan River, and the Revelation at Sinai – demonstrate the unique status of becoming an Am Yisrael. Their freedom from slavery was intended not merely for the sake of personal liberty, but rather to allow them to become the loyal subjects of the G-d.

Yachatz

Elana Feldman

We break the middle matzah and put it aside to serve later as the afikoman. Why do we break the matzah now if we don't need it until later? Because a major key to freedom is to anticipate the future and make it real. The definition of maturity is the ability to trade a lower pleasure now for a higher pleasure later. Children lack this perspective and demand instant gratification, (for example, why not eat ten candies now? Because you'll get a stomachache later!) The challenge of adulthood is training ourselves to look at the long-term consequences. "Who is the wise man?" asks the Talmud. It is "The one who sees the future." We break the middle matzah, not for now, but for later. Because true freedom is a long-term proposition.

P-E-S-A-C-H

Rabbi Daniel Eisenberg

"Pesach" is spelled Pay-Samech-Ches. Every letter in the Alef Beis can also be read as a word, so Pay can be read as "Peh - mouth," Samach as "Samach/Someich - to rely upon/lean upon," and Ches is from a lashon (language) of "Chayos- life." Additionally, the Gemara in Shabbos 104a does an analysis of all the letters of the Alef-Beis and the letter Ches is connected to the word "Chein - Favor/Grace." It also stands for words like "Chessed - kindness" and "Chus - pity." I'd like to suggest that the message here is that on Pesach, the avodah (service), especially on the Seder night, is for us to use our mouths and speak about how much we relied on G-d's mercy in Mitzrayim (Egypt) and how much we rely on it every single day. Therefore Pesach, spelled Pay-Samach-Ches, is when our Peh speaks about how we are Someich on His Ches (Chein, Chessed, and Chus) or where the Peh speaks about how we're Someich on Him for our Chayos, our life.

Freedom

Rabbi Daniel Eisenberg

Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach points out something interesting about the isur (prohibition) of eating chametz (unleavened bread) on Pesach. Unlike the isur of eating non-kosher food, which is b'k'zayis (with [food] the size of an olive) or eating on Yom Kippur, which is b'koseves (with the size of a date), the isur of chametz is b'mashehu, with anything. Even the smallest crumb. Reb Shlomo goes on to say that relationships don't generally end because of big things. They happen because of small crumbs.

Little things here and there. What holds us back from becoming free? What holds us back from making ourselves great, from reaching our potential? Small crumbs. All the small things we sweep under the rug all year long. All the little issues we allow to hold us back from growing. We hopefully found the sod (secret) of our true selves over Purim and realized what we need to work on. We should now know what chametz we have. Now, we must seek and destroy it for Pesach. Says Reb Shlomo, we need to find all the little crumbs and burn them. We can't have even a mashehu of chametz for Pesach so that we can be truly free!

Personal Exodus

Yochanon Lax

Since the day I was born, I would sit by the Seder twice a year like everyone I knew. Every year I would go through the motions and would steal the afikoman, ask the mah nishtana, and drink the four cups of wine. As I got older, I would think and put more of my knowledge and depth into everything I took part in, which included this Yom Tov of Pesach. While writing this article I answered a question that I've had for quite some time. The question being, "how can I relate to this Yom Tov? The Exodus from Egypt took place thousands of years ago, how am I supposed to feel the bitterness when I eat the maror and celebrate the redemption that happened thousands of years ago?"

I look at Pesach as the time to not only remember the Exodus of our ancestors from Egypt, but to look at the personal exodus that HaShem took each of us out of in the past. We all have different definitions of what our personal exodus is. All of us have different examples of tough situations that we thought we'd be enslaved to forever, until HaShem redeemed us. I use this lesson, the memory of my own redemption, to connect better to the story of Pesach, which I'm supposed to resonate with during the Seder, and when I hear the words "Zecher L'yitzias Mitzrayim."

Another aspect of a "personal exodus" is to use it to strengthen our faith. Life is made up of moments. Some are good and some are bad. For many people, there is more than one instance in life where we need an "exodus", redemption or in more modern terms, "major help." However, as we all know, HaShem always hears our Tefillos but doesn't always show us the answers right away. Those times when things aren't going the way you planned, you're stressed out and questioning "Why Me?" Those times when you beg that HaShem help you with the dire situation. Those are the times that our faith is tested.

The Rambam, in his *Guide to Perplexed*, compares the night to a "spiritual night". He describes how the night is a time when one's faith is tested. When one has to guide his or her way with the clarity he or she had during the day, even though now it is completely dark. He compares our existence to a man walking alone in a field at night during a fierce thunderstorm. That man is completely enveloped by darkness. Suddenly, the plain is lit up by a terrifying bolt of lightning. At that moment, the man can see his destination clearly, as well as the route he must take. But before he can look any further, he is once again blinded by darkness. Now, he must push himself through the storm and the darkness, guiding himself with the memory of clarity he had moments before.

Similarly, a person always stumbles through the darkness in life, often not seeing where he/she is going, nor who is in control of the world. Every now and then there is a bolt of lightning, a moment of inspiration, which allows him/her to see exactly how the world operates and who is really in control. Then, all goes dark again, and he/she must carry himself forward with the memory of that inspiration that HaShem showed him previously.

It is important that when times are rough, we must pay attention to the little signs that HaShem is showing us. Those little "bursts of lightning" are what HaShem uses in order to show us that everything happens for a reason and that it's for our own benefit. Personally, I find it very important to use the past instances of my life as a flashlight guiding me through. It was when HaShem helped me through a struggle and was there for me as a burst of lightning, inspiration and strength that made me feel secure about tackling future obstacles. When Yosef was sold as a slave, the caravan that he was sold to usually carried within them foul smelling spices that would surely make someone cringe. This time, however, the caravan was filled with pleasant smelling spices, which was very unusual. This was HaShem's way of telling Yosef that this was meant to happen, and so this was a little "bolt of lightning" to show Yosef that HaShem is here with him. It's important that we always look for the lightning, the inspiration in our lives, the little signs that are put out there for us to see, which signal to us that He is with us.

Why?

Leila Hertz

“It happened that Rabbi Eliezer, Rabbi Yehoshua, Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah, Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Tarphon were reclining [at a seder] in B'nei Brak. They were discussing the Exodus from Egypt all that night..”

There is a question about this story: why does it matter where the Rabbeim were? Why does the Haggadah mention that they were in B'nei Brak?

Before we answer that question, we must consider another question which goes as follows: We are taught that a person is not allowed to lean before his/her Rebbe or supposed to stay sitting up straight, this is due to respect. We are also taught that R' Akiva was the *talmid* (student) of R' Yehoshua. So, it is of concern that R' Akiva had to lean in front of his Rebbe, as many parts of the Haggadah dictate that one must lean (e.g. lean when eating drinking the four cups of wine). So our second question is, was R' Akiva sinning by leaning before his Rebbe?

Now, we answer both questions with the same answer. It is known that R' Akiva was the Rebbe of B'nei Brak. So from the mention of B'nei Brak, it is teaching us the *halacha* (Jewish law) that the Rav of a town may lean before his own Rebbe if they are situated in his own town. So, since the Rabbeim were in the town in which R' Akiva was the Rav, he was allowed to lean before R' Yehoshua and was in fact not sinning.

Most mitzvot (commandments) require one to recite a bracha (blessing) before fulfilling the mitzvah. For example, we are expected to make a blessing before and after eating food. The retelling of the story of Exodus, by reading the Haggadah, is a mitzvah on Passover. There is no blessing, however, that one must make before or after reading the Haggadah. Why is that?

It is brought down that the entire retelling of the Exodus and recital of the Haggadah is a blessing of G-d in itself. The telling over of the miracles that G-d performed for us is a form of praise, as well as the many *brachot* that are included in the actual text of the Haggadah.

For instance, “ברוך המקום, ברוך הוא. ברוך שנתן תורה לעמו ישראל, ברוך הוא”, which means, “Blessed is the Omnipresent One, blessed be He! Blessed is He who gave the Torah to His people, Israel, blessed be He!” So, just as we do not recite a blessing over the blessing of a meal, the whole Haggadah is a form of praise in itself and, therefore, does not need a formal blessing.

Leadership Traits That We Can Learn From Moshe

Avi Orlian

As the the person who was chosen to give the chosen people the Torah, we can call Moshe the chosen of the chosen. This important figure within the history of Am Yisrael should be studied and emulated by us. The example that Moshe set as a leader is an example we can all follow in, by emulating the character traits he developed and exhibited.

Recognizing G-d's hand in our lives: In the second chapter of Shmos, the Torah tells us how Moshe was born, then his mother hid him, placed him in a basket and let it float down the river. The Torah goes on telling how he is found by Pharaoh's daughter, Batel, and raised by her in the palace. One could attribute all this to coincidence, but it is important to recognize that of all the people who found him was no one less than a member of the Royal Family. Only Batya would have been capable of keeping Moshe and raising him. It was all part of Hashem's plan. All these stages of events ended up being a fundamental asset in the story of our redemption from Egypt.

Uncompromising of what is expected: After each plague, Pharaoh would say that he would let the Hebrews go, but only on certain conditions — if the plague was lifted, if they didn't go far from the land of Egypt or if only the men went to offer Korbanot to Hashem. But Moshe would not compromise. Each time he went to speak to Pharaoh he would tell him, "Thus said the L-rd, G-d of the Hebrews ... let My people go, that they may serve Me." (Exodus 10:3) A good leader does not compromise his values or his mission.

Persistence in the face of adversity: Moshe never falters from going before Pharaoh and demanding the Jewish people be set free. Each time Pharaoh says no or reneges on his promise to let the people go, Moshe continues with his mission. He does not go back to G-d and say that this is too hard. It is never going to happen. Moshe demonstrates this persistent behavior again as he leads the Jewish people to the Promised Land. Even though they murmured for food and water, he continued to lead them, guide them and teach them.

Humility: When Hashem first called to Moshe from the burning bush, "Moshe hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon G-d." (Shmos 3:6) In other words, he was humble and recognized that he was in a presence that was greater than his own. Moshe was also humble in his weaknesses. When he was first called upon by G-d he said, "...but I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue." (Shmos 4:10)

Delegation: Moshe also had to learn to delegate. A great leader cannot do all the work himself and must learn to ask the help of others. When Yisro, Moshes' father-in-law, arrived at their encampment, he noticed that Moshe had to oversee all the disputes among the people. Yisro told him that he needed to share his responsibility with others or else he would wear himself out (Shmos 18) Moshe followed this advice and became a better leader because of it.

Defining a Leader: The definition of a leader, in a professional term, is a person whose followers adhere to him willingly, out of an understanding of his might and charisma; also of the fact that he reached a position of leadership, which was not achieved through exertion of force or manipulation. Scholars stress that this view of the leader, in the eyes of those who are led, is an important principle in the character of a leader. His might and actions bring those who follow him to walk in his ways. Nevertheless, we see in the Torah that Moshe, as a leader, did not come out against the minority who bad-mouthed him, opposed him, and picked fault with him.

In the Korach affair, we read of Moshe's response of when he heard Korach and his company taunting him. "When Moshe heard this, he fell on his face." (Devarim. 16:4)

Moshe did not go to battle against those who wished to undermine his authority, nor did he enter a confrontation with them; rather, he tried to reason with them. He continued, as always, standing fast by his principles and aims, helping and lending a hand to the general population. Note that in Moshe's words of reproach he did not list himself among those offended: "Truly, it is against the L-rd that you and all of your company have banded together, for who is Aharon that you should rail against him?" (Devarim. 16:11)

Also, in the matter of the criticism launched at him by his sister, Miriam on account of Moshe having married a Kusheet, the Torah does not mention any response by Moshe to her insults. Quite the contrary, when she became afflicted with tzara'at, Moshe hastened to entreat and beg Hashem to have pity on Miriam by praying, "...heal her" (Devarim. 12:13) He asked for mercy on his sister, irrespective of what she had done, and the concise formulation of his prayer underscores the nature of his request – begging and crying out urgently for her to be healed.

The nobility of Moshe's character, his capacity to restrain himself from reacting to insults in negative ways, and his desire to unite the people and see to their welfare – and all of these comprise the unique nature of his leadership. As a leader, Moshe did not settle accounts with those who came out against him. Naturally, he understood that there would be people who would not comprehend what he was doing and would even seek power for themselves. He was not power hungry or seeking glory at all as a leader. As proof, witness his initial request from Hashem that he not be chosen for the task: "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and free the the Jewish people from Egypt?" (Shemos. 3:11) Moshe added further, "Please, Hashem, I have never been a man of words, neither in times past or now that You have spoken to Your servant; I am slow of speech and slow of tongue" (Shemos. 4:10)

In conclusion, Moshe did not choose to be a leader, rather he had this position imposed upon him. He was found worthy of the job and was chosen for it precisely because of his noble traits, among them a rejection of wielding power and leadership. Mercy and respect for others were deeply ingrained in him from a young age. A leader must also know that he cannot satisfy everyone, yet must believe in his way and faithfully adhere to it.

The Ten Plagues

Elana Feldman

Now, we have to deal with the idea of miracles because the modern, scientific perspective on miracles is not exactly the Jewish interpretation of it.

You must be wondering, "what do I mean by that?"

So let's understand: There are two sets of laws operating in this world. One is the "laws of nature," and the other is the "laws of miracles."

If you would say to people that there is enough energy in a little bomb to blow up an entire city, they would think that you're crazy. How could there possibly be so much energy in that little thing? The fact is, the energy that holds the bonds of elements and atoms together is immense, and when you release those bonding, nuclear fission produces tremendous energy.

This law, the law of physics, has always existed. It just wasn't until the 20th century that we understood how to unlock that energy. That is the law of nature. But nature can be superseded by miracles. A "miracle" means that there is a spiritual level where nature can be overridden. The Kabbalah gives instructions for how to do that. It's very "scientific" because Kabbalah also operates according to laws.

That was the key to Moshe's ability to lead the Jewish People through the plagues and the splitting of the sea. Through the Ten Plagues, the Egyptians and the Jews were forced to realize that all of nature has another level to it – a spiritual level. Everyone came to understand that G-d runs everything and all of it can change at the snap of His finger. The plagues touched every aspect of the physical world, starting with the lower forms and then working higher up. The plague of blood affected the water. The next plague was frogs – creatures who live in the water, then the plague went on to affect dry land. The lice infested the dirt. Then came wild animals – a higher form of species. Then pestilence hit the cattle. The next plague already affected human beings, boils appeared on their skin. Hail is even higher – coming from the sky. After that there were the locusts, which are animals of the sky. The plague of darkness affected the basis of life – light and dark. Finally, the killing of the first born took the soul.

G-d touched everything. But there's still one higher level. Eventually, the Egyptians chased the Jews and the Reed Sea split. There you see that not only does G-d run everything, but nature itself responds to good and evil.

G-d split the sea for the "soul" – the Jewish people, but it swallowed up the "body" – the Egyptians.

In the Details

Esther Seif

חכם מה הוא אומר? מה העדת והחקים והמשפטים אשר צוה ה' אלקינו אתכם?

The wise son - what does he say? "What are the testimonies, decrees, and ordinances which Hashem, our God, has commanded you"?

What is it that makes the wise son so wise? All he is doing is asking the most general question that any observer would ask, "What are the testimonies, decrees, and ordinances which Hashem, our God, has commanded you?" What is special about this question that singles out the one who asks it as wise? The Maharal gives an incredible answer – it's all about the details! The son doesn't simply ask "What is this?" He asks about the testimonies, the decrees, and the ordinances. This son understands the weight that every single detail has in serving God. But furthermore, this son doesn't simply accept those details; he understands the value of questioning them to seek deeper meaning and service of God.

Needs or Wants?

- ✧ A short(er) seder
- ✧ Triple the size of your bank account (for Pesach shopping)
- ✧ Kosher for Passover Coke
- ✧ Slick suit and tie
- ✧ A Red Carpet dress (tznius/modest one obviously)
- ✧ Good-tasting wine (why stop at four glasses?)
- ✧ Decent voices for singing (during the seder)
- ✧ Tasty spreads for matzah sandwiches
- ✧ More Chol Hamoed days
- ✧ Organized trips on Chol Hamoed (safer than unorganized trips...)
- ✧ Unlimited supply of vegetables (is mayonnaise a vegetable?)
- ✧ Good books to get you through the long days of the holiday
- ✧ Family and friends
- ✧ Moshiach
- ✧ A prize for finding the afikoman
- ✧ Lots of patience
- ✧ A sukkah...wait, what?
- ✧ Kosher for Passover Bissli
- ✧ Trustworthy cleaning lady/ies
- ✧ Unlimited jelly candies and marshmallows
- ✧ Countless money for eating at Kosher L'Pesach Restaurants
- ✧ A ticket to Israel (makes life easier)
- ✧ Lifted spirit, because we're free at last!

LAUGH...GIGGLE...SNICKER...CHUCKLE

Rabbi Daniel Eisenberg

What did the lion respond after he was asked if there was anything worse than his bitter herb breath?
Ma roar!

What's the best kind of cheese to eat on Pesach?
Matza-rella!

What gives you a heads up that an afik may be coming?
An afik-omen.

Why did the guy jump out of the street filled with potatoes?
He thought he saw a carpas.

Are you allowed to use horseradish for maror if you don't have romaine lettuce?
Yeah, it's bitter than nothing.

How should people ask the Baal Seder to allow them to use chazeres for maror?
Please lettuce!

What did Hillel do when Shamai couldn't raych by himself?
Hillel did co-raych!

Why should you not have your seder far away from tza?
Because the end of the seder needs to be near-tza!

What did the Baal Seder say when someone asked if he could read "Ha Lachma Anya"?
"Be my guest!" (Haggadah: Ha Lachma Anya)

What did the non-Jew have to do in order to acquire Sachi's chametz?
Pay Sach. (Shemos 12:11)

Did the Yam Suf hang around for a long time after the Jews got there?
No, it split. (Shemos 14:21)

What do you call it when someone is really enjoying his Matzah?
Having a matzah-ball! (Your Jewish Mother's Cookbook)

לשנה הבאה בירושלים!!!