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Reflective
Question:

What part of your pain should be brought closer, and what part should be released?

Gematria on the Parshah: Awakening from Mitzrayim



By: Reb Moshe Herskovits

On Pesach, we are not just remembering leaving Mitzrayim. We are being asked a more uncomfortable question: are we still there? The Haggadah famously teaches, "In every generation, a person is obligated to see himself as if he left Mitzrayim." The goal of the Seder is not only memory, but transformation.

The Ruzhiner Rebbe explains that the entire Seder is about searching for the chametz within ourselves, so that we may be redeemed from our personal Mitzrayim. But what is this inner Mitzrayim, and how do we leave it?

What Is Our Inner Mitzrayim?

The Baal Shem Tov teaches that Mitzrayim represents a constricted state of consciousness, a lack of daat, a distorted perspective. Remarkably, the gematria of שלילי (negativity) is 380, the same as מצרים (Egypt), showing that exile begins with a negative perspective. Exile arises when we fail to see Hashem in an aspect of our lives.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe deepens this idea. The greatest exile is when a person enjoys physical abundance but fails to realize he is truly in exile. Their chains are made of gold. Many things in life appear to be freedom, but if they pull us away from Hashem, they are chains in disguise.

Realizing We Are Asleep

How can we free ourselves from our chains of gold?

Rebbe Nachman of Breslov teaches that most people tell stories to put others to sleep, but he tells stories to wake people up. The gematria of שנה (sleep) is 355, the same as פרעה (Pharaoh). Exile is spiritual sleep. Rebbe Nachman warns that many people remain asleep their entire lives.

Shir HaMaalot before Birkat HaMazon says, "When Hashem returns the captives of Zion, we will be like dreamers." Redemption is not just freedom, it is awakening. This is why the Haggadah is built around storytelling. The story of Yetziat Mitzrayim is meant to awaken within us our neshamah's true desire to be fully connected to Hashem.

This is why the Haggadah is full of questions. It invites us to examine our lives, and recognize the chains that bind us. The term חורין (free people) shares its gematria, 336, with שאלה (question). Freedom begins with the courage to ask. Where am I in my relationship with Hashem? Am I reaching my potential? What is holding me back? Asking honestly opens the door to growth. Only by questioning ourselves can we discover the chains that bind us.

The Prince Who Forgot Who He Was

To show what it means to be asleep to our true selves, Rav Simcha Bunim of Peshischa illustrates this with a parable.

A king had a beloved son, who sinned against the king and was sent into exile. The prince traveled far from the palace and settled in a small village. There he became a drunk, immersed in indulgence, and lost awareness of who he once was. He walked barefoot, dressed in tattered clothes, and ate simple food, yet he believed he lacked nothing.

When the king's servant finally found him, he asked how the prince was faring. The prince replied, "I have everything I need. What more could I want? Perhaps new shoes, proper clothing, or a bottle to drink from." So absorbed in his indulgence, he no longer sensed what he had lost. He had forgotten he was a prince.

This is our state in galut. Like the prince, we wander far from our true home, lost in fleeting pleasures and blind to the richness of our souls and the closeness to Hashem that is our birthright.

The Chiddushei HaRim explains that this is why we eat maror. Only when we taste the bitterness of exile, and recognize how deep it runs within us, can our souls awaken to the sweetness of freedom.

Removing Our Inner Chametz

This idea does not remain abstract. It comes to life the night before Pesach, through Bedikat Chametz.

Although it might seem logical to search during the day, we search at night, because the most dangerous chametz is hidden in darkness, concealed deep within us. We can only remove chametz through fire. The gematria of אש (fire) is 301, the same as רוצה (desire). Only a burning inner will for holiness can overcome the inertia of the yetzer hara. Seder night gives us the opportunity to continuously build that fire and extinguish our inner chametz.

Challenge

While performing Bedikat Chametz, take a moment to identify three character traits you want to improve. Choose one, and speak to Hashem about it. Remember it during the Seder, and throughout the night ask Hashem for the inner fire to burn away your inner chametz.

The Ashes That Do Not Belong in the Fire



By: Reb Adam Klasner

There is something deeply moving about the way this week's parsha opens. Before the day begins in the Mishkan, before the next offering is brought, before the new service starts, the Kohen is told to lift the ashes from the altar.

Not all the ashes. Just a small portion. He places them beside the altar with dignity. Only later are the rest of the ashes removed and taken outside the camp.

At first glance, this seems like temple maintenance. Clean the altar. Make room for the next offering. But the Torah is never just giving house-

keeping instructions. If it gives so much space to this act, it means there is something here about the inner life of a person.

Fire represents passion. Love. Yearning. The soul's desire to rise, to connect, to become more honest, more alive, more aligned. But every real fire also creates ashes. The stronger the fire, the more it reveals what cannot be fully consumed. On an inner level, those ashes are the parts of us that come to the surface when we begin to grow. Old wounds. Shame. Fear. Coping patterns. Places where we still feel broken, stuck, reactive, or small.

And here the Torah reveals something profound. Not all ashes are treated the same.

There are ashes that stay close to the altar. They are lifted up first, carefully, respectfully. These are the painful places that actually reveal our mission. They are the parts of us that keep us humble, real, human. They break the fantasy that we are above struggle. They make us softer toward other people. They teach us compassion. They force us to meet ourselves honestly.

This is what Moshe was telling Aharon when Aharon felt ashamed to approach the altar. Your shame is not proof that you do not belong here. It is part of why you were chosen. The place where you know weakness, failure, or heartbreak can become the place from which you serve with truth. A person who has never trembled cannot always hold the trembling of another. A person who has never fallen may know how to instruct, but not always how to accompany. Aharon's brokenness did not disqualify him. It deepened him.

There are people who change lives not because they are polished, but because they are real. They do not speak from a tower. They speak from a place inside themselves that has known fire and has known ashes. And because of that, when they speak, something in another person says, he understands me. She understands me. I am not alone.

But there is another kind of ashes. There is a darkness that does not humble a person but crushes them. A voice that does not say, here is what you need to work on, but says, you are worthless. You are beyond repair. Your story is a mistake. Your life has no point. Those ashes cannot remain by the altar. Those ashes must be taken outside the camp.

Why? Because once shame stops being a doorway to truth and becomes an identity, it is no longer holy. Once self awareness turns into self destruction, it is no longer helping you grow. It is draining your life.

This is one of the hardest pieces of inner work. To know the difference between pain that is holy and pain that is lying. Between a wound that points you toward your mission and a voice that tries to convince you that you have no mission at all. One kind of ashes belongs near the altar because it keeps you real. The other kind has to be removed because it will bury the fire itself.

So much of spiritual growth is learning not to confuse the two.

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The first kind says, here is where your work is. Here is where your heart still needs healing. Here is where your soul is asking you to become more true.

The second kind says, there is no hope for you.

The first kind should be lifted with reverence.

The second kind should not be allowed to run your life.

That is why the Torah begins the day with terumas hadashen. Before the next korban, before the next act of holiness, first tend to the ashes. First know what in your inner world needs to be held with dignity, and what in your inner world needs to be removed from the center. First know what your pain is teaching you, and what your shame is trying to steal from you.

This is not just about the Mishkan. It is about every person trying to live a life of truth.

Your struggles do not prove that you are failing. Very often they reveal where your deepest work is. The places where you feel most ashamed may become the places from which you offer the most healing, the most honesty, and the most presence to others. The crack is not always the end of the story. Sometimes it is exactly where the light enters, and exactly where it begins to pour out.

Give it Back, It Doesn't Belong to You!

By: Rabbi Adam Law



Parsha Tzav continues with the themes of Sefer Vayikra in explaining important mitzvahs in the avodah. This parsha specifically relates to sacrifices and the milium (investiture) of the Kohanim. It also mentions some impurities, as well as flesh which one shall not eat, and the prohibition on blood.

We have previously spoken of the famous makloket around Rambam's striking opinion that the sacrifices were not G-d's first choice for us to serve Him (Moreh 3:32). Rather they are a necessary intermediary until man can reach the true service which is purely spiritual/intellectual. Of course Ramban strongly disagrees: by all indications the service that G-d commands is His innate wish in itself. This aligns with the verses and tradition. He gives a moving explanation of the experience of the petitioner in bringing a sacrificial animal to G-d in repentance and devotion (Vayikra 1:9).

The Shelah HaKodesh, writing centuries later, has an interesting perspective regarding the materiality of the mitzvahs of sefer Vayikra (ShL"H Torah ShBKtav Vayikra).

Based on the holy sefarim, he states that these physical aspects of the Torah were only necessary because of the sin of Adam, which brought impurity to the world. When Adam ate the Eitz HaDaas, he caused a mixing of good and evil in reality.

The Torah, the transcendent Eitz HaChaim is the light beyond and suffusing this world. But ultimately it is for, and reaches to, the level of man. Therefore the physical mitzvahs such as sacrifices are a rectification (tikun) of reality after man's fall.

This is the same for all the mitzvahs of the Torah which became somewhat "more physical" because of the fall of Adam.

Although there are mitzvahs throughout the year, each of the holidays are lessons to correct man to reach his Creator.

The AriZal explains that the word "Pesach" "The mouth speaking" is referring to G-d's word. This foundational journey brought us to the ultimate understanding that everything is under H's hashgacha. Through the story of the Exodus we recognize that G-d is dictating it all.

Mei HaShiloach explains that all the mitzvahs of Passover are related to the rectification of the mouth. We fix eating by refraining from chametz and eating matzo and maror. We fix drinking by having the four cups. The rectification of speech is through the hagadah: teaching our children about the Exodus and praising G-d. The power of the mouth can be fixed for the whole year on Seder night. This is as it says "Lmaan teyeh Toras Hashem b'fecha..." in order that the Torah of H" should be in your mouth..." (Shmos 13:9. Mei HaShiloach II: Bo, "Lmaan...").

Just because man is in a lowered state does not mean that we don't have incredible light. The mitzvahs of every Jew are so powerful. Just as when we brought sacrifices in the Holy Temple, we have the ability to improve the world by simply eating a piece of matzo.

Set your earthly passions on fire!

By: Rabbi Avrohom Jacks



To the modern mind, the sacrificial rites of the Beis Hamikdash can seem jarring and utterly foreign.

Yet, when we dig beneath the surface, we find a treasure trove of relevance. The steps taken to offer a sacrifice are actually a psychological masterclass in human transformation. They offer a practical guide to drawing intensely close to G-d. In fact the Hebrew word for sacrifice (Korban) means to draw close.

Let's start with the very first (and perhaps most confronting) act in bringing an animal sacrifice – the slaughtering of the animal. On a deeper level, this represents the vital first step to spiritual growth, because if we want to ascend spiritually, we must begin by renouncing our animalistic orientation toward life. The slaughtered animal symbolizes the slaying of our egos and our selfish needs.

But Judaism does not view our physical drive as entirely negative. Once the animal is slaughtered, its blood is sprinkled on the Altar. Blood represents the heat of enthusiasm. Sprinkling the blood towards the Altar signifies the psychological re-orientation of our enthusiasm. Instead of reserving our greatest passions for fleeting worldly victories, we can inject our spiritual pursuits (acts of kindness, prayer, and study) with the same hot-blooded excitement.

The next step in the sacrificial process is the offering of the choice fats on the Altar. In the physical body, fat is the biological result of indulgence, born from consuming rich foods that flood our brains with feelings of immense delight. Surrendering the fat on the Altar represents elevating our sense of joy. Instead of seeking satisfaction in luxury, status, or materialism, we retrain our hearts to find our ultimate delight in G-dliness and in fulfilling our purpose.

Finally, the offering is consumed by fire. This is the pinnacle of the sacrificial service. The animal has not been thrown away. Rather, it has been transformed into a soaring flame. This teaches us that the goal of a spiritual life is not to crush our human nature. By channeling our passions

toward holiness, our formerly animalistic drives become powerful, burning engines for goodness. They fuel our ultimate mission, namely to transform this physical world into a welcoming home for G-d. When viewed through this lens, a process that initially felt jarring and utterly foreign to the modern mind transforms into something deeply relatable – a timeless, profoundly relevant roadmap for elevating the human soul. And that is something that anyone can support!

The First Fire

By: Reb Yacov Aboudi



Before the fire from Heaven, there must be a fire from below.

This Shabbat is known as Shabbat HaGadol the Great Shabbat. The Tur (OC 430) explains that it commemorates the moment just before Yetziat Mitzrayim, when Bnei Yisrael were commanded: "לִשְׁכַּח וְקָחוּ לָכֶם צֶאֱן..." to take the Egyptian deity and prepare it as a korban to Hashem (Shemot 12:21). They were still slaves; nothing had changed. And yet, they were asked to act like free people.

The greatness of this Shabbat was not a miracle, but a movement. In taking the lamb, Bnei Yisrael made an awakening from below אֲתֵעֲרוּתָא דִּלְתַּתָּא stepping into a new identity before it was revealed to them (Zohar). That step itself began to draw the redemption down.

This is mirrored in Parashat Tzav, where the Torah commands: "אֵשׁ תָּקִיד תִּקְדֶּה..." a constant fire must burn upon the Mizbeach (Vayikra 6:6). Yet Chazal teach that even though fire descends from Heaven, we are still commanded to bring our own (Yoma 21b). The fire from above rests only where there is a fire from below. Before there can be a constant fire, there must be a first fire.

The Bas Ayin explains that taking the lamb awakened within Bnei Yisrael a deep recognition that they no longer belonged to Egypt, and that inner shift itself began the process of geulah. The Sfot Emet teaches that redemption begins when a person steps beyond their current state, even before anything changes externally. And the Tomer Devorah writes, "כִּי רָאוּ לְאָדָם לְהִדְמוּת לְקוֹנֵוֹ" a person must act in a way that reflects who they are meant to become.

And even if that action does not yet come from a perfect place, Chazal teach: "מִתּוֹךְ שֶׁלֹּא לִשְׁמֹה" from doing something not fully for the right reasons, one comes to do it for the right reasons (Pesachim 50b). You do not wait to become; you act, and through that, you become. And that is not inauthentic it is the opposite. When a person acts in alignment with who they are striving to become, that is not fake; that is who they are becoming.

This avodah is not only then it is now. As Pesach approaches, we search for chametz carefully, even in the smallest places (Pesachim 2a). Chametz expands and rises; matzah remains simple and unchanged. At the Seder we declare, "הָאֵל לֹחֵם עִיָּא" this is the bread of affliction. Before geulah, we remove chametz; at geulah, we hold matzah. We are not only cleaning our homes we are creating space.

Redemption begins the same way it did then. Not when everything changes, but when we move. Not when the fire from Heaven comes, but when we light our own.

So the question is: where in my life do I need to take the first step to create space, to act, to move forward even before it feels real?

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