

פסח

"מעשה ברבי אליעזר ורבי יהושע ורבי אלעזר בן עזריה ורבי עקיבא ורבי טרפון שהיו מסבין בבני ברק והיו מספרים ביציאת מצרים כל אותו הלילה עד שבאו תלמידיהם ואמרו להם רבותינו הגיע זמן קריאת שמע של שחרית"

"There was a story with Rabbi Eliezer, Rabbi Yehoshua, Rebbi Elazar Ben Azariah, Rebbi Akivah, and Rebbi Tarfon who made their Seder in Bnei Brak, and were telling over the story of the exodus of Egypt the entire night until their students came to them and said "our Rabbis, the time for the morning Shema has arrived!"

This story is part of the order of the Hagadah that we read on the night of Pesah. It is interesting to note that the Rabbis who composed the Hagadah (over 1100 years ago) decided to give us the location of this Seder in which all these Rabbis participated. Why is it that the Hagadah tells us that the story was in *Bnei Brak*?! This seems to be a non important fact that has no relevance to the point of the story. The Rabbis were located in Bnei Brak, so they celebrated the holiday in Bnei Brak. Why did the Rabbis of the Hagadah deem it necessary to list the place in which these Rabbis gathered?!

In truth, the fact that the story took place in Bnei Brak was not a mere coincidence. These Rabbis specifically chose Bnei Brak as the spot for their gathering, and it was only in Bnei Brak that they could bring about the lofty goal they desired to accomplish.

The Chatam Sofer explains a fascinating reason for why the Rabbis chose Bnei Brak. He links this gathering of Rabbis with the story of Purim.

In the story of Purim, Esther requested of Mordechai that the entire nation fast on her behalf. The Pasuk in the Megillah says; (פרק ד' פסוק יז')
"Mordechai went on his way and did all that Esther had commanded him". Rashi explains on this Pasuk that the word ויעבר also means "to transgress". Mordechai "transgressed" the law by instructing the people to

fast on the 14th, 15th, and 16th of Nissan and this caused the people to fast on the holiday of Pesah! Mordechai, in essence, nullified the holiday of Pesah that year! There was no Seder, no recitation of the Hagadah, and no partaking of a Yom Tov meal.

Of course, in the end it all worked out, and the Jews were saved, but even so, this Pesah that the Jews missed needed to be rectified.

The Gemarah in Gittin (57a) says that “from the grandchildren of Haman there were those who taught Torah in Bnei Brak”. Some of the grandchildren of Haman converted and ended up teaching Torah in Bnei Brak. The great Rabbis that convened in Bnei Brak did so in order to help rectify (on behalf of the grandchildren of Haman) the Seder that was missed on account of their great grandfather Haman. Haman’s evil decrees caused the Jews to fast, and thereby miss the ceremonies of Pesah. The Rabbis specifically chose Bnei Brak to make their historic Seder, in which they spoke throughout the entire night in order to rectify for the missed Seder on behalf of the grandchildren of Haman who taught Torah in Bnei Brak!

One may ask, why is it that these great grandchildren of Haman would need a תיקון (rectification) after all, it was their great grandfather, not them who sinned?!

The explanation is understood through the general question of why all of mankind suffers the punishment given to Adam and Chava, when it was they - not us - that ate from the tree! Why should we be punished with death and childbirth pains?! We did not eat; it was only them who ate?! The explanation is, that we too were part of the soul of Adam Harishon, and when he ate, *we also ate!* We were there, and partook as part of Adam Harishon! Therefore we too suffer the consequences of this action. So too, the grandchildren of Haman were part of Haman when he caused the Jews to fast and miss Pesah, therefore they too, needed a rectification for being part of the cause of the Jews missing the Pesah Seder. For this reason the Rabbis purposely convened in Bnei Brak, the city where the grandchildren of Haman taught Torah, in order to have a perfect Seder, that should also fill in for the missed Seder of the Jews that was caused by their grandfather Haman!

There are other deep intentions that these five Rabbis had when they made the Seder in Bnei Brak. One of these intentions sheds light on many more general questions surrounding the Seder night. Such as:

1. Why is the Seder done at night? Why not get together during the day in order to read the Hagadah, and perform the ceremonies of the Seder??
2. Why is much of the Hagadah in question and answer form? (4 questions of the "מה נשתנה" etc...) Before the Hagadah was written the people would listen to the questions of their children and answer them ("והיה כי ישאלך בנך מה זאת?"-"it will be when your son asks you; what is this?") It seems that it must be in the form of "give and take". Why is this so??
3. We drink 4 cups of wine which stand for the 4 words of redemption used in the Pasuk. However there are many other words that describe the redemption, why is it that the Rabbis limited it to 4 cups? What does the number 4 signify??
4. Why did the Rabbis instruct us to drink 4 cups of *wine*? Why not drink 4 cups of any liquid??

The answer to all of these questions become clear once we understand what these Rabbis were accomplishing by gathering in Bnei Brak.

Let's begin with the exile in Egypt. Pharaoh tortured the Jews, and wanted to break them both physically and spiritually.

What was his intention deep down?? It was to destroy the kingdom of Hashem.

What establishes the kingdom of Hashem? It is the Jewish people's observance, and performance of the Torah and Misvot. "אין מלך בלא עם"-"there is no king without a nation". If there is nobody observing the Torah, then who is there to proclaim Hashem's kingship?!

What is it that instructs us, and teaches us what the will of Hashem is and how we are to perform the Misvot? It is the Torah, more specifically; it is the Torah Shebeal Peh- the oral Torah.

There are 10 "attributes" of Hashem, 10 levels in which we perceive his greatness. The lowest level of the 10 is the attribute of מלכות-kingdom of Hashem. The 10 attributes correspond to 10 different parts of the body (ex. the right hand is רחמים [kindness], the left hand is גבורה [judgment]). This is why we do things with our right hand taking precedence over the left hand such as clapping our hands with our right hand over our left, putting on our clothing by inserting our right hand first into the sleeve, sleeping on our left side at night in order that the right side should be over our left side etc.). Which part of the body corresponds to the 10th attribute of Malchut and

the kingdom of Hashem?? It is the פה (mouth). The mouth of a person proclaims Hashem's greatness, and stands for his kingship.

What else does the mouth represent?? It stands for the תורה שבעל פה-the *oral* Torah. The Torah that was given orally from generation to generation that explains the true meaning of the written Torah. The Rabbis are the ones who transmit the Torah Shebeal Peh, and they are the ones who spread the glory of Hashem. This is why the Gemarah says "מאן מלכי רבנן"- "who are kings? The Rabbis!" Which can also be understood; "who spreads the kingdom of Hashem?? It is the Rabbis, through their transmission of the Torah Shebeal Peh.

We read in the פתח אליהו before the prayers; "מלכות-פה, תורה שבעל פה קרינן לה" (Malchut is the mouth - the oral Torah it is called). We see from here that the פה-mouth is what stands for the oral Torah. Without which, we have no idea how the written Torah is to be understood, and therefore would have no idea how to serve Hashem, and if we didn't serve Hashem it would affect his מלכות! This explains why the פה is the part of the body that corresponds to מלכות. It is the part of the body that stands for the Torah Shebeal Peh which instructs us how to serve Hashem, and glorify him thereby proclaiming him as king! As we recite just before the Amidah in Musaf "כי כל פה וכל לשון ליתנו הוד והדר למלכותך" "the *mouth* and tongue will give glory and splendor to your *kingdom*!

This was the target of the wicked Pharaoh. He was trying to affect the kingdom of Hashem by preventing the Jews from leaving Egypt. He understood that the main purpose for the Jews leaving was to receive the Torah at Sinai! This was not only the written Torah, but it was the oral Torah (the Torah that represents Hashem's kingdom) that Moshe received at Sinai. Pharaoh was trying to prevent this from happening and stop the Jews from accepting the oral Torah, and proclaiming Hashem as king!

These intentions of Pharaoh are hinted both in his name as well as the name of his country מצרים. The Torah Shebeal Peh begins with the letter מ' (the first Mishnah of Berachot begins with the word מאמתי), and the last letter of the Torah Shebeal Peh is a ם from the word בשלום. It begins with an "open" מ and ends with a closed ם. (this is also how we spell out the letter מ [מם] and it hints to us that just like when we pronounce the letter מ we must say "מם" [to begin to pronounce the letter מ we must open our mouth and to complete the pronunciation we must close our mouth for the end of the ם. We are forced to pronounce both מ and ם in order to properly pronounce the letter מ], so

too upon starting the Torah Shebeal Peh that begins with a נ we must not stop and abandon our study until we have completed it with the letter ם).

Pharaoh represented the evil inclination that tried to prevent the Jews from accepting the Torah Shebeal Peh that begins with a נ and ends with a ם. The word יצר מצרים begins with a נ and ends with a ם, and the letters in between are the letters יצר (inclination). This shows us that Pharaoh stood for the evil inclination that tried to break apart the two נ'ם's and stop the Jews from spreading the glory of Hashem through accepting the Torah Shebeal Peh. The two נ'ם's equal 80 the same numerical value as the letter פ ! Again, showing us the connection between the פ (that stands for the פה-mouth), and the Torah Shebeal Peh.

The name of פרעה can be reconfigured to spell פה - רע "evil mouth", showing us that his mission was to spoil the Torah Shebeal Peh of the Jews.

We also see that the Egyptians found shepherds repulsive as the Pasuk says כי "תועבת מצרים כל רעה צאן" "it was an abomination to the Egyptians, anyone who was a shepherd" what was it about being a shepherd that bothered the Egyptians so much?? It was because the leader and teacher of the Jews is described in the Torah as a shepherd. When Moshe asked Hashem for a replacement, he asked that the Jews should not be "כצאן אשר אין להם רעה" - "like sheep without a shepherd". We see from here that the leader of the Jews which taught them the Torah Shebeal Peh was referred to as a "shepherd". For this reason the Egyptians despised shepherds. The Egyptians were all about stopping the proliferation of Torah Shebeal Peh (the kingdom of Hashem), and they hated anything that represented its being spread.

The Jews however, fought back, they prepared themselves to accept the Torah Shebeal Peh (and the kingdom of Hashem). The Pasuk says; (שמות פרק א' פסוק יד) "וימררו את חייהם בעבדה קשה בחמר ובלבנים ובכל עבודה בשדה" "they embittered their lives with hard work, with mortar and brick, and in all kinds of service in the field".

It says that this backbreaking work was also a preparation for the Torah.

"קשה זו קושיא בחמר זו קל וחמר עבודה זו משנה ובלבנים דא ליבון הלכה ובכל עבודה בשדה דא ברייתא"

"The word קשה stands for the questions of the Gemarah (קושיא) the word חמר stands for חומר that is used in Gemarah. The word ליבון (ליבון) stands for clarity in Halacha. The word עבודה stands for the Mishnayot. The words כל עבודה בשדה stands for ברייתא (the word ברייתא means "outside" just like the work that was done outside in the fields). We see from here that the Jews were gearing themselves for the Torah Shebeal Peh, and readying themselves to glorify the kingdom of Hashem.

The Jews were freed from the exile, and left Egypt to accept the Torah. This is the holiday of Pesah. The word פסח can be broken up as פ-סח. The “פ” stands for פה the mouth, and “סח” means to talk. The פה was redeemed from exile, and the Torah Shebeal Peh that stands for the פה was freed as well. The פה-the Torah Shebeal Peh was free to no -to speak and proliferate Hashem’s will and teaches us how we are to serve him, thereby proclaiming his kingship. The letter פ of פסח also stands for the 40 days and 40 nights that Moshe ascended to שמים to learn the Torah (40+40=80, פ equals 80). The entire holiday of Pesah is a celebration of our freedom to study the Torah Shebeal Peh, and glorify Hashem.

This is what it means when it says in the Hagadah; מצוה עלינו ...מציאת מצרים “ואפילו כלנו חכמים... even if (today) we are all wise men-we would still be obligated to tell the story of the exodus from Egypt”.

The deeper meaning of this is, even if we were all חכמים-wise men in the תורה שבכתב -the written Torah we would *still* have to read about מציאת מצרים -the “taking out” of מצרים. Meaning, the removal of the יצר from מצרים leaving us with two מם’s that stand for the Torah Shebeal Peh. We would still have to study and understand the Torah Shebeal Peh, no matter how well versed we are in the written Torah!

There was another wicked רשע that tried to affect the kingdom of Hashem, this was Haman Harasha. In his time the Jews began to falter in the Torah Shebeal Peh, and did not heed the advice of Mordechai Hasadik. The Jewish people were saved, and they were וקבלו-reaffirmed and reaccepted the oral Torah. Mordechai cancelled Pesah that year because, what good is it to celebrate the holiday of the Torah Shebeal Peh if they were about to be destroyed on account of its abandonment!

The Jewish people’s repentance was accepted, and the miracle of Purim began at night (when Ahashverosh was unable to sleep and called for his book of remembrance). This is why we read the Megillah by day *and* by night. Why did the miracle begin at night? It was because the night represents the Torah Shebeal Peh. When Moshe was in Shamayim the only way he knew if it was day or night was based on the Torah he was being taught. When he was being taught Torah Shebeal Peh he knew it was night. From here we see the association between Torah Shebeal Peh and the night.

Another reason that the Torah Shebeal Peh is compared to night is because just as the night represents darkness and lack of clarity, so too the Torah Shebeal Peh is

as difficult as night, as the Midrash says; the Torah Shebeal Peh is “as difficult as night”. It is hard to understand, and we must toil greatly to reveal its light.

The Jewish people repented and reaccepted the Torah Shebeal Peh, therefore the miracle of their redemption began at night - the night standing for the Torah Shebeal Peh.

Once we understand this, we uncover the answers to some of our questions:
Why do we make the Seder at night?

The night as mentioned represents the Torah Shebeal Peh, and the Torah Shebeal Peh represents the glory of Hashem’s kingdom. Pesah is the celebration of the freedom of the mouth (פ-פ-ה-the mouth speaks), the mouth which signifies the Torah Shebeal Peh. The night therefore is the perfect time to read the Hagadah and to celebrate our freedom to study the Torah Shebeal Peh.

Why is the Hagadah in question and answer format?

The question and answer format is in the style of the Gemarah. The Gemarah is written in שְׂקִילָא וּטְרִיא (give and take), the Hagadah mimics the Gemarah’s style because, the Gemarah stands for the Torah Shebeal Peh and that is what we are celebrating. This is why even the Pesukim in the Torah write the requirement in question and answer form (וְהָיָה כִּי יִשְׁאַלְךָ... “when your son will ask you “what’s this”? you will answer etc...”). In addition we find that the Hagadah takes Pesukim and analyzes them all in the style of the Gemarah.

Why four cups?

The four cups stand for the four levels of the Torah Shebeal Peh; פֶּשֶׁט, רִמְז, דְּרָשׁ, סוּד (simple understanding, hints, exegesis, and secrets). We drink four cups corresponding to the four levels of the Torah Shebeal Peh that the night symbolizes.

Why wine?

Wine stands for the Torah Shebeal Peh. Wine is produced by crushing and squeezing grapes. The Torah Shebeal Peh is a study that can only be mastered through intense toil, and by “crushing and squeezing” your mind to understand its depths. The toil involved in producing wine stands for the toil entailed in the study of

Torah Shebeal Peh. We drink wine specifically because Torah Shebeal Peh is what the Pesah night is all about.

The Pasuk in Mishlei (פרק ט פסוק ה) says; "לכו לחמו בלחמי ושתו ביין מסכתי"- "come eat of my bread and drink the wine I have mixed". The Zohar explains that the bread referred to in the Pasuk is the written Torah and the wine stands for the oral Torah (the word מסכתי is like the word מסכת used for the tractates of the Gemarah- Torah Shebeal Peh).

This also explains a Gemarah (Shabbat 77a) which Rava details the proper balance of wine. The Gemarah quoted Rava that says "any wine that does not contain three parts water to one part wine is not considered wine". What is Rava's deeper message to us? יין-wine is numerically 70. This is the same numerical value as the fourth level of Torah Shebeal Peh-סוד. סוד equals 70 (this is why it says יין יצא סוד-when wine comes in secrets come out, alluding to their connection). Rava is explaining that if we don't "dilute" the סוד-secrets of the Torah" with the basic understanding, we will not have true סוד! One cannot jump straight to the secrets of the Torah while ignoring the first three steps! Rava therefore instructs us to balance the סוד with the first three levels of Torah the פשט רמז סוד.

Wine stands for Torah Shebeal Peh, and this is why in the times of Purim, Esther made the request from Ahashverosh over a גמשתה יין-a *wine* party. She was invoking the merit of the wine - the merit of the Torah Shebeal Peh - that the Jews were returning to at that time, in order to save them!

This explains why the Seder is at night, why the Hagadah is in a question and answer form, why we drink four cups, and why we drink wine, but what about Bnei Brak?! What does all this have to do with why the Rabbis chose to have their Seder in Bnei Brak??

The answer lies in who the leader of Bnei Brak was at that time. The head Rabbi of Bnei Brak was Rabbi Akibah. This is evident from this story in the Hagadah, the Halacha states that a student may not recline in front of his Rabbi, yet we find that Rabbi Akibah reclined (שהיו מסובין) in front of his Rabbi Rabbi Elazar?! The explanation is; that if a student is the Rabbi of a town he is allowed to recline in front of his Rabbi only if he is located in the town in which he is the leader. Rabbi Akibah was the Rabbi of Bnei Brak and because he was the leader in Bnei Brak, he was permitted to recline in front of his Rabbi, who was visiting him. Now that we know that it was Rabbi Akibah

that was the Rabbi of Bnei Brak, we can understand the importance of Bnei Brak being mentioned in the story.

Rabbi Akibah is the Rabbi who is linked to every unauthored statement in the Gemarah, and the Torah Shebeal Peh. (an unauthored Mishnah is the opinion of Rabbi Meir - a student of Rabbi Akibah, and unauthored Tosefta is like Reb Yehudah –a student of Rabbi Akibah). Thus, the Rabbi who personifies the Torah Shebeal Peh is Rabbi Akibah. The great Rabbis convened specifically in the town of Rabbi Akibah in order to have the “perfect” Seder, because Rabbi Akibah stood for the Torah Shebeal Peh! They were focusing on the essence of the holiday to reveal the light of the Torah Shebeal Peh, and the kingdom of Hashem!

With this concept we discover an amazing revelation into the story of Yael and Sisrah. Sisrah was the general of an army that was attacking the Jews. When he was “on the run” and in search of a place to hide out, Yael invited him in to her tent. She served him milk and wine to drink, and put him to sleep, after which she struck him in the temple and killed him. The holy books write; that contained inside the soul of the evil Sisrah was a spark from the holy soul of Rabbi Akibah! She therefore gave Sisrah *wine* to drink - wine that stands for the same thing as Rabbi Akibah - the Torah Shebeal Peh!

Sisrah sensed the holy spark inside of him, as is alluded to in the Pasuk when he entered the tent of Yael. The Pasuk says; (Shoftim 4-20) ויאמר אליה עמד פתח האהל והיה "stand in the door of the tent, and it shall be when any man asks you “is there any man here”? That you shall say, no”

Sisrah was instructing Yael not to let anyone in the tent. The word פה איש in פה איש can be understood as the word פה-mouth. We now understand פה איש as Sisrah's telling Yael, that if anyone asks for the פה-the mouth - meaning Rabbi Akibah the representative of the Torah Shebeal Peh that is symbolized by the mouth - tell them he is not here! Tell them that I do *not* contain his spark; so that they will leave me be! In reality he did have this spark of Rabbi Akibah, and this is why the Pasuk ends “ואמרת אין” (literally; “you shall say, no”) the word אין in the language of the Gemarah means “yes”. He was actually led to say that אין-yes indeed the פה, the spark of Rabbi Akibah that stood for the Torah Shebeal Peh was contained in him!

Yael was extracting the soul of Rabbi Akibah; this is why the Pasuk says that after she laid Sisrah down to sleep, she covered him with a "סמיכה". The word סמיכה has no parallel in this context elsewhere in scripture, but is understood to mean

“blanket”; the word סמיכה is explained by Resh Lakish in the Midrash, as a short way of saying "שמי כה מעיד עליה" - "my name of 25 testifies about her" (it testifies about Yael's purity of intention in her actions with Sisrah). The 25 refers to the 25 letters of שמע ישראל. We now understand that the Midrash is showing us that Hashem was testifying that Yael's intentions were to save Rabbi Akibah, the one who cried out the 25 letters of the Shema Yisrael as he was being combed to death by the Romans! She was trying to save Rabbi Akibah in an attempt to lay the foundation for the Gemarah, and the Torah Shebeal Peh! For this reason she gave him wine and laid him to sleep.

We also find an allusion to this in the Pasuk that discusses the destruction of the army of Sisrah (Shoftim Perek 4 Pasuk 16): "לא נשאר בהם עד אחד" (Lit; "and there was not a man left"). The words עד אחד can also be understood as "until one". The Pasuk is hinting that the entire army of Sisrah was destroyed except for one that was saved. Who was that one? It was the spark of the Neshama of Rabbi Akivah that was saved by Yael. This spark was referred to as אחד because the Neshama of Rabbi Akivah left him as he said the word אחד of the Shema while he was being tortured by the Romans (יצתה נשמתו באחד).

The essence of the holiday of Pesah is the glory of Hashem through Torah Shebeal Peh. This was the original exodus from Egypt, and this will be the future redemption as well אחרית כראשית-the last redemption will be like the first, both will be all about the Torah Shebeal Peh and its study. "ציון במשפט תפדה ושביה בצדקה" - "Zion shall be redeemed with judgment and those who return to her with righteousness". The words ציון במשפט תפדה equal 1076, the exact numerical value as תלמוד ירושלמי. The words ושביה בצדקה equals 524, the exact numerical value as תלמוד בבלי. We see from here that the future redemption is hinged upon our study of Torah, and dedication to the Torah Shebeal Peh! This is why today; when we are so close to seeing Mashiach we find a proliferation of Gemarah, and Torah Shebeal Peh study! We are in the process of the final redemption!

This opens our eyes to the importance of the night of Pesah, and its connection to the Torah Shebeal Peh, glory of Hashem, the importance of the Torah Shebeal Peh, and its integral role in our redemption. Without Torah Shebeal Peh the written Torah is like a short hand dictation that is indecipherable! We would be clueless of its intention! The Torah Shebeal Peh explains, and teaches us how Hashem wants us to serve him. Any facet of Judaism that abandoned the Torah Shebeal Peh ultimately faded away. The belief in the Torah Shebeal Peh and in the Rabbis is what keeps us as a nation,

and what gives us endurance through which we will merit our ultimate redemption
Amen.