

Pesach 2006

By: Rabbi Boaz Tomsky

An important section of our body of Judaic literature comes from the Kabbalah-mystical writings. Although Kabbalah only recently has become world famous, it actually has been in existence for quite some time. One instrument used in Kabbalah is the Atbash. The first letter Alef corresponds to the last letter Tav. The letter Bet corresponds to the letter Shin and so on. According to Atbash, we can determine on what day of the week the other chagim fall throughout the year. The first day of Pesach (Alef) which falls out this year on Thursday, corresponds to a holiday Tisha Bav (Tav), which will also be celebrated on Thursday. The second day of Pesach (Bet) which falls out on a Friday corresponds to Shevuot (Shin) which will also fall on Friday. This pattern continues with the third day of Pesach (Gimel) celebrated on Saturday, corresponds to Rosh Hashanah (Resh) which will also fall out on Saturday. This pattern continues throughout the seven days of Pesach.

We can observe from the Atbash that there is some connection between the holidays of Pesach and Tisha Bav. The difficulty presents itself, what precisely is that connection? Some commentators contend that this is the origin for wearing a Kittel and eating an egg at the Seder. Since Tisha Bav will always fall out on the same day of the week as the first day of Pesach, we acknowledge this by introducing these stimuli at the Seder table. Nonetheless, a question should surface. These two days appear to have no common denominators with one another. Tisha Bav focuses on the exile and the destruction of the Beit Hamikdosh. What does this have to do with the holiday of Pesach, a day named Zeman Charutanu-a time of our freedom?

In addition, the entire Seder seems to underemphasize the aspect of freedom. Instead the theme of the Hagadah is that the Jewish nation went Mayavdut lecharut-from acting as slaves to becoming emancipated. But why must we focus on the avdut aspect at all? Let us forget those trying years as slaves! Why do we still need to go through all of the motions of slavery long after we've since been freed?

I think the answer can be found on the dollar bill. After the signing of the Declaration of Independence, the Continental Congress charged some of our founding fathers with the responsibility to design the new nation's seal. The

committee produced a seal which was a scene of the Exodus from Egypt. In the seal is the figure Moshe, stretching his arm over the Red Sea, with the Bnei Yisroel crossing through the parted waters, protected by a divine fire and the Egyptian army drawing in the waters. This recommendation however, was rejected. As the Revolutionary War was coming to a close in the year 1782, a new committee was formed to create the famous image of the dollar bill. This familiar design is that of a pyramid, which was built by slaves. Charles Thomson, the artist who designed the seal, felt that the pyramid signified strength and duration.

One can't help but to wonder why the Continental Congress chose the symbol of pyramids and not the powerful symbol of the Jews at the Red Sea. To me, the motive of our founding fathers is quite clear. The pyramids represent slavery. The Red Sea represents freedom. Our founding fathers wanted to instill within us, the feeling of appreciating our freedoms. How can this be accomplished? By remembering and acknowledging the alternative. We could still be under the rule of the British. We then will not take our freedom for granted and, in turn, we will better appreciate our freedom.

This is the message of the order of our Seder. Remembering and acknowledging the Avdut-slavery that our forefathers endured, we can then appreciate our chayrut-freedom.

This also explains the connection between Pesach and Tisha Bav. It is coming to teach us this stark lesson that the Tisha Bav experience, eating eggs and wearing the Kittel, clothes and food of mourners, can give us the focus and appreciation that we are now free. But it also shows that if we don't appreciate our freedom, the alternative, the consequence is that these freedoms will be removed from us.

This can also explain the significance of the Mah Nishtana. Why were these specific questions being asked by the child? Since these questions focus directly on the paradox of the evening: Is tonight's focus on slavery (eating Matza, eating Marror) or is the theme of the evening freedom (leaning, dipping)? The answer is the first lie after the four questions. Avadim haayinu liparoh bimitzrayim veyotziaynu Hashem elokenu mishom. We were slaves but Hashem removed us from Egypt. We teach our children that it is necessary to go through the motions of slavery to truly appreciate our freedom.

In conclusion, we recite toward the end of Magid that each generation must envision themselves as though they have personally left Egypt. Why must we play mind games and pretend that we were in Egypt. Most of us never even spent a single day in Mitzrayim? Although none of us were physically slaves, we can still fulfill these words of the Hagadah. We are being instructed to look within ourselves, at our past and at our current status. The way we are today with our families and careers, may be drastically different than from years prior. Perhaps some of us may have had difficult experiences in ones past. These experiences are not meant to be forgotten. Instead we are instructed to remember those difficult times, not to be saddened by them but rather to realize how fortunate we are today. This is our personal Avdut lichayrut-from slavery to freedom.

Good Yom Tov!