

The
CHASSIDUS
PERSPECTIVE
 with Reb Yoel Kahn

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THREE MATZOS, FOUR CUPS

The Rishonim explain that the four cups of wine we drink at the Seder correspond to the four expressions of *geulah* written in Parshas Ve'eira (*Vehotzeisi, Vehitzalti, Vega'alti, and Velakachti*).

The Mordechai asks: The matzah is also reminiscent of the *geulah*. Why didn't Chazal institute that we have four matzos at the Seder table?

Other *mafarshim* explain that the four cups correspond to the four times the word "cup" is used in Tanach in relation to salvation. This reason would not apply to matzos. But the Shulchan Aruch cites the first explanation, that they correspond to the four expressions of *geulah*. If so, why not have four matzos, too?

ANALYZING THE FOUR EXPRESSIONS

The Rebbe explains that in truth, the matzos correspond to the expressions of *geulah*, too—but only to the first three of them.

When analyzing the four expressions, we find that the fourth differs from the first three. While the first three explicitly foretell a redemption from slavery—"I will take you out of the bondage of Mitzrayim; I will deliver you from being enslaved to them; I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great wonders"—the fourth does not mention redemption at all: "I will take you to Me as a nation." How is the fourth expression connected to *geulah*? Because it refers to Matan Torah, when the Jews became a nation, and Matan Torah was the culmination and ultimate goal of Yetzias Mitzrayim.

In other words, the first three expressions focus on the overt *geulah* as it was experienced during Yetzias Mitzrayim, while the fourth expression includes a later, not-yet-obvious part of the *geulah*, which would only be experienced seven weeks later, by Matan Torah. Chazal therefore instituted three matzos, corresponding to the first element of *geulah*, and four cups of wine, recalling the second element as well.

What exactly are these two elements of *geulah*? And why did Chazal decide that the matzos should correspond to the first element and the wine, to the second?

A GIMMEL AND A DALED

To understand this, we need to examine the Hebrew letters that represent the numbers of three and four—*gimmel* and *daled*.

The Gemara says that the letters *gimmel* and *daled* signify *gemol dalim*—a benefactor assisting a needy individual. The Gemara explains that this is hinted in the form of these two letters: the *gimmel*, whose leg extends forward to the *daled*, represents the benefactor proactively offering assistance, and the *daled*, whose head is turned away from the *gimmel*, is the poor man.

Kabbalah and Chassidus take this a step further, explaining that the two ideas of giving and receiving are related (not only to the *form* of these letters, but also) to the *numbers* they represent, namely, three and four.

But first, let's explore the concepts of giving and receiving a bit deeper, as they apply to a teacher (the giver) imparting intellectual knowledge to a student (the recipient).

ARE YOU TEACHING OR TRANSFORMING?

There are two methods in which a teacher can instruct a student. In one model (in Chassidus known as *hamshachah milmaalah limatah*), the teacher imparts information (Gemara, Chassidus, etc.) to the student, and the student understands and retains the information he was taught. However, he is still unable to study on his own, and

he surely cannot innovate new ideas. The teacher's thoughts and ideas have merely been transferred to the student, but the student's mind works in the same way as before; his intellect has not changed.

In the second model (known as *haala'ah milmatah limaalah*), however, the teacher instructs the student to the extent that

he is now able to study and innovate independently. The teacher has succeeded in transforming and elevating the student's thought process, so that he now has the ability to explore further on his own (based on the knowledge he has received from his teacher).

Although both models require effort, they differ drastically: In the first, the student is doing his best to focus on the teacher's words and make sure he does not forget them, while in the second he is

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working on transforming his intellect, so that the teacher's way of understanding becomes his own.

[This can be compared to the act of creating a lush landscape from a desolate, arid wilderness (whether materially or spiritually). One way to do this is by bringing water from elsewhere to irrigate the land. This requires effort, too—you must dig pits and coat them with cement to make sure the water doesn't get lost. But the land's fertility is not its own doing; it is the result of an outside source.

Another method, however, is to transform the land by digging deeper in the land itself, until a well of water is reached. This is a different type of work, one in which the stones and earth covering the well are slowly removed, layer by layer, until the inherent fertility of the desert itself is revealed.]

These two methods are associated with the numbers three and four. In brief, the act of imparting information consists of three elements: the act of giving, the act of withholding what the recipient is not yet ready to receive, and a third element which is a combination of the previous two. Once the student receives the information and it fuses with his intellect, a fourth element is created: the representation of the intellectual idea as the student understands it.

TWO STAGES OF GEULAH

These two methods of *hashpa'ah* can help us understand the difference between the two elements of *geulah*, as experienced first at Yetzias Mitzrayim and then at Matan Torah.

At the time of Yetzias Mitzrayim, the Jews were on a lowly spiritual state. Despite the fact that they were nearly bare of mitzvos, Hashem revealed Himself and redeemed them. The Jews were drawn after these sublime revelations, but they themselves were not elevated as a result.

Yetzias Mitzrayim was followed by a seven-week period—the time of *sefiras ha'omer*—during which the Jews refined themselves, *midah* by *midah*. Ultimately, they achieved a true transformation at Matan Torah, when they were finally free of the spiritual filth of Mitzrayim. The first three expressions of *geulah* underscore Hashem's role in

taking the Jews out of Mitzrayim, but do not mention any change in the Jewish people. These expressions correspond to the first element of *geulah*, as it was experienced at the time of Yetzias Mitzrayim—a Divine revelation that drew the Jews to Hashem, despite their low spiritual state. The fourth expression, on the other hand, emphasizes the fact that the Jews *became* and *were transformed into* Hashem's nation, which occurred at Matan Torah.

MATZAH AND WINE

As mentioned above, the three matzos correspond to the first three expressions of *geulah*, while the four cups of wine include the fourth

expression as well. In other words, the matzah is associated with the *geulah* as it came from Above, while the wine commemorates the Jews' transformation to become Hashem's nation. Why?

The obligation to eat matzah is *min hatorah*, while drinking four cups of wine is *me'derabanan*. Biblical vs. rabbinic obligations reflect the two

concepts discussed above: A biblical command is one that stems from Above, but this very same Torah tells us that Hashem gives the *chachomim* the ability (not only to explain the words of the Torah, but also) to devise original enactments, demonstrating that their intellect is one with Torah.

Furthermore, matzah is flat and tasteless, signifying the *bittul* that is required when the student focuses on understanding his teacher's instruction. At this point, he may not mix in any personal insights (just as even a crumb of *chometz* may not be consumed on Pesach). The wine, which has a flavor and instigates feelings of joy, symbolizes the second phase, where feelings of self are no longer taboo. Instead of total *bittul*, the student can focus on understanding and innovating on his own, as the teacher's outlook has successfully fused with his own.

In the second model, the teacher instructs the student to the extent that he is now able to study and innovate independently.

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