



Dayan Yehonoson Hool

Federation Beis Din

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Parshah

FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION - PASSING DOWN THE MESORA ON SEDER NIGHT

The Chochom – the wise son – asks a detailed question at the Seder. “What are the testimonies, the statutes and the laws that Hashem our G-d has commanded you?” The answer that the Ba'al Haggadah says is to be given doesn't seem to respond to the points in the question: “You should also answer him, “Like the laws of the Pesach, one must not eat anything after the Pesach *afikomen*.”” How does that address his comprehensive query?

The expression “*Kehilchos hapesach* - Like the laws of Pesach,” too, is puzzling.

The Malbim (at the end of Parshas Bo) offers an eye-opening insight into this familiar passage.

There are many *mitzvos* that the Halacha commands us to perform, but they appear to have varying degrees of severity. At the top end, so to speak, are *mitzvos* that incur a punishment of *koreis* – excommunication of the soul – for those who transgress them. Then there are *chayvei lavin* – negative commandments that incur *malkus* for their transgression. There are positive commandments in the Torah, that are obligatory but do not incur *malkus* for those who fail to perform them. Then there are *mitzvos derabonon*, commandments that are not Biblical but were added by the *chachomim*. In addition, later sages added various *takonos* – enactments - that were binding on their communities. There are *minhogim*, too, customs that some sectors of Klal Yisroel have taken upon themselves, and finally, there are the individual family traditions that some families have been passing down for generations.

All of these make up the totality of Judaism, and the service of Hashem.

On the Seder night, all of these differing categories of *mitzvah* come together in a remarkable way.

The Korban Pesach is a positive commandment, which carries a penalty of *koreis* if not performed. Not only is it of the most serious consequence, it is also of supreme significance. It represents the testimony that Hashem took us out of Egypt, and is an expression of gratitude for this and the acceptance that from that moment on we became the servants of Hashem.

The prohibition of *chometz* is the most severe type of negative commandment, which also carries with it a penalty of *koreis*.

There are other negative commandments of this night that do not carry a penalty of *koreis*, such as the prohibition of taking the Korban Pesach out of the house or breaking a bone of the korban.

Then there are positive *mitzvos min hatorah* to be performed, such as eating matzah and *moror*, and relating the story of the Exodus from Egypt.

The many *mitzvos derabonon* of the night include the four cups of wine and the *charoses*.

Then there are *takonos*, such as the prohibition of eating *kitnyos* that the Ashkenazi communities have been observing for generations, and the individual customs that differing groups follow, such as ‘*gebros*’ and the fact that some are particular to use only hand matzos whereas some are particular to use only machine matzos.

Finally, there are unique customs for Pesach and the Seder that many individual families have been passing down through the generations.

The Chochom – the wise son – notes all these different activities going on at the Seder, and he is curious, wishing to categorise them all. What is the significance of each one? Which ones are more important, or more significant? Which are less so? Which are statutes, without apparent reasons, and which are testimonies, the performance of which testify to fundamentals of Yiddishkeit?

His detailed question indicates an intelligent, probing mind. He deserves a full answer, and indeed one must make sure that he gets a full response to his comprehensive enquiry. Much of the rest of the Haggadah will indeed provide answers to all of this.

But the Ba'al Haggadah tells us, “You must also tell him,” - there is a crucial introduction that you must preface your answer with.

It is true that there are differing types of *mitzvos*, with some being more severe than others, and each one having its own reasons and significance. Nonetheless on a practical level they are all equal. We observe them all, and value each

and every one. We don't pick and choose. Every single one is vital to our Yiddishkeit – we don't compromise on the seemingly less important ones and concentrate only on the more significant.

Mitzvos de'oraiso, derabonon, takonos and *minhogim* are all part of *Avodas Hashem*.

So, we take start by telling the Chochom about two contrasting *halochos* of Pesach. On the one hand the Korban Pesach itself, being a *mitzvah min hatorah* that carries a penalty of *koreis*, incorporates enormous significance in *avodas Hashem*, and thus represents perhaps the most important of the *mitzvos* of the Seder. On the other end of the spectrum, the Halacha that one must not eat anything after the *afikomen*, is apparently of minor consequence. It doesn't seem to have any intrinsic significance. It's just there so that the taste of the *mitzvos* of Pesach and matzah stays in the mouth at the end of the Seder, indicating that the *mitzva* is beloved in our eyes and we don't want to part easily from it. And yet for us, this *inyan* of not eating after the *afikomen* is just as vital as the Korban Pesach, because *avodas Hashem* means doing everything that we are supposed to do, whether we appreciate the significance or not.

So give the Chochom a full answer to his question. But also impress upon him that whatever the comparative significance and relative importance of each *mitzvah*, Halacha and *minhag*, ultimately, for us, “*kehilchos hapesach* - just like the strict and severe *halachos* of the Korban Pesach,” so too we are equally scrupulous in observing the apparently minor Halacha that “one should keep the taste of the *mitzvah* in one's mouth by not eating after the *afikomen*.”

The message is as timely today as it was in the Malbim's generation. The Seder night is the ultimate ceremony of the passing down of the *mesora* from generation to generation. Even as we discuss the Exodus from Egypt and instil in the coming generations the principles and fundamentals of Yiddishkeit, we ensure to emphasise that whether we fully understand or not, we are uncompromisingly committed to upholding and performing every single aspect of Yiddishkeit, just as our parents and their ancestors did for all of time.

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2. What was (one of) the hardest avoda done by the kohanim?