



טעמו וראו

A taste of the
Rebbe's teachings

Passover

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Four Questions for Life

On Passover eve, we all gather around the Seder table and turn our attention to the children's recital of the Four Questions. These Questions are not just children's play. They have deep meaning and relevance for every person's life.

The following pages contain a new and original interpretation for the ancient and beloved text.

In loving memory of
Rabbi **Aharon Serebryanski**,

the Rebbe's representative to
Australia and New Zealand.

Yartzeit **9 Nissan, 5780**

Dedicated by his **children**
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The Four Questions



>> The Rebbe

What makes this night different from all the other nights?

The Rebbe Rashab famously interpreted the Mah Nishtanah as follows: “What makes this night—*this final exile*—different from all the other nights—*the other exiles which preceded it?*”

Exile is compared to nighttime; the fact that the Jewish people are scattered among the nations is a sign of darkness. It signifies a darkness over all people of the world, in the fact that G-d’s presence in the universe is not recognized (if that recognition would have been widespread, the Jewish people would have no longer been in exile). It also signifies a sense of darkness among the Jewish people in particular, because the exile is a result of our sins.

Now, we have experienced several exiles. In addition to our exile in Egypt, we were exiled among the Babylonians, the Persian Medes in the time of Purim and the [Syrian] Greeks in the time of Chanukah. Today, we are in our final exile. There is no doubt that this final exile is different. But, in this regard, the child asks, “*What* makes this night different?”

Source 1 The Rebbe, Balayla Hahu, Purim 5720 p. 2

During exile, it is as if we are asleep. As it says in the Song of Songs, “I am asleep,” and the Zohar explains, “I am asleep in exile,” because exile is compared to sleep...sleep begins by closing one’s eyes. Other parts of the body do not overtly change when we sleep; the most noticeable difference is that one’s eyes are closed. Now, sight is one of the most important elements of the body—both physical sight and intellectual sight, i.e. foresight... When a person is in a state where he is unaware of his surroundings, he is considered “asleep.”

כללות ענין השינה למטה בכללות העולם הוא ענין הגלות, וכמו שכתוב (בשיר השירים) אני ישנה, ואיתא בזהר ‘אני ישנה בגלותא’, היינו, שענין הגלות הוא בדוגמת שינה . . . הנה ידוע שענין השינה מתחיל מסגירת העינים, והיינו, שבכל שאר האברים לא ניכר השינוי שבשעת השינה לגבי היותו ער כמו שניכר השינוי בעינים, שבשעת השינה הם סגורות. והרי הראי’ הוא ענין היותר חשוב שישנו באדם, הן ראי’ כפשוטה, ראיית עיני בשר, והן ראיית השכל, כמ”ש (בקהלת) “החכם עיניו בראשו והכסיל בחושך הולך”. אך כאשר נמצא במעמד ומצב שאינו רואה ואינו יודע מה נעשה סביבו, הרי זה נקרא בשם שינה.

Question One

>> The Rebbe

On all nights we do not dip even once, but on this night, we dip twice?

The first unique element of this final exile is that “on all other nights, we didn’t dip...”

The Rebbe Rashab explains that “dipping” is “an expression of cleansing and purification.” On all other “nights” we didn’t even dip once, i.e., “we weren’t fully cleansed, for they were followed by further exiles. On this night, however, we will ‘dip’ twice—our bodies will be refined and our souls revealed.”

To explain this in simple terms so that even a child—the questioner—could understand:

We dip items into water or other liquids to cleanse them from unclean matter. Even a young student knows that Torah speaks of “bathing in water and becoming pure”—in other words, dipping is a form of cleansing.

This is also true on a spiritual level: when we do something that is forbidden—and even a child knows that he might occasionally do something wrong, after being enticed by a friend etcetera—we need to cleanse and purify ourselves from that deed.

How do we “dip twice”? Our deeds take on two forms: there are acts of the soul and acts of the body. In simple terms, some sins are associated with eating and drinking, like eating forbidden foods, failing to recite a blessing and so on. Those deeds are associated with the body. But some deeds are associated with the soul, such as the obligation to recite the Shema where we confirm our belief in G-d and our love for him.

We therefore need to be dipped twice, “to cleanse ourselves from sins of the body and the soul.”

This is the meaning of the question, “On all nights we did not dip even once, but on this night, we dip twice?” Other exiles were followed by incomplete redemptions, indicating that the Jewish people weren’t fully cleansed and purified, and therefore reverted back to exile a short time later. But this final exile will be followed by a final and complete redemption, when all evil and pain will be abolished from existence. This indicates that our exile has the qualities of a “double dipping” which represents complete purification for both our bodies and our souls. In the Rebbe Rashab’s words, “our bodies refined and our souls revealed.”

Question Two

On all nights we eat chametz or matzah, but on this night, we eat only matzah?

This is followed by the second question: “On all nights we eat *chametz* or matzah, but on this night, we eat only matzah?”

Chametz and matzah differ in the fact that *chametz* rises, which signifies a perception of self-worth and arrogance—which is the source of all evils. A child knows that as a result of arrogance, he may disrespect his teacher or parent, and he may even come to disrespect G-d. Matzah, on the other hand, represents humility and unpretentiousness.

So, the question states, “On all other nights, we ate *chametz* or matzah.” The other exiles didn’t conclude with a complete redemption, which indicates that we were left with a residue of *chametz*. But at the end of this “night,” with the arrival of the true and final redemption which won’t be followed by another exile, we will be “only matzah,” cleansed of all *chametz*, for evil will cease to exist.

Question Three

On all nights we eat any kind of vegetables, and on this night, we eat only maror?

We then come to the third question: “On all nights we eat any kind of vegetables, and on this night, we eat only *maror*?”

Vegetables are not essential food items like bread. Rather, they enhance our eating experience. When we are able to supplement our staples with vegetables, our meal is a more pleasurable experience.

In this regard, we say, “on this night, we eat only *maror*.” In the future redemption, when G-dliness will be revealed, our pleasure will derive from our experience of G-d and not from our experience of materialism. Thus, we will eat only to sustain our bodies, and the food will taste like *maror*. Setting aside time for eating will be an irritating chore; although it will be a necessity to remain alive, we will have preferred that G-d create us such that we do not need to eat at all. We will only eat what is necessary; pleasures and luxuries won't be pursued at all, being bitter to the palate.

This is something even a young child could comprehend: he knows that when his mother calls him to dinner when he's in midst of a game, he yells that he'd rather continue playing than eat, because he finds more interest in the game than in eating. He eats only because he is forced to, or because he is told that without eating, he won't have energy to play. But that act of eating itself is insignificant. It is an experience of *maror*.

It will be a similar experience when he matures. We've often mentioned the writings of Maimonides in his commentary on the Mishna: A young student of Torah should be given sweets as reward, and as he grows he should be given rewards that are more significant. Over time, he will begin to learn Torah for the sake of reward in the world-to-come, and then he will learn to

appreciate Torah study for its own sake. When he will begin to understand that Torah study is more valuable than food, he will be pained by the fact that he must take valuable time to eat; eating will become a chore that tastes like *maror*.

So, during all the other exiles, we “ate vegetables.” There were times that we dedicated ourselves to Torah study and relegated physical pleasures to the status of *maror*, but there were other times when we indulged in the world’s pleasures.

But on “this night,” with the redemption from this last exile, all physical pleasures will be like *maror*.

Question Four

On all nights we eat sitting upright or reclining, and on this night we all recline?

This is followed by the fourth question: “On all nights we eat sitting upright or reclining, and on this night we all recline?”

Both sitting and reclining are positions of rest. A child knows that after standing for a while, he gets tired and needs to sit down to rest. But there is a distinction between the two positions. Sitting isn’t true rest. It is a midway position from which you can easily stand if necessary. Reclining, on the other hand, is an expression of true, uninhibited freedom.

This is the difference between this exile and the previous ones. Some redemptions were longer (reclining) and some shorter (sitting), but they always knew that another exile could come in its wake, so even the longer redemptions weren’t true freedom. Only the final redemption, which will not be followed by another exile, will be a true “rest” from exile, and then, “we will all recline”—we will achieve true rest.

The Greatest Question of All

This raises the question: “What makes this night different from all the other nights?” Why will the next redemption be different than the previous ones? Why will this redemption bring double-purification, true humility, transcending materialism and ultimate rest? Why will it be different from the redemptions until now?

Just several months earlier, the questioner might ask, he was himself behind the Iron Curtain, and he saw that for every Jew there were five times as many non-Jews holding him back from living a Jewish life in which Torah and Mitzvot are “our very life and the length of our days.” Every act necessitated self-sacrifice.

Even now, after leaving that land and coming to a state of peace and tranquility, he still cannot truly rest, knowing that his colleagues behind the Iron Curtain continue to struggle with observing Torah and Mitzvos.

If so, he asks, “What makes this night different from all the other nights?” He is being told that this will be a final and ultimate redemption—but how is that possible?

The Answer

The answer is, “We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt and G-d took us out...” When the people of Israel were servants to Pharaoh in Egypt, they were enveloped by Egypt like a baby in the mother’s womb; they needed to be removed as “a nation from within a nation...” Nonetheless, G-d did not leave them for a single moment, and as soon as He so desired, He took them out with a strong arm.

The same will occur for us with the future redemption; in the words of the verse, “As in the days of the Exodus from Egypt, I will show you wonders,” with the coming of Moshiach, very soon.

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