

MAGGID - PART 4: THE MISSING QUESTION AND FREEDOM

by Rabbi Yehudah Prero

One of the highlights for children at the Seder is the recitation of Mah Nishtaneh, the Four Questions. The Four Questions have their origin in a Mishna. The Mishna (Pesachim 116a) states: His father instructs him [to ask]: 'Why is this night different from all [other] nights? For on all [other] nights we eat leavened and unleavened bread, whereas on this night [we eat] only leavened bread; On all other nights we eat all kinds of herbs, but on this night we eat bitter herbs; On all other nights we eat meat roasted, stewed or boiled, but on this night, roast only; On all other nights we dip once, but on this night we dip twice.'

When reading this text, one will notice that the four questions in the Mishna are not the four questions we ask at the Seder. During the existence of the Bais Hamikdosh, the Holy Temple, the nation of Israel used to consume the Korban Pesach, the special Paschal offering. The Korban Pesach could only be eaten roasted. It could not be stewed nor boiled. It is for this reason that during the time of the Bais Hamikdosh, the child asked a question about how the offering was eaten. Nowadays, when we do not eat the Korban Pesach, there is obviously no reason for a child to ask a question about something he does not observe.

The Satmar Rebbe, however, is troubled by the question that we do ask. Instead of the question about the Korban Pesach, the child asks: On all other nights, we eat both sitting up straight and reclining, yet on this night we eat while reclining. This difference in how we conduct ourselves during the meal is a difference that is not solely apparent nowadays. At the time of the existence of the Temple, people ate their Pesach meal and Korban reclining as well. Granted, we know why we no longer ask the question concerning the preparation of the Korban. However, why does the Mishna not include the question concerning reclining during the meal?

The Satmar Rebbe explains that reclining during the meal is an act of nobility. It is an act in which a free person, who rules over his domain, partakes. We, therefore, recline during the Seder to remember the freedom we experienced when we left Egypt. Reclining recalls the great miracles that G-d performed for us in conjunction with our freedom. At the time of the existence of the Bais Hamikdosh, when the nation of Israel governed over themselves, there was no need to detail what freedom means. There was no reason to have an in depth discussion about liberty. Freedom was part and parcel of the life of the members of the nation of Israel. They had the Bais Hamikdosh, and they were able to bring Korbanos, sacrificial offerings. The nation vividly felt freedom. Therefore, the mere fact that people ate reclining at the Seder was enough to remind people that they were

celebrating freedom. No question that would lead to deep discussion about freedom was needed. Hence, the Mishna contains no question concerning reclining.

However, nowadays, when we are in exile, a question about why we recline is more than appropriate. Why, the child asks, do we recline? What good did the freedom of our forefathers do for us? We are currently sitting in exile, with no Temple, no Korban. Why do we bother commemorating a freedom that seemingly has no relevance to our lives, in this day and age?

The answer, we recite in the following passage of Avadim HaYinu. "If G-d had not taken us out of Egypt, we, our children, and their children would still be enslaved to Pharaoh in Egypt." The Ohr HaChayim explains that during the time they were enslaved in Egypt, the nation of Israel experienced a massive spiritual decline. They sunk so low that there was almost no hope of recovery. The nation barely missed this threshold. The reason why they sunk so low was because they had not yet received the Torah. Once the nation was redeemed, they were given the Torah, which has since then acted as a spiritual booster. It is now impossible to sink so low that we would no longer be worthy to be G-d's people. Had G-d not liberated our forefathers, not just by physically taking them out of slavery in Egypt, but by giving them spiritual freedom when they were presented with the Torah, we could have been enslaved to the physical drudgery of this world. Had we not tasted freedom in the days of our ancestors, we would have no chance at obtaining freedom in this day and age. A commemoration of a freedom first tasted long ago is needed, and we therefore recline.

The Satmar Rebbe is sending us a clear lesson. We may live in democratic societies. We may have prosperity. We may have the ability to practice our religion freely. Yet, we are not free. We are still in exile. We still lack the spiritual setting we need to be truly free. We must have a reminder of what freedom is, because we have never experienced it.

L'Shana Ha'Ba'ah B'Yerushalayim - Next Year in Jerusalem - as a free nation!