

INHERENT AND ESSENTIAL CONTRADICTIONS

by Rabbi Yehudah Prero

Dedicated to the memory of my dear father, R' Israel Prero, R' Yisroel Aryeh ben R' Shmuel Tzvi, hk"m. He is sorely missed.

The Seder night marks the culmination of an intense and task-filled period of time. Thorough cleaning, cooking, studying, shopping and Seder preparations all fill our schedules in the weeks preceding Pesach. The amount of tasks and items to accomplish may seem daunting. However, all of this preparation should not cause us to lose proper focus on the upcoming holiday.

In connection with the holiday of the Sukkos, the Torah (Devarim 16:14) writes "You shall rejoice on your holiday...." Two verses later, the Torah writes "and you will be completely joyous." There is a seeming repetition of the instruction to be happy on the holiday. R' Reuven Grozofsky explains that the later verse is intended to address a specific aspect of our feelings. A person should not allow feelings of labor or "servitude," that we are servants of Hashem who has given us many mitzvos to perform, to minimize the happiness we are supposed to feel on the holidays. On the day of his coronation, a king should be experiencing sheer joy and elation, and he puts aside the enormous feelings of responsibility and the pressure from overwhelming tasks he faces until after the celebrations end. A sumptuous meal is not prepared on its own. Someone must labor over every aspect of the preparation, from selection of the proper ingredients to the appropriate recipes to the presentation of the food itself. Yet, when the chef finally does partake of this meal, he enjoys it. He does not feel the burden of the preparation at that time. He just sits back and enjoys the experience. The same is true with all earthly pleasures. And the same must be true when it comes to our celebration of the holidays, R' Grozofsky writes.

Yes, preparations for Pesach can be complex, daunting, and stressful. The Seder itself, with ensuring that we properly fulfill the evening's dictates, from the recitation of the Hagadah to the consumption of the proper measures of matzo and wine to completing the Afikoman before the middle of the night, can be viewed as a challenge. But we must celebrate, and that celebration must be with the happiness that is due for the night which marks our birth as a nation, a nation free to serve G-d alone. Nothing should take away from that.

The attitude we have towards the Seder and the night's observances not only needs to reflect the happiness that we are reminded to feel. There is recognition of why we are doing what we are doing of which we must be cognizant as well.

At the end of the Seder, at the beginning of the step known as Nirtza, we state "The Seder of Pesach now concludes according to Halacha, complete in all its laws and ordinances. Just as we were privileged to arrange it (tonight), so should we merit to perform it."

The Minchas Yitzchok, on this passage, cites an analogy offered by the Yismach Moshe. Picture an individual who is famished. He has not eaten for days, and is literally starved. There are two ways that individual may be relieved of his hunger. If given food, even a small amount, even the stalest, most unappetizing morsel of food will do the trick. However, a person may forget his hunger if other senses are engaged. If that individual comes upon an awesome sight, hears an absolutely amazing and beautiful piece of music, or has his intellect or curiosity piqued, he may come to forget he was hungry and will be satisfied for a period of time. There is a clear distinction between the two paths to "satisfy" hunger. When done in the way that addresses the root of the problem - with food - any small and unimpressive foodstuff suffices. Food is obviously that which is intended to satisfy hunger, so food, regardless of quantity or quality, will help. However, the stimulation of the other senses will only work to distract a person from hunger; it will not satisfy hunger. That is why the stimulation of the senses must be in a heightened and engaging fashion, with something awesome that will distract from the underlying feelings of hunger.

Each and every commandment G-d has given us has a purpose. Clearly, we do not know or are not aware of the purpose. However, we were given commandments to do certain things in certain ways at certain times. The commandments were structured in this fashion to allow us to benefit from them to the greatest extent possible. When we are able to perform these commandments in the right way, place and time, even if they are performed by rote, without deep thought or meditative intent, they still benefit us - just as food satisfies hunger. However, there are times when we can't perform the commandments the way they were established. We need to do something short of the ideal, and that performance needs to be more engaging to satisfy the need at hand. In such circumstances, we need to bring extra measures of purity, whole heartedness and intent to the performance in order to fully capitalize on the experience.

Come the Seder night, writes the Minchas Yitzchok, we unfortunately are not able to bring the Korban Pesach, the Pascal offering. We cannot perform the service of the night in the ideal and proper fashion. We therefore have the Hagadah, in which we recount the story of our slavery and exodus. We have numerous observances and remembrances to recall the days when we were able to celebrate Pesach in the ideal manner. We engage ourselves in many different ways. Upon our conclusion of these observances, we state that we have completed the "Seder," the "order" of Pesach with all its laws and ordinances. We were only able to have the "Seder," an arrangement or order, and not the actual observance - and that is why it needed to be with all its laws and ordinances. And we state that just as we were privileged to arrange the night's observances - a less than ideal situation, so should we merit to perform it - in the proper way, in the correct fashion, when we have the Bais haMikdash, the Holy Temple, in Jerusalem.

The Seder night is one full of dual symbolism. We recall both slavery and freedom. We eat bitter herbs and a festive meal. We sing praise and we recount the story of our harsh and painful slavery. And with the Seder, in its essence, we recognize that we do not have a Bais HaMikdosh, yet it must be a happy and celebratory experience. The Seder, from beginning to end, is designed to pose contradictions, so that the children (and we as well) will ask "Why is this night different from all other nights?" And we know the answer.

May we all merit celebrating Pesach in the Bais HaMikdosh, free to serve only Hashem, speedily.