



כוס ישועות The Cup of Salvations

■ The Dream of Redemption

Almost as well-known as the obligation to drink four cups of wine at the Pesach Seder is its allusion in the Torah: the famous Four Expressions of Redemption in G-d's promise to Moshe.

וְהוֹצֵאתִי... וְהַצַּלְתִּי... וְגִאֲלְתִּי... וְלִקַּחְתִּי...

I will extricate [Israel from Egypt]... I will save... I will redeem...

I will take... (Sh'mot 6,6-7)

It is the Sage R. Huna, in the name of R. Bnayah, who teaches us this allusion in the Medrash (B'reshit Rabba 88,5). There is also another, less well-known Torah reference to this law, based on earlier events. It is found in Parashat Vayeshev, where King Pharaoh's imprisoned butler describes his dream to Yosef HaTzaddik:

...וְכֹס פְּרֵעָה בְּיָדִי, וְאָקַח אֶת הָעֲנָבִים וְאֶשְׁחַט אֹתָם אֶל כּוֹס פְּרֵעָה וְאָתֹן
אֶת הַכּוֹס עַל כַּף פְּרֵעָה.

"Pharaoh's cup was in my hand, and I took the grapes and pressed them into Pharaoh's cup and I gave the cup into his hand." (B'reshit 40,11)

We then read Yosef's interpretation:

בְּעוֹד שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים... וְנָתַתְּ כּוֹס פְּרֵעָה בְּיָדוֹ כַּמֶּשֶׁפֶט הָרִאשׁוֹן אֲשֶׁר הָיִיתָ מְשַׁקֵּהוּ.

"In another three days... you shall deliver Pharaoh's cup into his hand, as you did when you were his butler." (verse 13)

The word "*cup*" appears in the above verses exactly four times: three in the story of the dream, and once in its interpretation. R. Shmuel bar Nachman, in the above Medrash, says that it is these four mentions that indicate the obligation to drink four cups at the Passover Seder.

The first explanation for the four Pesach cups – the correspondence to the four Expressions of Redemption of the Exodus – seems logical. But what connection can there be between the butler's dream and Pesach commemorations?

It is very clear that for Yosef, the butler's dream was something out of the ordinary. In fact, it was his personal Dream of Redemption, his lifeline after 12 years in the terrible dungeons of ancient Egypt. After providing the interpretation, Yosef immediately asked the butler to remember him to Pharaoh, in the hope for a royal pardon.

Yosef is no regular person. He is a symbol for Israel, and his years in captivity symbolize the entire nation's upcoming torturous ordeal in the great house of bondage known as Egypt. His personal redemption dream set the pattern for Israel's national Dream of Redemption from Egypt. The cups the butler saw as he slept in his bed are the Divine harbingers of redemption. King David alluded to this when he composed this verse:

כּוֹס יְשׁוּעוֹת אֲשֶׁר וּבְשֵׁם ה' אֶקְרָא.

*The cup of salvations I shall lift,
and in the Name of G-d I shall call.* (Psalms 116,13)

"I raise this cup of salvations," David sings, "and praise G-d Who brings about these salvations."

The butler's four cups set the pattern for the Four Expressions of Redemption that later described the Exodus. As we have seen, the first three cups are in the butler's dream, and the fourth is in the interpretation. The first three cups thus set the stage for the fourth one, just as the dream itself leads to its interpretation.

The same is true in Parashat Vaera in Sh'mot: The first three Expressions of Redemption lay the groundwork for the final one, namely, the ultimate goal of the Exodus from Egypt. The first three are these: *V'hotzeti, V'hitzalti, V'ga'alti* - "***I will take you out from under the burdens of Egypt, and I will save you from their labor, and I will redeem you...***" (Sh'mot 6,6). The fourth expression is the objective and destiny – the dream's interpretation: *V'lakachti* - "***I will take you unto Me as a nation, and I will be G-d unto you.***" (verse 7)

And one more parallel: When Yosef tells the butler his dream's interpretation, he adds a personal request for the butler to remember him to Pharaoh and have him rescued from the dungeon. But in the event, the butler did not remember Yosef - until Pharaoh dreamt his own dream two years later.

The same happened with Hashem and Israel. After the Expressions of Redemption, Hashem had one request for Israel: “Please don’t forget what I did for you: *Know that I am Hashem your G-d, Who took you out from under the sufferings of Egypt*” (Sh’mot 6,7). But Israel did not remember all the kindnesses, and instead built the Golden Calf, saying: “*This is your god, Israel, who brought you out of Egypt.*” (32,4)

Just as “*the butler did not remember Yosef, and forgot him*” (B’reshit 40,23), Israel did not remember Hashem, and forgot Him...

■ The Four Expressions of Redemption

Israel’s Redemption dream began to be actualized in the amazing momentous prophecy that Moshe received in Egypt, quoted above. It is G-d’s detailed account of the four individual stages by which He will open the gates of freedom – the stages which were to have a critical, historic effect on the Nation of Israel. Let us explain each one in turn.

1. V’hotzeti, I will take you out from the suffering of Egypt

As the process of the Exodus began, the People of Israel were well-entrenched in the idol-worshipping culture of Egypt. They needed, first of all, to be physically separated from their surroundings, and the plagues that Hashem brought upon Egypt in fact demarcated clear borders between the Jews and the Egyptians. For instance, regarding the Plague of Darkness, the Torah tells us (Sh’mot 10,22-23): “*There was total darkness throughout Egypt for three days... and for all the Children of Israel, there was light in their dwellings.*”

Extricating Israel from the sufferings of Egypt means to establish a clear dividing line and buffer between Israel and Egypt.

2. V’hitzalti, I will save you from their labor

The second stage necessary for the redemption process is that of freedom from the emotions and sensations of slavery. A slave does not know what freedom actually is, and is somewhat afraid of it. He would rather continue eating the “*fish we ate freely in Egypt*” (Bamidbar 11,5) from his master’s hand, instead of being independent and on his own in an unfamiliar world. He must be detached from his habitual consciousness of being a slave.

3. V’ga’alti, I will redeem you with an outstretched arm

This third stage carries the nation forward with great hope for the future. It means uplifting each individual from his day-to-day worries, to a life

spirit of national unity. This means working and advancing together in the course of building a national home for the nation seeking its place on earth for growth and development. This stage of “redemption,” **v’ga’alti**, is that in which our national aspirations are shaped, including the aspects of peoplehood, land, kingdom, and national identity.

4. **V’lakachti**, *I will take you unto Me as a nation, and I will be your G-d*

This is the fourth and decisive stage, the very reason for the Exodus from Egypt, and the interpretation and solution for the Dream of Redemption. Here is where is set the Nation’s sublime spiritual direction. Israel is not to be just an ordinary nation, but rather a special People to G-d, one that proclaims His name and walks in His ways, and leaves its mark on all the peoples of the world.

The verse thus emphasizes a double promise, in four stages. The promise is that not only will the Nation be singularly dedicated to G-d, but Hashem, as well, dedicates Himself and His name on behalf of His People. The four stages, engraved on the consciousness of the Nation of Israel, are:

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|------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Physical Separation | 2. Emotional Freedom |
| 3. Shaping of National Aspirations | 4. Spiritual Realization |

■ **The Four Cups**

Let us consider once again the four *cups* in the butler’s dream. The first mention is when he recounts that he saw that “*Pharaoh’s cup was in my hand*,” immediately after his description of the grapes growing on the vine. This action – grapes coming out of the vine – corresponds to **v’hotzeti**, the removal of Israel from Egypt.

The second *cup* appears when the butler describes how he turned the grapes into wine: “*and I took the grapes and pressed them into Pharaoh’s cup*” – corresponding to **v’hitzalti**, the erasure of the sense of slavery.

Next, the butler says that he “*gave the cup into [the king’s] hand*” – an indication of his return to royalty, corresponding to **v’ga’alti**, Israel’s redemption leading to the fulfillment of its national aspirations.

Finally, the fourth *cup* appears in Yosef’s interpretation: “*You will [be released from prison and] deliver Pharaoh’s cup into his hand*.” This parallels Israel’s release from the bonds of materialism, leading to national spiritual development as G-d’s people: **v’lakachti**.

As we said above, these four stages find their expression not only in history, but also at our Passover Seder table. It is not just the number of cups that is the same; most remarkably, each cup has a function at the Seder that matches the Expression of Redemption for which it stands:

1. The first cup is drunk at the first stage of the Seder, known as *Kadesh*. It is the cup of Kiddush, which means Sanctification. The essence of the Kiddush is that we acknowledge our consecration to G-d and our separation from the other peoples of the world. This precisely matches the idea of the first expression, in which clear borders are set between Israel and the Egyptians.
2. The second cup is drunk during the *Maggid* section, when we read the bulk of the Haggada and tell the story of the Exodus from Egypt. We begin by noting *Avadim Hayinu*, “we were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt,” and we conclude with the blessing of *Ga'al Yisrael*, the blessing of Redemption. We thus trace our path out of bondage, just as Hashem promised in the second Expression of Redemption: He will free us of all links with our previous slave mentality.
3. The third cup of the Seder is drunk at *Barekh*, immediately following the Grace After Meals, in which we bless and thank G-d for our food. It opens with thanks for the past, and continues on to our national aspirations for Eretz Yisrael and the Kingdom of the House of David. This corresponds with the words, “I will redeem you.”
4. The fourth cup, where we signal our great spiritual ascent and adherence to G-d, is imbibed at the *Hallel* section, when we sing praises to G-d. This is the ultimate objective of this entire evening known as Pesach Night: The singing of *Hallelu et shem Hashem*, “*Praise G-d's Name, may G-d's Name be blessed*” (Psalms 113). This of course corresponds to what Hashem told Moshe in the fourth phrase, “*I will take you unto Me as a nation and I will be your G-d.*”

■ The Means and the Goal

As we have said, the first three stages prepare the way for the fourth stage, which is the most significant and meaningful of all.

The entire purpose of the wondrous exit from the bondage of Egypt was to fashion and form a special nation that would be G-d's people, unique among the nations of the world. Minus the attainment of this goal, the

entire Exodus is pointless. Similarly, without the fourth cup, that of praise to Hashem, there is no need for the previous ones.

This immediate need for the fourth cup explains why we are not permitted to drink any wine between the third and fourth cups. This law is a sign for us that if we have reached the third cup, symbolizing our national aspirations, we must continue directly on to the fourth cup – that of spiritual ascent – and attach it to the preceding three. Indeed, between the first and second cups, and between the second and third cups, we are permitted to drink wine – but nothing may come between the first three and the last one, the end-goal of all of them.

■ The Deeds of the Forefathers

As we learned above, Yosef's release from the dungeon in Egypt was a prototype for Israel's freedom from the bondage of Egypt. This is not a one-time phenomenon; we learned from Avraham Avinu, many years before, the concept of *maaseh avot siman labanim*, "the deeds of the Forefathers set the stage for their descendants," just like a tree's roots make their mark on its branches.

Hashem gave a prophetic command to Avraham, the father of our nation, to walk throughout the Land of Israel: "*Arise, walk in the Land, through its breadth and width, for to you I have given it*" (B'reshit 13,17). Why? What is so significant about walking through the Promised Land that necessitates the dedication of a prophetic command from Hashem? The answer is supplied by R. Pinchas in the Medrash (B'reshit Rabbah 40,6): "Hashem said to Avraham Avinu: Go and conquer the way for your sons."

Avraham's task, according to a detailed list in this Medrash, was to prepare symbolic acts that will determine the future. His hike by foot throughout Eretz Yisrael, for instance, is to open the gates for its conquest by his descendants four generations later. When we look at other parts of Avraham's life, we see an amazing pattern showing that what he did very often paralleled what later happened to his descendants in Egypt:

1. Avraham descended to Egypt because of the famine in the Land of Israel (Canaan) - and Yaakov's descendants also went down to Egypt because of a famine, close to 200 years later.
2. Pharaoh, the King of Egypt, was heavily stricken with great plagues when he took Avraham's wife, Sarah. Hundreds of years later, Pharaoh

and all of Egypt were badly hit with the Ten Plagues when they refused to let the Jews leave.

3. Pharaoh sent Avraham and Sarah from Egypt, together with great riches (B'reshit 12,16). When the Children of Israel left Egypt, they also left with utensils of silver and gold and much property.
4. Avraham proclaimed and spread the Name of G-d wherever he went – just as Israel bears G-d's Name upon them all around the world.
5. Avraham made a covenant with Hashem, namely, the Brit Milah, the ritual circumcision. So too, after leaving Egypt, Israel forges a covenant with Hashem – the covenant of Torah, which they received at Mount Sinai.

This fascinating parallel structure is just one complex example of how “the actions of the fathers are a sign for the children.” The renowned Ramban (Nachmanides) explains this at length. But - was it so important to choose such giants of spirit as our holy forefathers just to mark out the path for future generations? Apparently so. Let us analyze the great inner strengths and abilities needed to fulfill the Divine commands to actualize these milestones for their descendants.

■ Testing the King's Ability

Let us approach this topic by studying the historic, final encounter between the Prophet Elisha and King Yoash of Israel:

וַאֲלִישָׁע חָלָה אֶת חָלְיוֹ אֲשֶׁר יָמוּת בּוֹ וַיֵּרַד אֵלָיו יוֹאָשׁ מֶלֶךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּבֶן עָלָיו
פָּנָיו וַיֹּאמֶר אָבִי אָבִי רֶכֶב יִשְׂרָאֵל וּפָרָשָׁיו.

*Elisha had fallen sick of his fatal sickness, and Yoash the King
of Israel came down to him and wept before him and said,*

“O my father, my father, chariot of Israel and its horsemen.” (Kings II 13,14)

Elisha answered the desperate call of King Yoash, and afforded him the opportunity to determine his future, and that of all of Israel, in the upcoming wars with their enemies. The window of opportunity that influences and determines the future was known to the prophet – but he was limited in how much he could reveal of these secrets. Elisha did not tell Yoash the precise nature of the “test” he was about to undergo, but only, *“take a bow and arrows.”* (verse 15)

This was the first of four specific instructions Elisha gave the king. Given the fatefulness of the occasion, the simple act of shooting an arrow was divided

up into four stages, each with its own, separate Prophetic instruction. After telling him to prepare the bow and arrows, Elisha also told the king to draw the bow, open the window, and shoot: *“Elisha said to the King of Israel, ‘Put your hand on the bow,’ and he did... And he said, ‘Open the window eastward,’ and he opened it. Elisha said, ‘Shoot,’ and he shot.”* (verses 16-17)

Elisha placed his hands atop the King’s hands and, when the arrow was fired, he called out: *“[This represents] the arrow of G-d’s deliverance and the arrow of deliverance from Aram - for you shall smite Aram in Afek, until you have consumed them.”* Elisha has thus set the target: The destruction of Aram Naharayim, also known as Babylonia, Israel’s #1 enemy of that time.

Elisha then moves on to the next stage, in which he instructs the king to *“take the arrows [and] smite them upon the ground”* (verse 18). King Yoash did so three times – and stopped. Elisha was angered and said, *“You should have struck five or six times, for then you would have smitten Aram until they were consumed! Now you shall smite Aram only three times.”* (verse 19)

The critical chance was missed! If King Yoash had hit the ground six times, or even five, instead of three, he could have brought about a conclusive victory over Aram. Elisha is incensed at the king for not doing so, and for thus negatively setting the future of Israel’s wars against Aram. Israel would defeat Aram three times, and no more.

But we must ask some basic questions:

1. Why didn’t Elisha simply tell King Yoash to continue hitting the ground with his arrows? Was it really too late? Was the window of opportunity truly closed? Can Elisha the Prophet now do nothing but clap his hands in despair and frustration?
2. How was the king supposed to know how many times to hit the ground? Perhaps he thought that three times might have been more than enough? How was he to know that five or six times were needed, and not perhaps seven or eight?
3. And what is the significance of symbolic acts such as hitting the ground altogether? How can they determine the future?

Upon studying the story, we see that Elisha is testing the extent of the emotional and psychological strengths of King Yoash. His message to the king is that he now bears on his shoulders the responsibility for his nation’s future wars, and that his actions will determine whether they win or lose.

Before Elisha conducts this test of the King's abilities, he hints to him that he must not do anything without receiving a specific instruction to do so. Shooting the arrow through the open window, together with Elisha's inspirational speech regarding G-d's deliverance, prepared the way for the true test that is to take place immediately afterwards – in the form of striking the ground with the arrows.

Elisha the Prophet knows that the king feels scared and isolated; this is why he places his hand upon the King's hands, as if to say, "Do not fear, I am with you in the Name of G-d."

The Prophet also knows that King Yoash is steeped in idol-worship and has left the ways of Hashem – and that this is the real reason for his weakness of faith. At this point, Elisha tells him to take the arrows and start striking the ground with them, time after time.

Elisha has succeeded in causing him to feel the great responsibility lying on his shoulders in his every act at this sublime occasion. King Yoash feels it so intensely that he is sapped of all strength. He begins to fire arrows to the ground – but when he reaches the third one, he simply cannot continue. He is too weak – because of his sins. He knows that he should not have stopped without receiving a specific instruction to that effect from Elisha, yet he did. He thus showed that his strengths were enough to last only for three wars, and not more.

Elisha understands what the King is going through, but he cannot help him. He cannot grant the king spiritual strengths. He thereupon bursts out in bitterness: "*You should have struck five or six times! ... Now you shall smite Aram only three times.*"

In other words, "you should have kept on striking, and I would have stopped you at five or six." But now it is too late; the window of opportunity has closed.

But for us, this remarkable story is a shining light on the concept of "the deeds of the fathers are a sign for the children." Hashem chose Avraham, and Yosef, because He knew their tremendous inner strengths – which King Yoash did not have. They were selected to lead historic processes, laden with heavy loads of responsibility for the generations of the future. Their success in doing so is the success of all of Israel.

