

The Seder Journey To Freedom & Rebirth

Editor's note: The following is an adaptation of a shiur given by Rabbi Yehoshua Gerzi in London in 2015. It is part of a group of shiurim on the topic of Purim going into Pesach, which we will hopefully have the zechut to bring into print in the future. The shiur is an in-depth description of the process of the seder. As we prepared it for print, we have tried as much as possible to maintain the flavor of the shiur as it was spoken. Certainly, you could read and share these beautiful thoughts at your seder. However, we wrote this so that it can also serve as a guide, Torah that can be enjoyed before the seder, to help us prepare for Pesach. At various points journal prompts are given. If you would like, stop, take a breath, and reflect. Whether you decide to take up the opportunity to journal or not, everyone is encouraged to take the opportunity to relate these ideas to their own life, and to make it their own.

An open invitation to all who are seeking wisdom, wealth, connection and happiness

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*May the ones that have graduated our world
be remembered and have an alia!*

In loving memory of:

Mr Albert Allen - Avraham ben Salchah





The “Collected Writings” series is made up of sichot delivered over a number of years in Eretz Yisrael and abroad. Their purpose: to share how we can live with deeper connection and commitment, inspiration, and the confidence to improve ourselves, our families, communities, the human race and the planet.

A note to the reader:

Lovingly and respectfully as you start this reading, please remember life is an unfolding journey, your journey is to reflect as you discover and grow.

May you test what is written here in your own life, allowing your inner soul wisdom to guide you in healthy ways. As we listen to life’s lessons, as we learn from the people we admire and respect, may we become beings of greater service in the ways of love, respect, strength and compassion.



Introduction

Preparing for the Seder

My dear friends, as we come close to approaching the *seder*, and to opening up the *avodah* within the *seder*, and while we are still some days away from the *seder*, we now have a beautiful opportunity. We have time to discuss, take notes, think and reflect. Because when we're actually at the *seder* table, who knows what's going to be happening? Yes, we try before the *seder* to prepare ourselves physically. We know that it's important to eat and it's important to have a rest, and hopefully to get the kids to have a rest. I say hopefully because, as we all know, it doesn't always happen. We can try, we can work, we can *daven*, we can yearn! However, if we actually accomplish something, that is a gift from the *Borei Olam*.

What is open to us now is an opportunity to prepare ourselves before the *seder*. We are going to discuss the journey that we can take through *seder*. We will, *be'ezras Hashem Yisborach*, explore the *seder*, not just from a linear perspective, but also from a perspective of learning about life experience. We can see the *seder* through a global perspective, a human race perspective, and the perspective of Am Yisroel. However, we can also explore the *seder* from the perspective of the self, and explore the experience spiritually, emotionally, psychologically, and physically.



Exploring The Structures Of The Seder

In order to open up these ideas, our path will be to first explore some ideas about Pesach and about the nature of *galut* and *geulah*. We can then we go inside, into ourselves, and explore our journey through the *seder*. We can first divide the *seder* into four stages, which gives us a general map of the terrain we are trying to transverse through the *seder*. And then, *be'ezras Hashem Yisborach*, we will explore how the division of the *seder* into 15 steps beautifully animates our *seder hachaim*, our life-path, which is constantly happening with every human being.

My dear friends, I would suggest that if you do want to do something, take a pencil and paper and write. At the seder itself, we certainly can't journal, and we often cannot do this level of learning. At the seder itself, I don't even bother. I am busy running around the Beit Midrash, being the plagues, to entertain and to transmit our *mesorah* to my children. The *nikudah* is, my friends, be authentic, be real. If we can't do this inner work at the *seder*, it's okay. Now, before the seder, we have this beautiful opportunity. We can start to journal. We can take note of the journaling prompts. We can go through these different stages and write about different things in our life. Even if we're not journaling, we can reflect and meditate on each of these elements in our life. We can go through the process and we can rebirth ourselves.



The Theme of Unity on Pesach

We are told in the Chumash, and it's expressed in Chazal as well, that one notable aspect of how Am Yisroel performed the Korban Pesach was that it was done in a *chaburah*. The *chaburah* would come together hours earlier in the day, and then they would do the *shechita*, and they were together throughout the whole night. Even though we don't have a *halachic chaburah* now, it's still important to recognize that part of the Pesach *avodah* involved *chaburah*. We need a *chaburah*. We celebrate Pesach together. And we should place our intention on coming together as one, and not to forget this.

As we know from the *hailege* Vishnitzer, the *gematria* of Pesach is 148. If we take those numbers and turn them into letters (the one is *aleph*, the four is *dalet*, and the eight is *ches*) and rearrange those letters a bit, you get *echad*. It's a hint to us that the *nekudah* of Pesach is *echad*. It's coming together *b'achdus*.

Similarly, if we look at the word Haggadah, we can find both the word *gid*, and the word *eged*. *Gid*, the word for tendon or sinew, as we find by the *gid hanasheh*, is a language of holding things together. And *eged* is the word for bundle. Pesach is a time of integration, when we can bring disparate pieces together.

We find this by the seder table. We all sit together, and we serve each other. We make space for each other by listening while each person tells their story. And, as we shall explore,



we also find unity as an intrinsic part of our personal seder night journey. We can find unity within all the circumstances of our life story and amongst all the different aspects of our selves.

Two Perspectives in Kabbalah

I would like to highlight here two different, complementary, *derachim* in *avodas hakodesh*. When we study the kabbalistic system according to the Gra and the Ramchal, what we find is a historical journey. They take the system of Kabbalah and show how it unfolds through the events of history. Whereas, if we turn to the Ba'al Shem Tov, we find a different, very relatable flavor. The Ba'al Shem Tov reveals the Kabbalistic system as it unfolds within us, and within our own experience. For example, if we open up *Sha'ar HaGilgulim*, *Perek Aleph*, we are told we have all the *arba olomos* within us. There's a story, an unfolding, a mapping out of human consciousness that is going on within us. The combination of the *torahs* of the Ramchal and the Gra, and the *torahs* of the Ba'al Shem Tov, coming together, gives us a fullness. In this shiur, we've accented the *derech* of the Ba'al Shem Tov, for the reason that while people have heard many *gevadlik torahs* on the subject of the *seder*, where they were lacking that little bit was in the world of *penimiusdik avodah*. The *avodah* of recognizing that I have a yearning, and a desire. I really, really want to come into the Pesach *seder* and recognize that it's my own personal journey. And this is something that can so easily be missed.



Unity Within Ourselves

Let's start our journey by understanding one idea of exile and redemption. The Zohar comes to tell us in several places that the speech of *Am Yisroel* was imprisoned in *Mitzrayim*. And when we say that our speech was in exile, what we mean, as explained by the Arizal and others, is that our *da'as*, our consciousness, was in exile. What does it mean that our *da'as* was in exile?

We are composite beings with many layers. In the world of the Ba'al Shem Tov, we experience our lives through the three modes of our nefesh: fleeting thought, emotions and physical sensations. Beyond this, we also have the level of *da'at*, which we can understand as our level of consciousness and/or awareness. As we see in the Kuzari 3:5, a person who is free is able to consciously use their *da'as* to mold their inner world.

In exile, our *da'as* falls into our nefesh. We are overwhelmed by our inner world, and it owns us. For example, when a person experiences full-blown anger, and they express that anger freely, it is clear to all that they are owned by their anger, and they are enslaved. If this person chooses to work on themselves, they may be able to develop their *da'as* to the extent that even when they are triggered, they are both aware of their own emotions and able to communicate their emotions appropriately to someone else. If they choose to keep on working on themselves, they can come to a level where even when they are experiencing anger on the inside, they are able to act calm. If they choose to keep on working



on themselves, they will be able to mitigate and then melt away the anger they feel inside. Finally, if they keep working on themselves, they come to a level when they don't feel anger anymore. At this point this person has moved themselves from complete slavery to complete freedom.

This is what we are referring to when we mention that the *yidden* in *Mitzrayim* had the experience of *kotzer ruach*. When the *yidden* came out of *Mitzrayim*, it wasn't just something physical. It was a freedom of da'as. We, as well, want to experience this same *yetziah*.

We're not here just to go into a *seder* and experience a historical manifestation of something that happened once upon a time yesteryear. What we want to develop, if possible, is this gift of spiritual opening which is gifted to us from the *Borei Olam*. We want to *mamesh* experience our own personal journey.

The fact is that I have the opportunity for elevating my consciousness--for expanding, deepening, and amplifying my consciousness. The *nekudah* is that when I start to open my mind to this idea, that there is an internal process that's going on, as well as an external process, then I can be awake to what is occurring. I can take my consciousness out of the *meitzar yam*, out of *avodah zara*, and out of the world of negative *nefesh*. I can move into a higher state, where my lower state becomes a *mercavah* to be *megaleh Hashem's ohr* in the world. I can *mamesh* touch, taste, smell the *neshamah*, so to speak, *kiviyochel*. The goal is to *mamesh* be one, to be *b'achdus*, not just with the others, but to be on the same page



with the *neshama*. That's what I'm wanting. That's what my desire should be as I go into the *seder*.

We Create Our World Through Our Thinking & Through Sefer, Safar and Sippur

There is another beautiful Torah in the Vizhnitz *seforim*, that the *roshei teivot* of Haggadah Shel Pesach are *hey, shin, pei*. Rearranged, they make the word *safah*, language. The Haggadah is all about speaking. And speaking is about creativity. Creativity is about consciousness. Through our language we can expand, deepen and amplify our consciousness, until we can touch the highest worlds. Through our speech, we can make changes, so that we don't live in the same way that we've been living. This is hinted to in the *gematria* of *safah*, which is 385, the same *gematria* as *shechina*.

The nature of our world is that we create it through our internal and external language. We learn this in the opening words of *Sefer HaYetzirah*, which begins, "With 32 mystical paths of Wisdom and engraved *kah* [engraved *Yud* and *Hey*] . . . He created His universe with three books: with a *sefer*, a *safar*, and a *sippur* [with a text, with numbers and with a communication]."

What we are being told here in the beginning of *Sefer Yetzirah* is that our world is created with 32 parts. It manifests through 32 paths, which are the ten *sefiros* (the ten emanations) and the 22 letters of the *aleph beis*. These are



engraved with a *yud* and a *hey* which is a representation of the mind and the heart.

We're told by the *heilege* Ba'al HaTanya, in Sha'ar Yichud V'emunah (1, 2, 3 and 12) that HaKadosh Baruch Hu creates and sustains the whole universe through the *otios* of the *aleph beis*, and through placing His intention on creation, through the *aleph beis*. Everything that we experience is a manifestation of the *aleph beis*, and the *sefiros*, binding and winding together. These are the 32 paths of wisdom.

We know, as is brought many times in the Zohar, that what happens on high also happens down here, in our world. We too have a mind and a heart. We too create the world around us through our thinking. What is our thinking? Our thinking is combining letters, which create language, which creates the *sippur*, the story, the narrative. Look around. What is around you? Around me in my office I see books, bookshelves and my computer. Everything that I see, that isn't part of nature, was created through a person's thought. Rabbi Yosef Singer, the Pilsner Rav, would say very often, that everything is created twice. Once in the mind, in our thinking, and then once again in action. We manifest reality through our thinking. And whatever we are thinking, that's what becomes. *Middah kneged middah*, on many different levels.

The process is as follows. The manifestation of reality, the *ohr*, comes down into the *neschama*, and the *neschama* is *mitlabesh* the *ohr*. The *neschama* then has the *levushim* of the *otios*, and the creation process can begin in our thinking. We



take those *otios* and bind them, combine them in letters. The letters become words, and then communication, forming the reality that I see outside of myself. So we are a product of our thinking. We are a product of the *yichud* of the *aleph beis* with the myriads of different experiences that we experience. I would suggest that this is one of the primary principles of the Ba'al Shem Tov. When we speak about the Ba'al Shem Tov we don't see *partzufim* and *sefiros*. What do we see? We see letters. And we see the *birur* of *nitzotzot*, *kidushot*.

Everything comes from our letters. The letters we combine in our consciousness bring out the life that's happening within. *Peh*, mouth, is the lashon of *po*, here. What I speak is where I am. As Rav Moshe Shapira said a number of times, the lips are the skin from within the body that come out. And that's what we're seeing. *Peh* is *pnimi*. The lips are the skin from within the body.

It's interesting to point out that there's the white of the *klaf* and then the letters of the Sefer Torah, which are black. And the Ishbitzer tells us that the reality in which we are living—that's the white of the *klaf*. That's the first level of Torah, and that is the *sefer*. This relates to what we find in Bereishis Rabbah 8:2, and in the Zohar, Parshat Tzav, that two thousand years before the creation of the world Hashem wrote the Torah. That's the white. The Torah that we read, the black letters, is a *peirush* in order to tap back into the consciousness of the white. That is the *safar*, it is Hashem's story. When we interact with these two aspects of the Torah, we create the *sippur*, our narrative with which we shape our world. What we want is to be able to take the first book,



Hashem's *sefer*, along with Hashem's narrative, the *safar*, and pump them through our consciousness in a healthy way. In this way, The Story (the *sefer*), His Story, (the *safar*) and My Story (the *sippur*) are able to combine together to create our reality.

We can see this idea reflected in the Gemara Avodah Zara (19a), where first the Torah is called Hashem's Torah. However, when we start to take the Torah of Hashem and make it ours and start to see reality through the eyes of Chazal, then it becomes our Torah. What we're suggesting here is that as we live life, and as we are manifesting ourselves, our state of consciousness and our ability to wield language and manage our thinking, creates our world.

What happened when we went into exile is that our thinking became very limited and very negative. Our thinking was holding us back, and we got lost. We sunk into the depth of the *avodah zarah* of Mitzrayim, and we lost our ability to hold that deep level of thinking and creativity. We lost our ability to bring out into the world that G-d glow revelation.

And what we are suggesting here is that the Haggadah Shel Pesach, which we read right at the beginning of the year, on the holiday which is called the Rosh Hashana of *emunah*, is the mechanism by which we re-establish our connection to the reality of how we actually function in this world. We are all products of our thinking, which is connected to our creativity, and then to our inner language, which is connected to our speech and our consciousness. What we will hopefully



come to see through this journey is that we have control over how we manifest in the world.

How We Create Our World

It is true, as we've mentioned many times, that we are not always in our highest state. Naturally, we oscillate between many different states, and that's natural. That's real. That's okay. However, if we can manage to map out the territory, and gain an understanding of how to work with that territory, then life is lived differently, as we spoke about above with the angry person.

So the starting off of our journey is recognizing that you and I, all of us, we want to achieve *achdus*. *Hashem Echad u'shmo echad*. As the Zohar tells us, "Torah, Am Yisrael and the Shechina, we're all one." And the way we can manifest that oneness is through our thinking, through our consciousness, through our ability to speak.

I would like to share a famous story that I've shared many times, the story of Rav Mordechai Zukerman, who expressed many times that he heard from his *rebbe*, Rav Avraham Grodzinski, who heard from the Alter. He tells us that if you want an apple, but you plant the seed of an orange, you're going to grow an orange tree, and you're not going to get to eat your apple. If you want a banana but you plant the seed of a pepper, you're not going to get your banana, you're going to get a pepper. If you want an olive, and you plant the seed



of a watermelon, you're not going to get your olive. You will be stuck with the watermelon, the pepper and the orange. You're not going to get what you want.

The same is true in life. If we plant seeds of defeat, we're going to grow a defeat tree. If we grow a tree of failure because we planted a tree of failure, that's what we're going to eat. If we plant seeds of depression, of sadness, of negativity, they're the trees that are going to grow. And they're the fruit we're going to eat. What he would say very often was, be careful with your words, make sure that the words that you speak are words that are going to grow strong trees, healthy trees, positive trees. If you want to eat the fruit of positivity, you have had to have planted that seed.

Our speaking is our seeds, and they grow into trees. We are going to eat those fruits. And that's very important to recognize, to realize, to understand, and to be aware of. What we are expressing, as we enter this journey through the Haggadah, is that the reality that we experience is created through my thinking, through my creativity, through my speech. If we put this idea into a different language: that energetic light, that *ohr* that's coming down, the *ohr* that I'm *mamshich* upon myself, is *ohr* that's *mitlabesh* into the letters, which is *mitlabesh* into words, which is *mitlabesh* into language which is *mitlabesh* into the way I perceive my world.

The Haggadah Shel Pesach offers us the opportunity to go through an internal journey of recognizing and understanding



the way we shape our world, so that we can be free to shape it in the way that we want to.

The Broad Path: The Four Stages

The Four Stages In History

We can start off by sharing that when we are speaking about the Haggadah Shel Pesach, there's four stages that we can speak about. The first refers to the Midrash Rabbah (8:2) which tells us that the Torah was created 2000 years prior to the creation. This is the stage that relates to the purpose of the world. The Torah is a tool for recognizing how this world should be experienced. We find the next three stages expressed in Gemara *Avodah Zarah* (9a) and Gemara *Sanhedrin* (97a). The history of the world is divided into 2000 years of *tohu v'vohu*, 2000 years of Torah and 2000 years of *yemos hamashiach*. The 2000 years of *tohu v'vohu* is from when the world was created until Avraham Avinu. The 2000 years of Torah is from Avraham Avinu to Rebbe Akiva, when the Second Temple was destroyed. We have *yemos hamoshiach* thereafter, when we are preparing for the days of *moshiach*. *Be'ezras Hashem, bimheira biyamenu* we'll get an experience of *moshiach* in our days, Amen.



Four Stages In Personal Experience

These three phases, *tohu v'vohu*, Torah and *yemos hamoshiach*, are not just global but also deeply personal. If we would like to use this model to understand our own personal journey, we can do it as follows. Before we are born, we experience the first stage of being created with a purpose. We come into the world to fulfill a lack that only we can fill. From the time we are children till about 6 or 7 years old, we live in a world of *tohu v'vohu*. It's an amoral world, of things just happening. A child just needs to find themselves and experience an authentic self. So too, as a human race, the world of *tohu v'vohu* was a world of finding themselves.

As we mature a little bit, we move into the world of Torah. In a world of Torah, we begin to manage our own lives. We are able to relate to each other, and to work according to the rules and within rules. When we're working together with sociological norms and our authentic self we could find our own personal *avodah*. *Yemos hamoshiach* in the world is the Messianic Era. Our internal *yemos hamoshiach* means having the ability to find our personal purpose, and then to live a purpose driven life.

In addition, these three stages are not just static. We continue to oscillate between them throughout our lives. The world of *tohu v'vohu* is breakdown, or from a child-like perspective, it is innocent destruction. Kids do what they do. So too in our life. We have breakdown. We have *tohu v'vohu*. We also have the world of Torah, where we're following the rules, we're trying to live within the rules. We live a big percentage of our



lives in a state of purpose, in a state of consciousness, where we're living a conscious driven, and a consciously directed life. We have times when we live mindfully and with consciousness. So too, we live sometimes in the world of *yemos hamoshiach*. We express our inner selves. We express the individualistic me that the world is waiting to meet and see.

Four Stages In The Haggadah

Now let's relate and superimpose these four stages into the Haggadah Shel Pesach from an overview perspective. We begin with **Kiddush**, the world of purpose, which relates to the 2000 years when the Torah existed **before the world**. Then we have **Maggid**, the discussion of our **past**. This relates to the *tohu v'vohu*. It's the early formation of our historical drama, and also the early formation of ourselves. From Maggid, which is the past, we move into **Shulchan Orech**, which is the **present**. Shulchan Orech is the world of **Torah**. It's where we're sharing our Torahs. Everyone is giving their little *vortlach*, we're making space to meet each child, each person at the table, wherever they are. Then we have Hallel. **Hallel** is about the **future**. It's about *yemos hamoshiach*.

Into this framework we can add the level of our personal journey, the four stages we all experience as humans. First, the *bechina* of Kiddish, of knowing our purpose, when things are going well. Baruch Hashem, things are good, we are



spiritually healthy. And then, unfortunately, the end of that health, *mamash*, before we phase into Maggid. Just before Maggid we start to drift. And in Maggid we are fully drifting into the *bechina* of *avodah zara*. We're not focused anymore. We've gone off our course of action. Maggid is when We've come down to Mitzrayim. We're in Mitzrayim and we're experiencing pain. We're experiencing suffering, anxiety and stress. We've drifted and moved away from what we should have been working on, our purpose, our *kiddush*. We've been *osek* in *avodah zara* and *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* has had to open up a Mitzrayim for us, a *metzer yam*, a *katnus*. We're experiencing this pain and insecurity, this suffering, this darkness.

Then what happens? In Shulchan Orech, we start to process. We start to recognize and realize where we are and what's gone on. We start to experience a therapy. Shulchan Orech is a *bechina* of reflecting. We're now in therapy. We're thinking about what's gone on. And then after Shulchan Orech we climb out of the experience and *mamesh*, we realize that everything that we've gone through we needed to go through it in order for us to be us. Hallel is the *bechina* of gratitude. We come to recognize and feel our own gratitude and express that gratitude. We even come to recognize, through *tefillah*, that our pain is the pain of the *Borei Olam*. Just as we're in pain, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*'s in pain. The *nekudah* is, we're embracing what happened. We've got appreciation and gratitude for what happened. And now we're integrating that and we're living an even deeper, more expanded life. A healthier life.



These are the four stages within human experience which are always there. And we're always oscillating between these different states. The cosmos is oscillating, the world, human beings, *Am Yisroel* and self. We're all always going through these different *bechinas*. The world of Kiddush, where I'm living with purpose. The world of Maggid, when I go off course, I'm down in my *Mitzrayim*, and I'm *mamesh* experiencing unpleasant experiences. The world of Shulchan Orech, where I recognize what's gone on and Hashem brings me out of *Mitzrayim*. And the world of Hallel, where I recognize and I embrace what happened, I have gratitude, and I move forward into a fuller, healthier, more conscious life.

Bringing The Four Stages Down To The Level Of Our Food

We can add here, as well, that on Pesach night we don't just leave this in the realm of the spiritual, the psychological, the emotional. We bring it down to the physical. We bring it down into the food stuff we experience on Pesach night. It's very profound. Our *avodas* Hashem comes all the way down into the food stuff. We're picking up *nitzotzos kedushah*. We're elevating the fallen sparks. We're releasing the fallen sparks. We do this through our *kavanah*. *Kavanah* is two things. *Kavanah* is focus and awareness. We are trying to be focused and aware in every single state that we are in.



At the *seder*, many of our *mitzvos* revolve around food. Food is the *bechina* of desire, *ratzon*. And everything is desire. Just as food keeps us physically alive, our desire keeps us spiritually alive. Each time we eat, we are touching on something deep.

At Kiddush, when we taste the wine, we taste the aspect of purpose, and the aspect of connection. Kiddish is *kadesh*, it's a commitment to our relationship with Hakadosh Baruch Hu. *Nichnas yayin, yatza sod*. When the wine goes in, we can be *zoche* to explore deep parts of ourselves. We can get in touch with our deepest desires. We can do beyond the physical.

Journal Prompt

Take a moment to breathe. Stop, think and reflect:

At this point we can ask ourselves, "What is my desire?" Privately, with no judgement, we can look into ourselves. We can ask, "What do I really want?" Where in my life do I want to connect, what do I want to connect to? What do I want to separate from?

Then we move to karpas. Karpas doesn't have taste. By Karpas we are basically drifting. We lose purpose.

There are several ways that the yetzer hara gets us. One of them is drifting. Drifting is one of the tools of the *yetzer hara*. It happens when we move away from our desired, purpose driven way of living, and then it becomes harder for us to return to where we want to be. When we are focused,



when we are living the way we want to be living, then life is good. But then, what sometimes happens is that for one or two days, we get off target.

For example, let's say two people speak quite often. And then they stop speaking, and they drift out of touch. The further a person has been drifting from the other person, the more energy it's going to take to get back on track. It becomes a little embarrassing, awkward or uncomfortable to pick up the phone after a long period of not being in touch.

To understand the dynamic, imagine a spaceship in orbit around a planet. As long as it is in orbit, it does not have to exert any energy or fuel to stay in orbit. Maybe just a little *shpritz* here and there. But if it goes out of orbit, then it requires fuel to return. The further it goes out of orbit, the more energy it takes to get back into orbit.

This same dynamic happens with us. For example, if we had decided to study a *perek* of Tanach or *daf* of Gemara each day. And we miss a day or two or three. We are now drifting. The more days we skip, the harder it is to return to the learning. After about a week and a half of missing, a person may say, "Ah, it's not worth it." But what happens if it is worth it?

The reality is that we do what to learn the *daf*, or we do want to learn the *perek*. If we keep drifting, it will become more and more difficult to open up the *sefer*. Which is why it's good to recognize what is happening. I think we all know, that when we do choose to get back on track, when we



choose to say, “No, I’m going to pick this back up again,” it feels amazing. It feels really amazing, when we are focused and back in the game. So it’s good when we can recognize this tool of the yetzer hara. Especially when we are in a Maror state, where we fall into the pain and suffering.

Journal Prompt

Take a moment to breathe. Stop, think and reflect:
Where in our lives are we experiencing drifting? Which aspects of our lives are bitter? What aspects of my life have I let fall away? What would it take to bring them back?

Then I start to pick myself up. At Shulchan Orech I start to recognize that everything is a communication from the *Borei Olam*. Everything that is in my life is something I can use to focus, something through which I can manifest a relationship with the *Borei Olam*. I learn that I can turn my mess into a message.

And then we have *afikomen*. The *afikomen* is the *bechina* of *ohr haganuz*. Like the Karpas, the *afikomen* is also a food with no taste, however here it’s the food without taste because it’s now on a higher *darga*. It’s *lema’alah* from the *gashmius*, beyond the physical world. It’s the *pashtus*, the simplicity, of our *neshama*.

What we are doing is using food as symbols to bring our *avodah* all the way down to the *gashmiut*, the deepest,



deepest level. This is similar to what we do on Rosh Hashana. We have all these *simanim*. We take a carrot and say, "Gazar Dinanu!" What's *peshat*? *Peshat* is, I can do that. I can get up and I can actually play games with words. I can play with meaning. That's what it's all about. Life is the creation of meaning as I manifest it.

It's the same here. Pesach is the Rosh Hashana of *emunah*. We manifest our *emunah* through our frameworks of thinking and our speech. It's what Pesach is about. Pesach is *peh sach*, the mouth that speaks. We don't just play games with words and meaning. This is the reality of our lives. I'm constantly creating the world that I live in through how I think, how I communicate, and how I'm perceiving myself.



Moving Deeper: The 15 Steps of the Seder

Al pi kabbalah the *seder* is a process. We begin at the highest *sefirah* of *kesser* and we rebirth into a new *malchus*. We go through the process of falling and working our way back up again to an even higher level. This rebirthing process can be seen from a cosmic perspective, a global perspective, the human being perspective, the national perspective, and of course, the self. Through the *seder* we are rebirthing ourselves spiritually, psychologically, emotionally, and even physically, through the food that we eat. The Arizal tells us that in order for us to be able to accomplish this, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* gives us an unbelievable gift. We receive unbelievable *mochin*, unbelievable inspiration, to help us along this journey.

We can add that the number 15 is meaningful. 15 is the gematria of *yud-hay*. And if we remember, from the Sefer Yetzirah, the engraved *yud* and *hey* is an important part of the creation process. It's the unity of the mind and the heart. What that means is that we can be in a state of *da'as* and then we can emotionalize our thinking. The beauty of life is that I can choose to arouse an emotion as I think or as I do an action.

Life revolves around emotionalizing our thinking. What we want is to emotionalize our thinking to be healthy, to grow, to change our beliefs, to restructure the manifestation of perception and how we are viewing ourselves in the world. Let's look deeper at how these 15 steps relate to *mamesh*, living in real time, this unity of the mind and the heart.



Kadesh Urchatz

Let's start off with the first two stages, which are Kadesh and Urchatz. We mention them together because it is only these two stages which are connected by a *vav*. The *nikudah* is that Kadesh and Urchatz work together. Kadesh is a *bechina* of light, a *bechina* of Abba. And Urchatz is a *bechina* of vessel, it's a *bechina* of *kli*, which is Ima. *Al pi kabbalah* we never separate Abba and Ima. We are constantly creating our reality through light and vessels, through thinking and manifesting this thinking. The light is an aspect of the *moach*, the mind, and the heart is an aspect of vessel. We're constantly filling up our vessels with our thinking and that's what is becoming pregnant, and that's what's birthed. This is, as we mentioned, the inner aspect of redemption.

Journal Prompt

Take a moment to breathe. Stop, think and reflect:

At this point we can ask ourselves, "What is my desire?" Privately, with no judgement, we can look into ourselves. We can ask, "What do I really want?" Where in my life do I want to connect, what do I want to connect to? What do I want to separate from?

Urchatz is washing, the aspect of cleaning. However, I'm cleaning in order to create something new. We wash our hands, and as we do, we can notice that our hands are our vessels. Hands are an aspect of *kli*. As I'm washing my



hands, I'm washing my *keilim*. What I'm doing with my hands, these vessels, is that I'm bringing a light through me, into my hands, and then I'm giving. When we say *poteach es yadecha*, I have the intention that my hands are open to receive. *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, I want to draw down upon me a *shefa*. I want to open myself up, to *hochma*, and then *bina*. I want to create light to come down into this wholesome, healthy, wonderful and wonderous *kli*. When Abba and Ima work in unison, when my thoughts are aligned with my actions, when there's a focus point, a *kedusha*, and then our actions are done with *kedusha* and with consciousness, then what we start to bring into the world is so profound.

What we would suggest here is Kaddesh-Urchatz is the set-up. We're setting up a reminder of how we work. We are reminding ourselves that there's a light coming down from the *Borei Olam*. Here at Kadesh, we are being *mekadesh*, just like we do when we say *harei at mekudeshet li*. We are committing ourselves to our relationship with *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*. And we're *mamesh* bringing this down into our hearts. We are emotionalizing our thoughts. As we do this, we want to make sure that the thoughts that we emotionalize give birth to the most beautiful, unbelievable version of ourselves.



Journal Prompt

*Take a moment to breathe. Stop, think and reflect:
Where in our lives are we experiencing drifting? Which
aspects of our lives are bitter? What aspects of my life have I
let fall away? What would it take to bring them back?*

Karpas

We began by setting ourselves up for success. However, the experience of the *seder* is the experience of mapping out the real process that we're constantly living. This means mapping out the downs and the ups and the ups and the downs. And we're not scared of that. We're aware of that on Pesach. The *tzaddik* falls many times, and the *tzaddik* is resilient. He gets back up.

As we move into Karpas, we're moving from the 2000 years of purpose, that relate to the time the Torah was created before the world, and into the 2000 years of *tohu v'voHU*, the world of childhood. Karpas is a green vegetable which represents youth. It's supple. It's young. This is the *bechina* of the "*bnei*" part of being Bnei Yisrael. The experience of Karpas includes recognizing that we have not just one inner child, but many inner children, including all four sons.



Journal Prompt

Take a moment to breathe. Stop, think and reflect:

Can I take a moment to think about these different parts of me? Can I find all four sons within me? Can I find and accept the parts of me that are young and awkward? Can I also see the beauty of their innocence? Can I open myself up to being real about who I am?

The time of childhood is a time that is amoral, meaning there is no real understanding of good and bad or right and wrong. Children are awkward. They don't care that they get up in the middle of the night. They don't care if they have a full breakdown in the middle of the shop over the parent not giving the child the candy. At Karpas we experience the sometimes-awkward reality of who we really are.

Yachatz

Karpas is the idea that I'm young. And what happens when I'm young? I mess up. And that is when we enter the world of Yachatz. The world where the middle *matza* is broken. In the world of Yachatz I've messed up. I've done *aveiros*. I've fallen. Yachatz is recognizing that this process is part of reality. And as we said, it happens universally, even to *tzaddikim* on their level. We are all young sometimes and experience loss of consciousness. Our *da'as* falls into our *nefesh* and we forget. We lose our commitment. A *ruach shtuss* envelops us, and we break, *mamesh*.



There's a beautiful piece by Rav Pinchas of Koretz, the *Imrei Pinchas*, that when we're speaking about *ovdei avodah zara*, we're not speaking about someone else, in the sense of "look how terrible they are!" It is much more personal. We are all, as individuals, going to fall into the world of *avodah zara*. We drift. When we drift, we move away from our desired goal, and enter the *bechina* of *avodah zara*. We all experience our *avodah zaras* in our life. The question is, what do we do thereafter? Do we give up? Do we break? Or do we heal and come back to our focus?

The Strettiner Rebbe asks the question, what's the difference between the *tzaddik* and the *rasha*? This is as well found in the Ba'al Shem Tov. It's a real question. What's the difference between them? Listen to this beautiful answer. The *rasha* gives up. The *tzaddik* never gives up. And the question is, okay, I've experienced Karpas and Yachatz. I've experienced being young and messing up. I can have that a number of times a day. Now what do I do with it?

The Haggadah is the journey where we go inside and there's an expectation of us to find the *tzaddik* within us. As we know from the Torahs of Rebbe Nachaman, and many others, there's a *tzaddik* in you. You are the *tzaddik*, I am the *tzaddik*. We have to reclaim it. "Be the *tzaddik*!" "Reclaim the *tzidkus*!" The *tzaddik* falls, but then the *tzaddik* gets back up. We make mistakes, and then we can choose to heal.



Journal Prompt

*Take a moment to breathe. Stop, think and reflect:
Can I think of times in the past where I've fallen and picked myself up? Can I recognize that as *tzidkus*? Can I see in myself places that are still broken? Can I accept them as places from which I can rise?*

Maggid

So far in the Haggadah we've experienced the Karpas and Yachatz. This means I messed up, I used my Kadesh and Urchatz in an unhealthy way. Now we start with the healing. And the healing begins as soon as we recognize that we've messed up. The first step is realizing that we've made a mistake here. I was a slave. I messed up. I fell. And then, in Maggid, I start to speak about it. I start to talk. I reach a point where I can reflect on what happened and I start to share. I might share only with myself. I might share with someone else. Whichever it is, this is an important part of healing. For example, if someone is an addict, and they go to AA, or a similar group, what happens? They speak in a group, and they share their story. The first step of healing is sharing the story. When I can start to describe the experience, I have already entered the first stage of healing. That's the *bechina* of Maggid.



Journal Prompt

Take a moment to breathe. Stop, think and reflect:

Think about your personal story. Without judging, reflect on where you've fallen, and take the time to understand how and why it happened. As we will see later, this is an important part of your story. We don't ever need to edit out the parts of our story where we've fallen.

Rachza

After Maggid, what starts to happen is we start to have deeper healings. In Rachza we return to the hand washing that we performed at the beginning of the seder. But now, we wash with new *kavanah*. We return with added meaning. Washing is a *bechina* of *mikvah*. It's *teshuva*, repentance. I stop and think, "Hakadosh Baruch Hu, *mamesh*, I want to return to you! I want to return!" At this washing, we can now wash with a bracha. We can now include Hashem in our process.

Journal Prompt

Take a moment to breathe. Stop, think and reflect:

Connect to the aspect inside that wants to return. What does it feel like? Are you ready to return? Are you in a place of wanting to be ready to return? Are you looking to return in one aspect of your life, or in many? Can you imagine, as if it were real, that you can return? Do you know in your mind that Hashem is waiting for you, with open arms? Can you feel it in your heart?



Motzi

When we speak about Motzi Matza, there is a very interesting question that comes up. When we say the *bracha*, “*Hamotzi lechem min ha’aretz*” is that *emes*? No. It’s not entirely *emes*. Why? Because bread is not brought forth directly from the ground. The reality is, there’s a lot of work that was needed. When we say “*Hamotzi lechem min ha’aretz*” we mean that it happened through a process. There are 11 elements of the 39 *melachos* that have to do with making bread. It takes a lot of work.

The *inyan* of *motzi* is the *inyan* of recognizing that now that I want to do *teshuva*, I have to do the work. And that work is re-forming my perception. It’s adjusting my perception of how I view the world and therefore how I experience the world. And that takes time. That takes effort. This *nekudah* is very, very important. I do *teshuva*, I say Hakadosh Baruch Hu, I messed up. *Motzi* is the additional *nekudah* that now I’m choosing to do the work. I’m investing.

This connection of the *bracha* of *Hamotzei* to the 39 *melachos* includes within it a deep idea, the idea of *sof ma’aseh, machshava techila*. This means that what we see at the end, in action, was first in thought. To understand this, let’s explore for a moment the concept of *melacha*. On Shabbat, if a person wants to pick a white date, but picks a black date, the *gemara* says they’re not *chayav*. But if a person wants to pick a black date, and picks a black date, they are *chayav*. If a person picks up a stone and they wanted to throw it 6 feet but they only throw it 3 feet, they’re not



chayav. However if a person wanted to throw it 3 feet, and throws it 3 feet, they are *chayav*. The halacha reflects that the *melachos* are an expression of *sof ma'aseh, machshava techila*.

This *nekudah* is a very important *nekudah* to remember, because this is the *derech Hashem*, this is the way that Hashem created the world. As it says in the Zohar, in the *hakdama*, Hashem Yisborach looked in the Torah to create the world. *Sof ma'aseh, machshava techila*. Before the beginning, He saw the end.

The Emek Hamelech says Hakadosh Baruch Hu laughed the world into existence. He looked at the *sof ma'aseh*, He saw the whole of creation, and He chuckled, *kiviyachol*, He laughed, and through that laugh, from that joining of the end and the beginning, the Emek HaMelech says the world was created. The universes were created.

If we have drifted from where we want to be, we've detached our actions from our original goals. We've taken ourselves out of the framework of *sof ma'aseh, machshava techila*. *Motzi* is the opportunity to recognize the need for unifying our actions with our thoughts.



Journal Prompt

Take a moment to breathe. Stop, think and reflect:

At motzi I can take a moment to stop and think. Why did I do an aveira? Why did I fall into avodah zara? Because I drifted. I wasn't sof ma'aseh, machshava techila. We can think about what we committed to in Kadesh, the thoughts we want to live by. Where are they being expressed in our actions? Where has there been a separation between our first thoughts and our actions? What do I need to invest to bring my thoughts and my actions back into a unity?

Matzah

Matzah is *emunah*. Matzah is surrender. I surrender myself to Hakadosh Baruch Hu. I've done my *avodah* of Rachtza, of *teshuvah*, and I've done my *sof ma'aseh, machshava techila*, I've gone into how it happened, and how the You in me wants to express itself. *Sof ma'aseh, machshava techila*. And now I focus on *emunah*.

Matza has a dual nature. Sometimes we focus on matza as *lechem oni*, poor man's bread, and sometimes we focus on it as free man's bread. Here, we relate to the matza through the aspect of surrender. As we eat the matza, we are expressing, "Hakadosh Baruch Hu, I need you. I rely on You."

And we are not just thinking this. We are eating this. We are actualizing our *koach* of *achilah* and bringing this all the way down into the physical world. It is a deep experience. I eat it, and it becomes a part of me.



Journal Prompt

Take a moment to breathe. Stop, think and reflect:

*As we prepare to eat the matzah, we can think about how we rely completely on Hashem. We can recognize that, "Hakadosh Baruch Hu, it's all You. I can't do it without You." And we bring that emunah, that *hasaga* of being, into the manifestation of my physical, *mamesh*. And we can ask ourselves, "What do we want to eat into ourselves?"*

Maror

Now once we've done that, we have something called *teshuva* upon *teshuva*. Maror is *charata*. It's the deep, deep bitterness we feel because of what went on. It's a *bechina* of *yiras chet*, and *yiras shamayim*. There is an idea that it is good to keep our *aveiros* in front of us all the time. I don't do this because I'm punishing myself. I do it because I don't want to fall into those traps.

This doesn't mean always thinking about it. It means doing a *cheshbon hanefesh*. I know that I have this tendency. And the *maror* is recognizing the bitterness I feel because I know that I have this tendency, and that I can easily fall into this trap. I know I live with this. And I have *charata*. Why? Because this damages my relationship with the Borei Olam. I started out with Kadash-Urchatz. But then I gave birth to something that was unhealthy. And I don't want that. It's when we recognize our own tendencies that we can stay away from that.



Journal Prompt

Take a moment to breathe. Stop, think and reflect:

We can experience the bitterness of the ways we have damaged our relationship with Hashem. What are the tendencies I live with? What are my personal patterns? Where am I likely to drift away from who I want to be?

Korech

During Korech we re-examine our relationship with the Maror. We put the Maror together with the Matza. The *seforim hakedoshim* explain that the ability to do this is the ability to embrace paradox. This is a big theme in Rebbe Nachman. We can experience the sweet and the bitter together. We have parts within ourselves that are contradictory. We can love and hate at the same time. We can want to draw near with one part of ourselves and want to create distance with another part, at the same time. And we can accept that we exist with both parts inside us.

Journal Prompt

Take a moment to breathe. Stop, think and reflect:

As we prepare for Korech, jot down some of the paradoxes that shape our lives. Where do we hold contradictory feelings within ourselves? Where in our lives do our actions or our circumstances express paradox? How can we make room for, and accept these paradoxes in our lives?



Korech is a new *darga*, where I recognize that the negative and the positive, that which didn't go according to what I thought it should, and also that which did go the way I thought it should – both are how it should have been. I can make space for those two extremes. I can foster a maturity. Part of a high level of consciousness is the ability to embrace paradox. This is the *bechina* of Korech.

Shulchan Orech

Until now, we have spent quite a bit of time in a state of observation. We have watched and realized how human consciousness is mapped out. We have had the opportunity to observe our own process and our own tendencies, and to take note of what we are feeling and experiencing. With Shulchan Orech we can move from a state of observation to a state of re-integration. At Shulchan Orech, I am ready to use whatever comes my way to serve Hakadosh Baruch Hu.

Shulchan Orech is the *bechina* of *hamtaka*, the *bechina* of re-integration that comes after observation. We sit down to a meal of many different items. I have a meal of many different plates on the table. We're sharing our own divrei Torah, we're sharing our own ideas. I'm taking what I've learnt in the Haggadah shiurim that I've listened to, the Haggadahs that I've read, and now I can give that over. Shulchan Orech is the opportunity to come back and integrate all that's gone on. We have gone through the process of *teshuva*, the process



of putting in the work, the process of *emunah*, of giving it all over to Hashem, and the process of embracing our paradoxes. Now, in Shulchan Orech I am ready for the *avodah* of taking everything that comes my way and living with it.

We as Yidden always want to be leveraging everything that happens to us to bring greater light into this world. We are meaning-makers, creating meaning through our thinking. We are constantly birthing reality into being through our thinking. By Shulchan Orech we are again, as we began in Kadesh-Urchatz, living with purpose. At this point in the *seder*, we can re-connect to the four stages we spoke about earlier. We are now in the present, and we are beginning to look to the future. We can begin to upgrade and expand our consciousness.

Journal Prompt

Take a moment to breathe. Stop, think and reflect:

As we prepare for Shulchan Aruch, think about the ways we expect our actual Seder to play out. What happens during Shulchan Orech in real life? Is it noisy? Is it chaotic? Are people tired or busy eating? How can we prepare ourselves to use the reality that we find around us to enhance our avodas Hashem?



Tzafun

Tzafun is the Afikoman. This is where we can take everything that has been, and we start to realize that it's *echad*. It's *mamesh echad*. The Afikomen is the *bechina* of the *ohr haganuz*. The matza, which was *lechem oni*, has now become something much much higher. I've embraced what happened. I've taken what happened and I'm now in a different state of consciousness. The *lechem oni* becomes the *lechem* of the free man.

The Rambam says that once we've gone through all the different stages of *teshuva*, we should believe that our *teshuva* has been accepted. We accomplished. What is the hardest and highest part of the Haggadah Shel Pesach? It's believing my *avodah's* been done and accepted.

Tzafun is Afikomen. It's the *bechina* of recognizing that I'm whole. At Tzafun, which means hidden, I recognize that it's a mysterious world out there. What I know is that I don't know what's going on. But I can be whole with that. I can decide that I'm going to search, I'm going to look, I'm going to become a yearner and a wanter. And even though things will remain hidden, I have the recognition that I'm one. I'm finished with one process and now I'm moving into a new *darga* of *avodah*.



Barech

Barech is the recognition that the only place I can ever really be is in the present moment. The natural consequence of what I've gone through so far in these different *dargas* is that I recognize that *mamesh*, everything in my life, I draw it from Hashem. In this stage, by Barech, I'm present in the moment, and I don't know what's going to be happening. Everything is a mystery. But I'm conscious. I'm whole through being conscious in the moment.

Barech is the *bechina* that I'm bringing upon myself *bracha*. I'm being *mamshich* an *ohr elyon*. I'm in a state of *deveikus* the whole time. And if not the whole time—to the best of my ability! That's Barech. The *bechina* of "I'm always drawing down."

A Grounding Exercise To Be Present In The Moment

Take a moment to feel the ground under your feet. Stop and just listen to the loudest noise around you right now, and to the quietest sound you can hear. And then just look around, and see how everything has its place.



Hallel

When I feel whole, when I am bringing down upon myself an *ohr elyon*, the natural consequence is Hallel. I just want to praise. And I want to thank. I've got *hakarat hatov*. And I want to sing. It's *mamesh* the natural consequence of developing our consciousness.

Reflection Point

Every day for a week, list five things you are grateful for, and notice how it impacts you.

Nirtza

At the end of the seder we return to a childlike state. *Mamesh* now, after this whole intense seder, we sing children's songs. "Who knows one?" and all the animal noises of Chad Gadya fill the room. We return to a childlike state.

How does a child live? A child lives with vulnerability. They are open, and that makes them vulnerable. This is an important *middah* of a child and of us as Bnei Yisrael, children of Israel. Vulnerability is what's needed for deep, intimate relationship. This includes the ability to let go, and the ability to take risks.

In this process of growth, personally and nationally, we have fallen so many times. So many exiles. It decreases our



vulnerability and our ability to let go. It decreases our ability to take steps forward and move forward. And what we're suggesting here is that Nirtza is a return to innocence. It's a return to *temimus*. *Ashrei Adam* who goes with *temimus* with Hakadosh Baruch Hu, with the Torah, with life and with ourselves. This is how Rebbe Nachman opens up Likutei Moharan, with this *nekudah* of a return to innocence and a return to vulnerability.

This is the end of this process. We end with rebirth. The 15 steps of the *seder* are the 15 steps of reclaiming ourselves and rebirthing ourselves. With this, we have gone through a more internal experience, a more Ba'al Shem Tov experience.

At Nirtza we've now re-created and rebirthed ourselves, and we're once again a child. We return to innocence. I return to my childhood. And I recognize that I am always free, even in the deepest experiences of exile. As I'm singing children's songs, I'm coming to this deep place of vulnerability, I'm coming to this place of letting go and I'm coming to this place of taking risks that I can start again. I'm okay. I'm not bitter. I've gone through the process. I can start again. I am re-born.



בס"ד

May we live life from a place of choice, strength, joyfulness, persistence and fulfillment.

As the Pilzno Rav would say,

'With all that comes before you, may you be successful in all your endeavors.'

- Yehoshua Gerzi, Eretz Yisrael

*Thanks to the Cause of all Causes for the
privilege of achieving the completion of
this text.*

