

2nd day Pesach 5762

Each Pesach we begin our Seder with the familiar words: *hashata hacha l'shanah ha'baah be'arah d'yisrael, hashata avdei, l'shanah ha'baah bnei chorin*. This year we are here, next year in the land of Israel; this year we are slaves, next year, free men.

The formula is ancient, preserved unchanged in its original Aramaic, from a time when Jews spoke Aramaic as their vernacular. How many centuries has it been since Jews spoke Aramaic! And yet we continue to say the same words, the same prayer.

Actually, it doesn't sound like a prayer. A prayer would begin *yehi ratzon*, or- in Aramaic – *yehei rava*, let it be Your will. Let it be your will to bring us by next year to Jerusalem, to make us free men.

That is not what we say. We don't begin the seder with a prayer. We begin with a statement, a confident statement of fact: This year we are here; but next year *we will be* in Jerusalem. This year we are slaves, but next year *we will be* free men.

And the years roll by, and the decades, and the centuries, and each year we are disappointed, each year our confident expectation fails to be materialize. Last year we were here, and here we are still. Last year we were slaves, and slaves we are still.

How is it then that we continue to make this confident prediction, the same confident words, year after year? Shouldn't we at least tone it down, allow for a little uncertainty: This year we are here, *perhaps* next year we will be in *Eretz Yisroel*. This year we are slaves; *let's hope* that next year we will be free men.

How do we go on year after year, setting ourselves up for disappointment?

You're probably all familiar with the famous business between Charlie Brown and Lucy, each year she sets up a football for him to kick, each year she pulls it away at the last minute, and yet Charlie Brown, sap that he is, convinces himself each year that *this time* will be different.

How are we different than Charlie Brown? Where does our confidence come from?

You know, this declaration has a very strange opening: *ho lachma anya*, this is the bread of affliction.

And many commentators have pointed out the difficulty that the Torah describes the matzoh as the bread of redemption, the bread that the Jews baked on their way out of Egypt because they were hurried out of Egypt so quickly that there was no time for their bread to leaven. And later on in the Seder, too, we say: *matzoh zu she'anu ochlim al shum mah?* What does the matzoh signify? And we answer: *Al she'lo hispik betzeikam l'hachmitz ad she'niglah aleihem melech malchei hamelochim*, because as they left Egypt there was no time for their bread to leaven.

And so how can we begin the seder by describing the *matzo*, that symbol of our redemption, as *lachma anya*, the bread of affliction?

And the meforschei ha'hagadah explain that the matzo had two historical roles. It was, as the Torah says, and as we say later in the Hagadah, the bread of redemption that we baked on our way out of Egypt. But it was also, for centuries, the bread of affliction, the bread that we were fed as slaves in Egypt when we were not allowed the luxury even of waiting for our bread to leaven, before being hurried back to our labors. And so the matzo is both; both the bread of *geulah*, and the bread of affliction.

But this answer, at first glance, seems unsatisfactory. Because even if it is true, as a matter of historical fact, that the Jews ate matzo as slaves in Egypt, that is not the *reason* that we eat matzo at the seder! The Torah makes clear that the reason we are commanded to eat matzo at the seder is because it is the bread that we ate when we were redeemed. So why do we begin the seder by emphasizing matzo's other, more melancholy aspect?

The answer, I believe, is this: Matzo is the bread of *geulah*. That is how the Torah characterizes it, that is the reason we eat it at the seder, that is its essential nature. And therefore when the Jews in Egypt during their long years of slavery, under the lash, ate matzo, they were eating the bread of *geulah*. With every bite of matzo that they ate, they were celebrating their *geulah*. Every meal that they eat in Egypt, where they were fed nothing but matzo, was a seder.

Only they didn't know it yet.

Because, you see, the process of *geulah* from Egypt did not start when Moshe arrived back from Midyan. It did not start when Moshe smote the Egyptian overseer. It did not start, even, when Moshe was born.

The process of *geulah* began the minute the Jews arrived in Egypt.

And we see that in the beautiful Midrash that Yocheved, Moshe's mother, was born *bein ha'chomos*, between the gates of the walls of the city when Yaakov and his children first arrived in Egypt. Because at that moment – with the beginning of the galus – began the unfolding of the *geulah*.

That *geulah* was a long, drawn out process, and for two centuries it was invisible to human eyes. No one realized the significance of Yocheved's birth. No one knew, for that matter, the significance of Moshe's birth and adoption by Pharaoh's daughter. The beginning of the slavery, its intensification, Pharaoh's decrees, all that was public knowledge and filled our hearts with dismay. But beneath the surface – far from the public eye – the *geulah* was already happening.

The great R' Yaakov of Lisa, the author of the *nesivos*, in his commentary on the haggadah, records a beautiful insight. The haggadah says: *Baruch shomer havtachaso*

l'yisroel, she'hakadosh baruch hu chisshav es ha'ketz, la'asos k'mah she'amar l'Avraham. Blessed is He who keeps His promise to Israel; for *hakadosh baruch hu* calculated the end, in order to do what He had promised to Avraham.

Now this is a difficult passage. What does it mean that *hkb"h* *calculated the end*? Does He need to calculate?

Explains the *nesivos*, all those years in Egypt, *hkb"h* was busy bringing the *ketz* about. All those years, when all we saw was misery, He was arranging the *geulah*. He was busy with the *geulah*. All the strands of history were being directed towards *geulah*. And the slavery itself, with all its horrors, was a necessary part of that *geulah*, even if we could not – even if we cannot – understand it. All those year when we were calculating how long we had been slave, He was calculating the *ketz*, how long the process of *geulah* had been going on, and how much longer it would need.

And therefore every bite of *lechem oni*, the bitter bread of slavery, was a bite of *lechem ge'ulim*. The matzo was the bread of freedom even in Egypt – but only Hashem knew it.

And that is the lesson that the matzo teaches us, and the lesson with which we begin the seder. As so as we sit down to the seder we take the matzo, that symbol of our freedom which is the centerpiece of our seder table, over which we will soon recount the story of our miraculous deliverance, and we say:

Ho lachma anya: This matzo was for many years the bread of our affliction. We ate it in abject despair, not knowing what it was. And all this time – all that time – it was the symbol of our redemption. All that time – we were being redeemed. The mills of *geulah* ground slowly – but they never stopped grinding.

Only the process was hidden. Until that final moment when - *Ad she'niglah aleihem melech malchei hamelachim* – until *hkb"h* revealed himself to them. He was there all the time – being *mechashev the ketz*, bringing the *geulah* about. All that changed at the end was *she'niglah aleihem*, He revealed Himself.

Ho lachma anya – today, too, we eat the bread of affliction. When we read of bombs and mortars, of shattered lives, of mothers killed along with their children, of families wiped out, when that is our daily fare – then we eat *lechem oni*, the bread of affliction. *Haysa li dimasi lechem yomam ve'layla*, my tears were my bread, day and night.

Hashata hacha, this year we are here, still eating the bread of affliction – and there is so much affliction for our people today.

And yet we know that *hakadosh baruch hu* is here too, with us, being *mechashev the ketz*, bringing it closer and closer, and this bread, this matzo, is for us today, too – not only *lechem oni*, but also – *lechem geulim*, the bread of redemption, which every year comes closer and closer.

And so with that same faith that our ancestors showed when they first made this declaration, with the same words that they used then, with the same undiminished confidence, we declare: *l'shono ha'baah b'ara d'yisroel*, next year in the land of Israel; *l'shono habaah bnei chorin*, next year free men.