

Pesach, Deep divrei Torah 2017

The Haggadah relates that at the beginning our fathers were idol worshippers, and now Hashem has brought us close to His service etc. (מתחלה עובדי עבודה זרה היו אבותינו ועכשו קרבנו המקום לעבודתו וכו'). The Rambam (hilchos chametz umatzah 7, 4) and the Shnayim Me Yodaya explain that the author of the haggadah is referring to Avraham's father, Terach. The Rokeach however argues and says that this refers to our ancestors in Egypt.

**Why does the haggadah relate this information? Why do we care that our fathers worshiped idolatry? Furthermore, isn't this considered lashon hara?** The Ramban (1, 9) says that when we bring a korban we must think that we should be instead of the korban. Our blood should be instead of the blood of the animal. It is only because of Hashem's compassion that we are able to bring the korban instead of ourselves. The Chinuch (mitzvah 95) says that Hashem commanded us to take a body formed of flesh like our own body. We must bring it to a place that was chosen for the enhancement of spirituality, aka the Beis Hamikdash. It must be burnt there and thus obliterating any memory of it. The pasuk (Vayikra 6, 16) says "it shall be entirely burned." Afterwards we mustn't mention or remember it etc. By affixing this image into our minds we will be extremely cautious not to sin. The Rambam (hilchos teshuva 2, 5) relates a similar idea. He says that one who divulges his sins between him and Hashem is considered עוֹזֵר פְּנִים (disrespectful). Thus, **it is improper and inappropriate to divulge our sins to others.** The Rambam (hilchos teshuva 7, 8) also says that it is a big sin to make fun of a bal teshuva. It is completely prohibited to remind a bal teshuva of his previous sins. The Chafetz Chaim (hilchos lashon hara 4, 1) says it is prohibited medeoriasa (from the Torah) to speak negative information about someone to someone else. Even if we aren't around the person who we are speaking about, it is still prohibited. It is also prohibited to speak about ones past if the information is negative. It is prohibited to speak about someone who sinned.

Rabbi Yoel Teitelbaum (Satmer Rebbe in his Haggadah Mahari Tov) explains that at the time of the Beis Hamikdash, the korban pesach was eaten when they were already satiated. However, due to our sins, the Beis Hamikdash was destroyed and we don't have a korban pesach anymore. We therefore have an afikoman which commemorates the korban pesach. **The afikoman is essentially a reminder that we sinned and therefore don't have the korban pesach. That's why we hide the afikoman, to hide our sins.** The pasuk in Tehilim (32, 1) states "praiseworthy is one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered over." "אשרי נשוי פשע כסוי חטאה." When one sins he needs to remove and forget that sin. The afikoman is called צפון which means hidden because we need to hide our sins and then get rid of them!

We see from all of the aforementioned that we must forget our sins. **It is also immodest to divulge ones sins.** With this information we can really appreciate the previous question. Why does the author of the haggadah relate that our fathers were idol worshippers? This statement of the haggadah is based on a Mishna in Pesachim (116a). The Mishna states we start with the degradation and end with praise (מתחיל בגנות ומסיים בשבח). Avraham completely uprooted himself from idolatry. Why does the author of the haggadah return and mention the idolatry? Isn't this lashon hara?

Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler (Michtav M'Eliyahu chelek beis pages 21-22) offers a beautiful answer. **Rav Dessler explains that Avraham passed many difficult trials and**

**tribulations. The author of the haggadah is informing us about how much braveness, courage and strength Avraham had. He went the polar opposite way from everyone around him. We know how difficult it is for a person to go against the tide. This is precisely what is most impressive about Avraham. The author of the Haggadah is essentially praising Avraham by mentioning the avoda zara that was worshiped because he went against the flow of avoda zara!**

In one of the phrases in the haggadah we say ‘this matzah that we eat, is due to what? It is because our fathers’ dough did not have a chance to become leavened until Hashem was revealed to them and redeemed them.’ Before being redeemed from Egypt the Jews were on the forty ninth level of tummah. If they would have been more impure they would have been hopeless. They wouldn’t have been redeemed and received the Torah. Hashem therefore had to hastily redeem them. It is for this reason that there are numerous stringencies pertaining to chametz which are halachically nonexistent in any other realm of halacha. For example, where else do we find a prohibition of seeing or finding something? **בל יראה ובל ימצא** (you cannot see or find) is a unique stringency which is nonexistent and inapplicable in any other area of halacha as stated by Tosfos (beginning of Pesachim). Pesach symbolizes the great spiritual danger that we had. We must therefore completely remove ourselves from that low and tammah (impure) spiritual level. It is for this reason that our fathers being idol worshippers were mentioned. **If Avraham was able to separate from this idolatry at a time when everyone was worshiping idols, then surely we can separate for that bad that occurs now a days.** Avraham’s abstaining from idolatry was impressive and is a lesson that it relevant to every generation. This is one of the reasons why the author of the haggadah mentioned that our fathers worshiped idolatry.

How did Avraham do this? He fled from wicked people. We must do the same as well. This shtims (coincides) with what we discussed in parshas Lech Lecha 2016.

"ויאמר יקוק אל אברם לך לך מארצך וממולדתך ומבית אביך אל הארץ אשר אראך." "Hashem said to Avraham, ‘go for yourself from your land, from your relatives, and from your father’s house to the land that I will show you.’” (12, 1) The Rabbenu Beihai discusses the incredibly important concept of being in a good environment. The pasuk in Mishlay (13, 20) states “one who walks with the wise will grow wise, but the companion of fools will be broken.” (הלויך הולך את חכמים וחכם) (יחכם ורעה כסילים ירוע.) **We must strive to be around good people. We should try to be around talmiday chachamim. We should distance ourselves from those who are bad influences on us.** The explanation of “one who walks with the wise” is, constantly. We must constantly follow the ways of the chachamim. We should make them leaders and make ourselves secondary. One who does this will surely become smart over time. One who spends time around a talmid chacham gains. Even so, the talmid chacham doesn’t lose out. The reason for this is because the Torah is compared to a fire as stated in Yirmiya (perek 23). **When one lights a candle from another candle, the first candle still remains aflame. The talmid chacham shares his Torah fire, without losing any for himself, on the contrary, he will gain. The Medrash Mishlay (13) compares this to someone who goes into a perfume store. Even if this customer didn’t buy anything, she will nevertheless smell like perfume. The same applies to environments. We will get affected, either directly or indirectly, or both, by the environment that we are in. We must therefore strive to be in a good environment in order to get positively affected, rather than in a negative environment and be negatively affected.** This is why we must attach ourselves to talmiday chachamim. If we are around fools then a loss will result. Conversely, if

we are around talmidday chachamim then a gain will result. This is why Dovid Hamelech starts sefer Tehilim by talking about how important it is not to be with sinners. Shlomo Hamelech also starts sefer Mishlay (1, 8) this way. He instructs sons to listen to the mussar of their fathers. Shalomo says that children will be more likely to listen to rebuke from their father if they don't hang around sinners. Avraham fulfilled the entire Torah even though it wasn't given yet as related in mesechas Yuma (28b). Even so, he needed to be warned not to be around sinners. These sinners would prevent him from serving Hashem properly. This is precisely why Hashem instructed him to relocate. The Medrash Tanchuma (gimal) compares Avraham to a sealed bottle which smells good. This bottle is closed and placed in a cemetery. This bottle should be removed from the cemetery and opened up. Avraham therefore needed to leave the cemetery of sinners. Hashem commanded Avraham to distance himself from these sinners in order not to get dirty. The Toras Chaim explains that the pasuk could have simply stated לך, why does the pasuk state לך לך? **The words לך לך are similar to the word לכלוך, which means dirt. Meaning, Avraham had to relocate in order that he wouldn't get dirty from all of the spiritual filth that existed.**

The Orachaim (12, 1) says that it is even preferable to dwell in a neighborhood that has lions rather than in an area that has sinners. The Mishna in Avos (perek alef) states: distance yourself from a bad neighbor; do not associate with a wicked person. (הרחק משכן רע ואל תתחבר לרשע.) Rabbi Ovadia Bartenuira explains that this is necessary in order that we will not learn from the ways of wicked people. Furthermore, this is in order that we will not get punished when they get punished. The source of this is an Avos D'Rebbi Noson (perek tes) that explains one of the disadvantages of having a neighbor who is a wicked person. If his wall gets tzaras and therefore has to get knocked down, then the tzadik will also get negatively affected.

The Brisa in Avos (perek vav) relates a fascinating story. Rabbi Yose ben Kisma said: Once I was walking on the road, when a certain man met me. He greeted me and I returned his greeting. He said to me, 'Rabbi, from what place are you?' I said to him, 'I am from a great city of scholars and sages.' He said to me. Rabbi would you willing to live with us in our place? I would give you thousands of golden dinars, precious stones and pearls.' I replied, 'even if you were to give me all the silver and gold, precious stones and pearls in the world, I would dwell nowhere but in a place of Torah etc. Furthermore, when a man departs from this world, neither silver, nor gold, nor precious stones nor pearls escort him, but only Torah study and good deeds.' (אמר רבי יוסי בן קיסמא פעם אחת הייתי מהלך בדרך ופגע בי אדם אחד ונתן לי שלום והחזרתי לו שלום אמר לי רבי מאיזה מקום אתה אמרתי לו מעיר גדולה של חכמים ושל סופרים אני אמר לי רבי רצונך שתדור עמנו במקומנו ואני אתן לך אלף אלפים דינרי זהב ואבנים טובות ומרגליות אמרתי לו בני אם אתה נותן לי כל כסף וזהב ואבנים טובות ומרגליות שבעולם איני דר אלא במקום תורה לפי שבשעת פטירתו של אדם אין מלווין לו לאדם לא כסף ולא זהב ולא אבנים טובות ומרגליות אלא תורה ומעשים טובים בלבד.)

(See Vezos Haberachah 2015)

**What is the explanation of this Rabbeinu Beihai? Does Avraham, the founder of monotheism really need to worry about being negatively influenced by others? Yes! Rabbi Shimshon Pinkes (Tiferes Shimshon pages 134-136) elaborates on the aforementioned Rabbeinu Beihai. **Whether we realize it or not, dirt attaches to us. The same applies to negative influences. The environment that we are in will affect us, whether directly or indirectly.****

The Rambam (hilchos dayos perek vav halacha alef) writes that **it is the norm for people to be thinking and acting the way others around him think and act.** Therefore we must attach

ourselves to tzaddikim, so that we will learn from their actions. We must also distance ourselves from wicked people, in order that we won't learn from their actions. If one is in a place where there are wicked people, he must relocate to a place where there are tzaddikim. If he is unable to go to such a place then he must dwell alone. If they are still making him mix with them and are disallowing him so sit alone then he must go to a desert or cave. (דרך ברייתו של אדם להיות נמשך) בדעותיו ובמעשיו אחר ריעיו וחביריו ונוהג כמנהג אנשי מדינתו, לפיכך צריך אדם להתחבר לצדיקים ולישב אצל החכמים תמיד כדי שילמוד ממעשיהם, ויתרחק מן הרשעים ההולכים בחשך כדי שלא ילמוד ממעשיהם, הוא ששלמה אומר הולך את חכמים יחכם ורועה כסילים ירוע, ואומר אשרי האיש וגו', וכן אם היה במדינה שמנהגותיה רעים ואין אנשיה הולכים בדרך ישרה ילך למקום שאנשיה צדיקים ונוהגים בדרך טובים, ואם היו כל המדינות שהוא יודעם ושומע שמועתן נוהגים בדרך לא טובה כמו זמנינו, או שאינו יכול ללכת למדינה שמנהגותיה טובים מפני הגייסות או מפני החולי ישב לבדו יחידי כענין שנאמר ישב בדד יידום, ואם היו רעים וחטאים שאין מניחים אותו לישב במדינה אלא אם כן נתערב עמהן ונוהג במנהגם הרע יצא למערות ולחוחים (ולמדברות, ואל ינהיג עצמו בדרך חטאים כענין שנאמר מי יתנני במדבר מלון אורחים).

Rabbi Shalomo Cohen (Per hador chalek beis page 101) relates a story. The Satmer Rebbe once visited the Chazon Ish. He asked what we should do nowadays because everyone would end up in a cave. The Chazon Ish responded that the Yeshivos are the caves.

Rabbi Shimshon Pinkes explains that following the ways of those who surround us is like nature. Meaning, just as the sun rises in the east and sets in the west, so too, not following the ways of those who surround us is unchangeable. Similarly, **just as sick people are contagious, so too, the ways of wicked people are also contagious.**

**It is for this reason that the Torah decided to specifically choose Avraham as the example of one who is warned to relocate in order not to get negatively influenced. If Avraham, the founder of monotheism, one who is so far removed from sinning or getting negatively affected, is warned to relocate, lest he get negatively affected, then we must surely not dwell in an area with wicked people.**

Rabbi Avigdor Miller (Q and A2 pages 15-16) says that one must leave the room at a wedding hall if there is mixed dancing. See there for an elaboration. The point is we must distance ourselves from what the Torah and Rabbis prohibit. Rabbi Binyamin Eisenberger (mesilas neviim on Yehoshua page 30) suggests good advice on how to overcome the yeitzer hara. We must imagine that we are trapped in a room and the only way to exit the room is through an open window. If the yeitzer tests us, we need to be strong and immediately run away. There is always a window to escape through! This is the pshat (explanation) of an exit sign! The American law requires exit signs in case of an emergency. The exit sign instructs us how to get out of the room. We need to create spiritual exit signs for us to escape the yeitzer hara. The Gemara in Sota (36b) relates that Yosef Hatzaddik saw the image of his father by the window. This symbolized that Yosef should immediately run away from his yeitzer hara! Yosef immediately ran outside! (באתה) דיוקנו של אביו ונראתה לו בחלון, שיעקב האיר לו לראות את החלון הפתוח למלט נפשו מיד יצרו, ומיד "וינס ויצא (ההוצה)". One factor that prevents us from repenting is yiush (giving up). Some people unfortunately give up hope and think since he already distanced himself so far from Hashem, Hashem will not accept his repentance. This is a big lie. Every Jewish soul is tied and connected to a very thick unbreakable rope as the pasuk in Devarim (32, 9) states. Ropes connect two things, even if they are very far away. Every Jewish neshama (soul) always holds on to one side of the rope and Hashem holds on to the other. This rope is unbreakable. There are very few people throughout our long history who became disconnected to this rope! There is always hope! The pasuk in Yehoshua says that Rachav lowered the spies through the window on a rope! Rachav demonstrated how proper repentance should be done. The rope she used was previously

used for eliciting relations. It was now used for mitzvah purposes. There is always hope! We should never lose hope!

**Another answer as to why the author of the Haggadah mentions the idolatry that Terach worshiped according to my humble opinion is to teach us the concept that our past affects our future. Avraham's past shaped and created Avraham Avinu. Perhaps Avraham wouldn't have reached such a lofty level if he would have had a different past.** This is similar to the concept of descending in order to ascend (ירידה לצורך עליה) or ביטולו זהו קיומו as stated in Menachos (99). Another example to clarify this point can be deduced from the life of Rabbi Akiva. Rabbi Akiva didn't learn until he turned forty as stated in the Avos D'Rebbi Nason (perek vav). The Gemara in Pesachim (49) quotes Rebbe Akiva who said give me a talmid chacham so I can bite him like a donkey. When a donkey bites it breaks the bone its bites into. אמר רבי עקיבא כשהייתי עם הארץ אמרתי מי יתן לי תלמיד חכם ואנשכנו כהמור. אמרו לו תלמידיו רבי, אמור ככלב! אמר להן (זה נושך ושובר עצם, וזה נושך ואינו שובר עצם.) This is why Rebbe Akiva said so I can bite him like a donkey. Notwithstanding of Akiva's past, he toiled and became the great Rabbi Akiva. If he would have learnt Torah from a young age perhaps he wouldn't have reached such great heights. His past perhaps positively affected his future. Because of his past he was able to relate to many different types of people. Perhaps some of his Torah chiddushim only resulted because of his open mind and worldliness that he had from his past. Furthermore, perhaps if Rabbi Akiva would have learnt his entire life he would have had the same enthusiasm and desire to learn as diligently as he did. With this we can answer another question. Why did Hashem bring the Jews to Egypt and the desert? The Emri Shefer answers that if the Jews would have remained in Israel they wouldn't have continued to serve Hashem and would have returned to their idolatrous ways. The Gemara in Berachos (60b) states one should always be accustomed to say - whatever Hashem does is for the best (לעולם יהא אדם רגיל לומר כל דעביד רחמנא לטב עביד).