

8th of Nissan, 5781

Should we invite Ishmael and Esau to the Seder?

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Good evening to everyone. Today is the 8th of Nissan the month of redemption from all the straits and confinements of Egypt that symbolize all the straits and confinements of every individual in his or her personal life. This also pertains to the spiritual life of the entire Jewish people. To be redeemed, we need to very strongly believe and prepare ourselves spiritually and physically for the coming redemption. This is also a special day for me, since it is my own personal day of redemption, which occurred 25 years ago.

Today everyone is busy in preparing for Pesach, cleaning the house, cleaning their heart from *chametz* (leavened products) and from ego, from self pride, and from negative conceit. To be ready to eat the *matzah* of Pesach in self-nullification before God and by receiving the yoke of heaven with great joy and pleasure of being a Jew that was liberated and given the *mitzvot*, among them this very special *mitzvah* of eating *matzah* for seven days.

We are going to relate the basic teaching of Pesach and the *Seder* night with a general overview of the entire order of *hishtalshelut* (order of evolution). *Seder* literally means "order," and in Kabbalah and Chassidut, order represents the order of creation, from beginning to end. In the Haggadah of Pesach, there are 15 steps, which provide an orderly outline that is not found in such a pronounced manner in other *mitzvot*. The 15 steps do not include the 4 cups of wine. If we include them, there are 19. It is explained that all these steps correspond to the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet; so there actually are three more "steps" that correspond to the 3 *matzahs* that we place under the *Seder* plate. In the *Gal Einai Haggadah* that was published in Hebrew a few years ago, there is a chart that draws the correspondence between the 22 stages of the *Seder* to the 22 letters, which once again corresponds to the entire order of creation (*Seder Hishtalshelut*) of the world.

The first thing we should have in mind then is that on the *Seder* night, the entire universe is being created anew. Just like in the month of Nissan, the month of spring, when nature is renewed and recreated. Likewise, when we go through the stages of the *Seder*, all the worlds are being created anew, one after another in their proper order. This is an introduction to what we would like to do this evening.

Revisiting the four sons

Right at its beginning, the Haggadah brings down the sages' teaching that the Torah speaks of four different sons, four different archetypal Jews of the next generation, that will question the meaning of Passover. Each son has a different way to address his questions. The individual leading the *Seder* is the "father" that is obligated to reply to

each son, personally, while being sensitive to his level of understanding, his soul, and his spiritual place. The order of the four sons in the Haggadah is first, the wise son, who is also a righteous son. The second is the very opposite, and he is called the wicked son. The third is the simple or earnest son. The fourth is the one who does not have the ability or the initiative to ask questions himself.

To ask of course means to ask an intellectual question; like, when I ask my father or my teacher to explain something to me. But, in Chassidic teachings¹ it is mentioned that “to ask” also means to ask for something, like asking for a gift. A young child is always asking his parents for things. Because he feels a need. But, there is someone who is so hard of heart that he does not know how to ask for anything. He cannot ask intellectual questions, but he also does not know how to express his emotional needs. So if there is such a son, “you must open for him” (וְיִפְתָּח לְךָ),² which means that you have to help him open his heart, so that he will know how to ask for those things that pertain particularly to his soul.

The four worlds

The Arizal explains³ that these four sons correspond to the four worlds, but the order in which the sons are listed in the Haggadah does not reflect the order in which they correspond to the four worlds. This is our first clue for understanding the more general issue of the order of creation that is found in the Haggadah, which we talked about in our introduction. Because the four worlds that Kabbalah speaks of are just a part of the more general order of creation, the full gamut of the 22 stages of *Seder Hahishtalshelut*.⁴

The highest world is the world of Divine consciousness exclusively—the world of Emanation that is one with God. This is usually described as a state of “nothingness,” a state in which there is nothing but God. The next three worlds have self-consciousness, meaning that there is something else besides God, some creation, namely “me.” This is the ego, the *chametz* that we need to consume and burn before we enter our holiday of liberation, Pesach.

¹. *Be'erat miriam* (Riminov) 1-2. *Ma'amar yechezkel* (Kuzhmir) on Pesach. *She'erit yisrael* (Wilodnik) *likuteem lepesach*.

². The phrase, “You must open for him” is stated using mixed gender pronoun and verb. The “you” pronoun is in its feminine Hebrew form (תָּא) and the verb “open” (תִּפְתָּח) is in the masculine form. This suggests that in order to hear an unasked, silent question, one needs to adopt a feminine, or motherly stance (the mother figure that is included within the father figure, who is commanded to tell the son about the Exodus from Egypt). But, once this has been achieved, it is necessary to adopt the masculine, influencer, and fatherly stance in order to actually ask the question and answer it.

³. *Pri etz chaim Sha'ar chag hamatzot*, c. 7.

⁴. The full 22 stage order of creation is discussed most explicitly and in breadth in *Sha'ar hayichud* from Rabbi Dov Ber, the Mittler Rebbe and in the writings of Rebbe Hillel of Paritch, his disciple, in his article, *Hirkaota enosh lerosheinu*, based on the section of the *Zohar* (3:152b) that discusses the *mitzvot* of Pesach.

The highest of these three worlds is the world of Creation. In it, that which is created, the “I,” feels that it has just been created, *ex nihilo*, something from nothing. The being, the “I” that was just created is like some formless matter (*hyle*, called *heeyulee*, by the sages) that needs to receive a form.

The next world is Formation, where there is already matter with form, but the forms that are in this world are general forms—they do not allow for particular, individual beings.

Finally, the lowest world is Action, which implies that there are individuals and they possess the most particular feeling of self-consciousness, so much so that the “I” feels severed from its source. In Formation the forms still feel their source in Divinity. But, in the world of Action, everyone feels severed from the Divine source and one needs to make a tremendous spiritual effort in order to reconnect to one’s source.

To summarize:

Emanation	nothingness (אין)
Creation	being (יש)
Formation	general (לכל)
Action	particular (פרט)

The sons and the four worlds

Each of the Four Sons in the Haggadah represents one of these four worlds. Clearly, the highest world, the world which is still in a state of Divinity and does not possess overt self-consciousness, corresponds to the wise son, the first and highest son. Interestingly, the verse that is associated with the righteous wise son is “What are the decrees, laws, and rules that *Havayah* our God has enjoined upon you?”⁵ Though the wise son includes himself with the rest of the Jewish people when he describes God as “our God,” it is somewhat acrimonious to hear him say that the laws of Pesach were “enjoined upon you,” thus seemingly isolating himself as if he does not have a part in these laws. But, when we recall that he represents the world of Emanation where there is no self-consciousness, no sense of separate self, we can reinterpret these words as meaning that though *vis-à-vis* Godliness, he feels part of the people, when it comes to being commanded to act and perform the *mitzvot* in the three lower worlds, he feels that they are distant and foreign to him.

In the order chosen by the Haggadah, the wicked son, who is the second, comes next and he is obviously the lowest world, the world of action, where the “I” severed from the Divine source. His verse is, “What is this service for you?”⁶ By saying “you,” he has severed himself from the people of Israel and feels completely foreign. This represents the disconnect between the world of Action and the three worlds above it.

⁵. Deuteronomy 6:20.

⁶. Exodus 12:26.

Why is the wicked son enumerated second? The explanation offered in Chassidut is that you put him next to the wise son when you organize the *Seder* table so that he will be hopefully influenced by the wise son and do *teshuvah*. Even though his real place is in the lowest world of action.

The simple, or earnest son represents the world of Creation, simple formless matter before it takes on form. This is in a sense the very definition of being earnest and sincere. Indeed, the question he asks is “What is this?”⁷ (מה זאת), whose numerical value is exactly “one earnest [son]” (אחד אתם).

The son who does not know how to ask, whether emotionally or intellectually as we said, he is the world of formation. This is the Arizal’s order and explanation.

Always called sons

The first thing we observe that they are all called “sons.” They are all sons of our Father in Heaven, and the father of the *Seder*, the individual who is now in charge of the *Seder*. In addition to the four sons, there is a father figure here and as we said a moment ago, he sits each of the sons down in his proper place.

There is a famous dispute in the Talmud regarding whether Jewish souls are always called “sons” of God, or whether this is conditional on their performing God’s will. Rabbi Meir says, no matter what, they are called “sons,” regardless of whether they are good or bad, righteous or wicked. This is how we rule—in all cases. One of the most beautiful allusions to this being the ruling can be found in the Haggadah, where the wicked son is called a son, he is counted among the four sons that the Torah refers to.

To elaborate a bit more on this point. The way the Haggadah introduces the four sons is with the phrase, “One is a wise son, one is wicked, one is earnest (simple), and one does not know how to ask” (אחד חכם אחד רשע אחד תם ואחד שאינו יודע לשאל). Each of the sons is described as “one,” an allusion to his enduring connection with the true “One,” i.e., with God, even if he is not conscious of it. Indeed, 4 times “one” (אחד), or 13, equals “son” (בן), or 52. All four sons together make up the one son of Israel, of what in Kabbalah is called the figure of “Israel the elder” (ישׂראל סבא).

Primordial Man as the father of the four worlds

If these four sons correspond to the four worlds of creation, who is the father? If we are referring to God in Heaven, then He is the Father Himself. But, in the *Seder*, part of the mitzvah, the commandment is to tell the story of the Exodus from Egypt. The Alter Rebbe, in his Code of Law, he lists 8 commandments, 5 of which are prohibitive and 3 of which are prescriptive and they are: 1) to burn the *chametz* before Pesach, 2) to eat *matzah* on the first night, and 3) to tell your son the story of the Exodus from Egypt (using the Haggadah). This is the *mitzvah* that every father is commanded to perform on the *Seder* night. Who then is the father in this context of the order of creation, *Seder hahishtalshelut*?

⁷. Exodus 13:14.

We are taught in Kabbalah that above the four worlds, there is another state of created reality. Created reality means that it is after the initial contraction of God's infinite light (or revelation). It is not in a state of pure infinity, and is called Primordial Man (אֲדָמָה קְדָמָה). From Primordial Man, the world of emanation is emanated. Since "emanated" means that it was emanated from something, I might have thought that the world of Emanation is emanated directly from God's infinite light. But the emanator is referred to in Kabbalistic terminology as Primordial Man. Primordial Man is like the ultimate image and likeness in which God created man; it is above the four worlds and is their source. But, it is not only above. The Arizal describes that it is enfolded within all the four worlds, meaning that Primordial Man extends itself all the way down to the end of the world of Action (which we said corresponds to the wicked son)—so Primordial Man is both above and within all of his four sons.

So now we have 5 different levels: the father of the *Seder*, Primordial Man, the wise son (Emanation), the simple son (Creation), the son who does not know how to ask yet (Formation), and the wicked son who feels separate (Action), as it says in the Haggadah that he takes himself out of belonging to the people of Israel as a whole. All sons are connected to become one son and they are all connected to the father, to Primordial Man who is commanded to learn with each of them. Primordial Man is of course *before* the creation of Adam, the first man. Adam was created in this image of Primordial Man.

Abraham as the four sons' father

Now we'll turn to a beautiful explanation that appears in *Likutei Moharan*.⁸ The father here is Abraham, the first father of the Jewish people, who is actually the father of all of humanity. Initially, Abraham's name was Avram and then he was the father of only the nation of Aram. But, after God added the letter *hei* (ה) to his name, he became, "the father of myriad nations"⁹ (אָב הַמְּיוֹן גוֹיִם).

Before Abraham's offspring became a people in the third generation—Abraham's grandson was Jacob who had 12 tribes and 70 offspring, the formal beginning of the nation of Israel that went down to Egypt—Abraham had four male offspring, i.e., four sons. He had Isaac from Sarah, Ishmael from Hagar, and then Isaac had twins, Jacob and Esau, who are also considered Abraham's sons following the sages' declaration that grandchildren are like sons.¹⁰ They are all sons of Abraham. These four sons correspond to the four sons of the Haggadah very clearly. Moreover, we can find a further connection between Abraham and the Haggadah's Four Sons. Abraham's hotel that he built in Be'er Sheva is described as a tree by the name of Eshel (אֶשֶׁל) in the Torah.¹¹ The letters of this tree's name permute to spell the word "ask" (שָׁאֵל) prompting the sages to say that Abraham would encourage his visitors to ask for whatever they

⁸. *Likutei Moharan* 1:30 c. 6

⁹. Genesis 17:5.

¹⁰ *Yevamot* 62b.

¹¹. Genesis 21:33.

wanted.¹² The four openings of Abraham's tent, open in each of the four directions, are also related to "opening" the mind and heart of the son who does not know how to ask.

Corresponding Abraham's four male progeny to the Haggadah's Four Sons is straightforward, as explained by Rebbe Nachman. About Jacob it says that he is a simple man (איש תם), which means sincere, or earnest. He doesn't seek things that are above and beyond his abilities. He walks with and serves God earnestly. He dwells in tents, which means that he is constantly engaged in learning Torah. So clearly he corresponds to the simple son.

Esau is the wicked son. Esau is many times described as being wicked. In fact, the name Esau stems from the word meaning action, another allusion to the world of Action, where we find the wicked son according the Arizal. These two are very clear.

The wise son is Isaac. About him the verse says, "A wise son makes his father happy"¹³—he is a source of joy to his father because of his wisdom. Isaac literally means, "will laugh." Since the wise son corresponds to the world of Emanation, Isaac too lives his entire life at the level of Emanation, without self-consciousness. For this reason, he is considered the only of the patriarchs whom God connects His Name to, even during his lifetime.¹⁴

The fourth son, the one who does not know how to ask, is thus Ishmael. This is a beautiful connection. What does Ishmael not know how to ask for? He does not know how to ask for forgiveness. He wants his father (Abraham) to love him, but he consciously has no idea what he did wrong in the first place. It should be noted in passing that this notion of an individual who wants forgiveness, but does not know what they did wrong, is crucial for understanding the predicament of those souls that return to God and become *ba'alei teshuvah*—returnees to observance. They want to come closer to God, but they do not know what to ask for, because they do not know what they did wrong. In such a case, you have to show them how to come close to God. First teach them what they did wrong and in what way their way of thinking was incorrect; they need to change not only their actions, but their outlooks as well.

The fourth revolution: Rectifying Christianity and Islam

The most amazing thing about the correspondence made by Rebbe Nachman is that the idea that "regardless, they are called sons" now refers to Ishmael and Esau. This is quite the messianic teaching. It is related to what we refer to as the fourth revolution—teaching Torah to all the nations of the world. It is mentioned in Kabbalah and Chassidic works that there are 70 nations in the world, 35 of them are under Ishmael and 35 are under Esau—who are representative of all of the 70 nations.¹⁵ Maimonides

¹². *Bereisheet rabbah* 54:6.

¹³. Proverbs 10:1 and 15:20.

¹⁴. See *Rashi* to Genesis 28:13.

¹⁵ *Sefer Haplee'ah s.v. Ure'eh vehaven sh'esav ne'echaz* and mentioned in many books.

writes what is in itself quite clear, that Ishma'el represents Islam and Esau represents Christianity.¹⁶

What are the spiritual differences in between the present spiritual state of Islam and Christianity? According to Maimonides, Islam is not true monotheism. It is not in state where it has refined its faith to be in *Havayah*, the God of Israel; yet, it is not idolatry, which is forbidden even for non-Jews. But, according to Maimonides, Christianity is akin with idolatry.

This difference was, according to some opinions, the basis for the fact that Maimonides lived in Egypt in spite of the fact that writes in his Code of Law that it is absolutely forbidden for a Jew to live there. Initially, Maimonides came to live in the land of Israel. However, at the time, the land of Israel was under the rule of the Crusaders. He preferred to live in Egypt under the rule of Islam and not in the land of Israel, because of the Christian hold on the land. There was a period of time that living under the rule of Muslims was better for the Jews, even materially. But, here the question was spiritual: which of the two belief systems, Islam or Christianity was less in error, less idolatrous. Our discussion regarding Maimonides' ruling and actions provides an example for Rebbe Nachman of Breslov's identification of Ishmael and Islam with the son who does not know how to ask and the world of Formation, placing them in a higher world than Christianity, which he identifies with the world of Action.

The Hebrew word for Formation (יצירה) alludes to the battle between the two inclinations (יצרים). So there is a sense of goodness and the right thing to do at this level. However, in the world of Action, which is worse off in this sense, there is total disconnect from the Creator, where the feeling is that there are a multiplicity of forces governing reality. About the world of Action it says, "even I have made it,"¹⁷ where the Hebrew word for "even" (אף) also means "anger," alluding to God's anger at the idolatry that is common at this level of consciousness. In the world of Formation there is a state in which the mind enters the notion that only two powers control and have providence over reality. For a Jew this is forbidden¹⁸ (and is known as "sharing," or שותף) but, according to some opinions, for a non-Jew, it is permissible. Thus, even though Islam is not ideal, it is relatively better than Christianity.¹⁹

¹⁶. *Shut harambam* 448.

¹⁷. Isaiah 43:7.

¹⁸. See *Chagigah* 15a which describes how Elisha ben Avuyah (also known as Acher) erred when he saw the angel Metat(ron) and concluded that there were two sources of providence. The angel Metat is found in the world of Formation.

¹⁹. Nonetheless, Maimonides himself ruled (*Teshuvot harambam* 149) that it is permissible to teach Torah to Christians because they believe that the Torah is from Heaven, i.e., from God. If they were taught the correct way to interpret Torah and understand it, they would return to the path of righteousness. On the other hand, he rules that it is forbidden to teach Torah to a Muslim who does not believe the Torah is from Heaven. According to Rebbe Nachman's identification of the wicked son with Esau and Christianity, Esau has questions on the Bible and can be engaged in conversation on these questions. However, Ishmael and Islam who are identified as the son who does not know how to ask would simply ignore the Bible and could

This is truly an incredible teaching through which Rebbe Nachman aims at addressing and including the entire world in the *Seder* night. We may say that Rebbe Nachman here is echoing Isaiah's prophecy about the Days of Mashiach when,

In that day, there shall be a highway from Egypt to Assyria. The Assyrians shall join with the Egyptians and Egyptians with the Assyrians, and then the Egyptians together with the Assyrians shall serve [God]. In that day, Israel shall be a third partner with Egypt and Assyria as a blessing on earth; for the God of Hosts will bless them, saying, "Blessed be My people Egypt, My handiwork Assyria, and My very own Israel."²⁰

The seven archetypal souls with Ishmael and Esau

There are 7 all inclusive souls of Israel. These are the 7 guests we invite on *Sukkot*: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses and Aaron (who took us out of Egypt), Joseph the righteous, and king David. They are also known as the Seven Shepherds of Israel. What happens when we add the two all-inclusive souls that represents the 70 nations of the world? Abraham, as we mentioned, is everyone's father.

The value of "Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Aaron, Joseph, David" (אברהם יצחק יעקב משה) (אהרן יוסף דוד) with "Ishmael, Esau" (ישמעאל עשו) is 2236 which is twice 1118, the value of the Shema, "Hear O' Israel, Havayah is our God, Havayah is one" (שמע ישראל יהוה אחד יהוה אחד). 2236 is also the exact product of *Havayah* (יהוה), 26—the Four-letter Name of God that is special to the Jewish people—and the Name *Elokim* (אלהים), 86, which is how God is revealed to all reality. This is a beautiful allusion to the messianic vision whereby all people will come to realize that God is one. Indeed, this is exactly how Rashi explains the verse that is the Shema: God who is one for us, the people of Israel, now, will be one for all people in the future—"His Name will be one and He will be one."²¹

Abraham as Primordial man

As we mentioned earlier, since the Four Sons correspond to the Four worlds, Abraham who is their father, corresponds to Primordial man. Abraham is thus the father of the *Seder*. Indeed, his name, Abraham (אברהם), literally means "father of [myriad nations]." Of the three patriarchs, Abraham is the only one that has the word "father," or "patriarch" in his name—the first two letters in his name. Isaac and Jacob do not.

What about the final 3 letters (רהם)? Do they relate to our meditation on the father and the four sons? The value of the final two letters, *hei* and *mem* (הם) equals Adam, or "man" (אדם). The middle letter, *reish* (ר) exactly equals "primordial" (קדמון). So the final three letters of Abraham's name equal "Primordial man" (אדם קדמון). As Primordial man,

not be budged from their indifference without some preliminary engagement on the part of the father.

²⁰. Isaiah 19:23-25.

²¹. Zachariah 14:9.

Abraham is the father that reaches out to the entire world. He reaches out to Ishmael—an individual who does not feel or know that he did anything wrong, nor is he compelled to ask for forgiveness.

Esau is a wicked soul, who feels separate, but in the end, he himself will also return, because from the womb he was together with Jacob and so in the end he will return. When they were born, Jacob held on to his heel²² in order to “bring him back.” That is the work of Mashiach.²³

²². Genesis 25:26.

²³. See our Hebrew volume, *Chasdei david hane'emanem* part 2 that Mashiach is also the secret of Primordial man.