



Where are you going this Pesach?

By Harav Yitzchak Reuven Rubin

It happens to all of us: the yearly MOT that decides if your car is roadworthy or not. Actually I am surprised they don't give drivers a MOT. I guess there would be too many failures if they did. Anyway, the time had come, the appointment made and off I went to the local garage, confident that this would just be a formality. After much scrutiny under the bonnet, the psak was delivered: the car failed! The back brakes needed changing and I had fourteen days to sort it out. I was truly crestfallen. My car, my link to the wider world, was not worthy of a pass mark, Sheer chutzpah. Of course, this was all a blessing; it wouldn't be very clever if the said brakes chose to stop working whilst i was driving behind a large lorry. Obviously, this event awakened this writer's interest. One of my close friends sent me a message "I am thinking you are already writing a column that begins: unless you have an ability to stop and pause in this mad world you are not fit to function on the road of life." Brilliant! I wish I had said that! Truthfully, though, he is right. If we can't control ourselves we are just not roadworthy.

"Pesach is the source of emunah. If we sleep walk through it we have lost its true lessons"

Pesach is about leaving behind the Golus, whatever that Golus may be. The tzaddikim of Ger ztl explain that the goal of the Seder is to teach us emunah, and a primary aspect of this is the belief that everything that happens is for a reason. Rav Melech Biederman explains that with this idea in mind, we can explain why Chad Gadya is sung at the end of the Seder. The final phase of an event is often the climax, just as Neilah is the climax of Yom Kippur. What's so special about this seemingly childish rhyme? It reinforces the theme that nothing happens without a reason. *A fire consumed a stick, which stick had earlier hit a dog.* There is nothing in the entire chain of events that doesn't have a reason. Anything taken out of context could seem random, but when presented with the full picture it all makes sense. Hashem has created things in His Wisdom and nothing is without a rationale.

We are often dumbstruck when faced with situations that just dont make any apparent sense. There are times when wonderful caring Yieden are stricken with terrible situations. I am often called upon to bring answers to the question why, but after all these years I have realized that without emunah there are no

answers. With emunah, however, there are no real questions. Emunah is about accepting that we don't always have the answers, but Hashem is a loving Father who creates things for our ultimate good.

Rambling through life without being connected to this aspect of our belief is truly dangerous. Emunah is the marker that stops us from crashing into the abyss of despondency. Life throws so much at us, but with emunah we can absorb the pain and seek ways forward. Without it we are left in agony, feeling the searing pain without the balm of faith. Pesach is the source of emunah. If we sleep walk through it we have lost its true lessons.

Alexanderer Chassidim used to relate a story from the Baal Shem Tov. It seems the Tzaddik was once told from Shomayim that in such and such a village lives a Yied whose Seder was extolled in the heavens and brought great light to the world. The Baal Shem sought to find this jewel of a Yied and perhaps share his Seder night and learn what he did that made such an impact on high. After some searching the Rebbe found out where this Yied lived and arranged that on Erev Pesach he would be at the fellow's door. Came the day and the Baal Shem Tov put his plan into action. He found the hovel where this gentleman lived and knocked on the door. A decidedly poor looking soul answered and hearing that this stranger sought to share in his Seder he was overjoyed. He took the Baal Shem Tov for an itinerant peddler who sought somewhere to be for Pesach. Night fell and the Yied put on his threadbare kittel and started his Seder. The Baal Shem Tov was astounded; nothing he heard or saw was especially remarkable. He was left wondering what it was that set this sweet poor man's Seder apart from the many thousands that were being held throughout the world.

Just then they reached the passage "*Tam, mah hu omer?*" "What does the simple son say?", and with a great cry the man broke down and kept repeating these words... *Tam, mah hu omer*...again and again with tears streaming down his weatherworn face. After some time, the fellow gathered himself together and continued his Seder without further disruptions. Afterwards the Yied fell into a conversation with his guest. The Baal Shem Tov couldn't hold back and asked him what it was about that one passage that caused him to cry with such intensity. The Yied explained simply that he learned that the word "*tam*" can mean "there". "When I reach these words I stop and think: where am I? I am at the same place as I was last Pesach! Nothing has changed. I haven't really grown. Then I think: what will I say when I arrive "there" (at my final destination after 120 years) at the Beis Din Shel Maalah? I will be ashamed to have to admit that I didn't take the opportunity to become stronger in my emunah. I just remained firmly rooted to where I was".

All lives are complicated. We can opt to stay put, but we can also choose to move ahead. Life is an eternal gift. It is a shame when our brakes are unsafe, yet we remain frozen on the spot. My car's brakes can be repaired, but it is worth stopping a moment to ask: *Tam*, where am I going?



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