



The Fifth Cup... Ponder It!

The four expressions of redemption reflected in the Rabbinic *mitzvah* of *arba kossot* at the *Seder* are to a degree incomplete. The fifth cup, the *kos shel Eliyahu*, reminds us that our redemption is only four-fifths achieved. We are left to ponder the fifth cup, not yet able to drink of its sweetness.

The Sforno explains the four expressions of redemption as referring to the following stages: *וְהוֹצֵאתִי* – the lessening of the bondage from the onset of the plagues; *וְהִצַּלְתִּי* – the redemption from being pursued slaves that culminates at the Red Sea; *וְגִאֲלֵתִי* – true redemption and freedom; *וְלִקְחֹתִי* – the consummation of our freedom with the receiving of the Torah at Sinai. After these four events were revealed to *Klal Yisrael*, a condition was added: *וְיָדַעְתֶּם כִּי אֲנִי ה'* – “Know that I am Hashem.” Then the Torah continues, *וְהִבֵּאתִי אֲתֶכֶם אֶל הָאָרֶץ* – “I will bring you to the Land.” When you contemplate all of this, you will be worthy to be brought into Israel.

Tragically, the Torah informs us that *Bnei Yisrael* did not listen to Moshe and they did not contemplate his words. Due to impatience of spirit and hard work, they neglected to think deeply about what had been revealed to them, and therefore, they failed to reach the levels of faith and trust in G-d that were necessary to make them worthy of entering Israel.

Let us not pass over the Sforno's comments without some deep reflection. *Chazal* tell us that had Moshe Rabbeinu triumphantly led that generation into Israel directly, without spending 40 years in the desert, the Land would have been ours in perpetuity, without the *galut*. All was lost because they failed to take the time and effort to think, reflect and ponder.

One can question the reason why G-d did not immediately drown the Egyptians in the Nile on the same day as the Exodus. Instead, He waited seven days, requiring the Egyptians to pursue *Bnei Yisrael* and eventually be drowned in the sea.

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One reason given is that when one gets used to bitterness and persecution, it becomes a way of life, and one doesn't appreciate how negative the situation really is. Only after experiencing freedom and being relieved of oppression can one then reflect on and ponder the previous situation and realize how oppressive it really was. Only then can one gain greater appreciation of one's freedom from that oppression.

When *Bnei Yisrael* left *Mitzrayim*, they did not really appreciate their newly-gained freedom, for they had no time to ponder and reflect on it. Therefore, G-d sent them on a roundabout route, for the slightest excuse could have caused them to give up this unappreciated freedom and return to *Mitzrayim*.

It took seven days of reflection, coupled with the danger of *Mitzrayim* pursuing them and the threat of losing that freedom, to instill within them a true appreciation of the impact of *Yetziat Mitzrayim*. Therefore, it was only after the *matzah*, the symbol of freedom, that they were able to truly appreciate the bitterness represented by the *maror* they had previously experienced.

The turning point in Rabbi Akiva's life came when he reflected deeply on water eroding a stone. He concluded that if soft water can erode hard stone, the impermeable Torah could reshape and mold his supple heart. Millions have witnessed erosion, yet only one Rabbi Akiva has appeared. All for lack of contemplation.

We live in a world in which we are constantly exhorted to simplify our lives, to do things quicker, without bother or effort. As Torah Jews, we must realize this is not the Torah way. We are enjoined to reflect and contemplate, and to fully and deeply realize what G-d wants from us. What should our goals be? What are our standards and values? For those of us fortunate enough to live in Israel – and most certainly for those who are not so fortunate – we must appreciate its *kedusha* and the insights its holy atmosphere affords us to ponder the wisdom of G-d's world. Let us make ourselves aware of the real implications and benefits of *geula*, and the type of lifestyle we must develop to merit it.

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