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- Ethan and Cheryl Spiegler, in memory of Cheryl's mother, Doreen Mirvis, whose *yahrtzeit* is the 17<sup>th</sup> of Nisan.

The first *halacha* regarding Pesach in Shulchan Aruch is *Maos Chittim* (donating money so that people in need can properly observe Pesach). The message is very clear: as you begin your preparations for Pesach, immediately start thinking about the needs of others.

שולחן ערוך אורח חיים הלכות פסח סימן תכט סעיף א

<א> ('א) ('א) {א א} (א <א א [א א] \* (א) שואלין א <ב בהלכות א' { פסח א' [ג קודם לפסח ב' { ד <ב [ב { (ב) שלשים יום. הגה: (ג) ומנהג לקנות (ד) חטים לחלקן לעניים לצורך פסח. וכל מי שדר בעיר ב ג' { ה <ג [ג] { ג } [ג] \* (ה) י"ב חודש צריך ד' [ ד' { ד' (ו) ליתן לזה (א"ז).

Thirty days before Pesach—we are already supposed to be thinking about others...

And every year, at our Pesach Seder, we issue what, at first glance, seems to be an invitation...

כל דכפין ייתי וייכול Let the needy join us in eating the bread of affliction.

But this statement is not meant as a practical invitation to guests. Rather, the statement— כל דכפין ייתי ויכול, “let the needy join us in eating the bread of affliction,” serves to introduce the Pesach seder. **It sets the tone for what the night of Pesach is all about...what freedom is all about...what the Jewish people are all about.**

**Rav Soloveitchik** taught (*The Seder Night: An Exalted Evening*, p. 27)

*“(Ha lachma anya) [Kol dichfin...let the needy join us in eating the bread of affliction] is the renewal of a pledge of solidarity among the Jewish people—solidarity between individual and individual, and between the individual and the Jewish community as a whole. It is a proclamation that we are one people, and we are ready to help each other. Pesach night is a time of sharing; without manifesting and demonstrating the sense of solidarity, responsibility, unity and readiness to share and to participate, the whole seder becomes meaningless.”*

He develops this idea in ***Festival of Freedom***, p. 22 (“The Seder and the Chesed Community”) *The meal, as the medium through which the individual, breaking out of his encasement, finds the “thou” and begins to address himself to him, was introduced by God in Egypt on the night of the fifteenth of Nissan prior to the miraculous exodus. The ceremonial Passover meal, centered around the paschal lamb, aims at the emergence of the new chesed community, for chesed is the characteristic mark of the free man. The bondman is not spiritually capable of joining the chesed community, because he is too much concerned with himself, too insecure, too fearful as regards the morrow, too humiliated to think of someone else, too frightened and too meek.. .only free and proud people think of others and share with others...God did not need the paschal lamb; He had no interest in the sacrifice. He simply wanted the people—slaves who*

*had just come out of the house of bondage--to emerge from their isolation and insane self-centeredness into the chesed community, where the little that man has is too much for himself, where whatever he possesses transcends his ability to enjoy...*

What is the deeper meaning behind inviting others to share our meal, an invitation that sets the tone for celebrating our freedom on this significant night of Pesach?

That one gesture—the willingness to share one's bread—no matter how dry or small or barely edible--symbolizes freedom...It symbolizes life... One who is willing to share his food shows that he is capable of chesed, the trait from which Judaism is born. And that is why we begin the seder by stressing the importance of inviting others to join us.

**Rav Avraham Yitzchak haKohen Kook** in *Maameri Reiya*, p. 157, writes:

*The difference between a slave and a free man is not only the difference of status in that one is indentured and one is not. We can find an educated slave whose spirit is free and the reverse, a free man whose spirit is that of a slave. This freedom is the lofty spirit of the person, and so too the entire nation is raised up by it to be faithful to its internal freedom, to its spiritual character of being in the image of God within it.*

And in his Haggada, **Rav Kook** writes:

כל דכפין ייתי וייכול (עולת ראי"ה הגדה)  
וקו היסודי המבדיל בין ישראל לעמים הוא אור החדש, שזהו אורו הראשון של אברהם אבינו ע"ה שממנו מופיעים קרני אורה רבים לפרטיהם, ההולכים... ע"כ ההרגשה הפנימית הראשונה תיכף כשיוסר הכח המכריח שמונע את החופש ואת הסגולה העצמית לצאת לאור, הוא החפץ להסיר כל צער וכל מחסור, כל דכפין ייתי וייכול... זאת היא הנטייה הטבעית לישראל, שהיא פועלת מיד בהסרת כח הלחץ, כח אדונים זרים שמונע מההלך ברחבה לפי עצמיות תכונת הטוב הפנימי.

*The intrinsic nature of a Jew, the defining feature of Avraham Avinu, was **chesed**-- to look to remove pain, hunger, and other forms of suffering from our fellow men...Such acts are an expression of our identity, and Rav Kook writes that when the forces that enslave us are released, the intrinsic nature of chesed springs forth from within us...*

It is no coincidence that the founders of Judaism, Avraham Avinu and Sarah Imeinu, personified chesed.

And the first time that Hashem appeared to a human being—the first encounter between the infinite and the finite-- was an encounter highlighting chesed on many levels...

וירא אליו ה' באלוני ממרא והוא יושב פתח האהל כחום היום

Hashem appeared to Avraham to perform chesed (*bikur cholim*)...when Avraham was sitting outside looking for guests...looking for opportunities to do chesed (*hachnasas orchim*)...

When did this occur? **Chazal teach us that it was Pesach night...**

Avraham and Sarah showed us that the essence of a Jew, the intrinsic nature of a Jew, is the commitment to **think beyond ourselves**...and that is how we start our Pesach, at the Seder, a night where we focus on faith, the miraculous acts of God, and the meaning of life and spirituality...by proclaiming that we know who we are, *baalei chesed*, and that we are here to express ourselves accordingly.

The Torah records that Bnei Yisrael were *chamushim* when they went up from the land of Egypt (13:18). **Targum Yonasan ben Uziel** says the root of

*chamushim* is *chamesh*, five. Consequently, he asserts that each family went out with five “children.” What does this mean? Is it conceivable that every family had exactly five children? **Harav Yosef Zundel of Salant** (famed Talmid of Rav Chaim Volozhener and teacher of Rav Yisrael Salanter) suggests that the four-fifths of the Jews who died in Egypt were adults who had regrettably acculturated and did not want to leave. They all perished during the three days of *makas choshech*, the plague of darkness. Their children remained alive and well, but they were orphans with nowhere to go and no one to care for them. He understands Targum Yonasan to be teaching that each of the surviving families who left Egypt cared for the orphans of four other families in addition to their own. That is the meaning of five “children”—five families. The Torah lauds these virtuous Jews for their magnanimous support of the many orphans. They cared for them and took them into a wilderness, even though they did not know where the food for their own children would come from. That is the expression of a Jew; *chesed*.

We see this same, fundamental characteristic in our own days. I’d like to share with you this morning two inspiring stories, which demonstrate that *chesed* is part of our spiritual DNA.

**Rabbi Yonasan Rosenblum**, a popular columnist in *Mishpacha* magazine, who lives in Yerushalayim, recently wrote about the Jewish community’s *chesed* during this terrible time for Ukrainian Jews. He and his wife took in a family from Uman, Ukraine.

*“One of the greatest benefits from our guests has been the opportunity to observe the sheer goodness of Klal Yisrael from a ringside seat. They have been deluged with chesed from every direction. On their first full day in Eretz Yisrael, I sent out a message to the neighborhood email list describing the mother’s need for someone to examine the gash on her forehead. Not long thereafter, a medic from Ichud Hatzalah was at our door. . .*

*“That evening, they went down to the Kosel to give thanks for having made it to Eretz Yisrael, and for having ended up in a neighborhood where both husband and wife had previously studied and had many friends. While they were gone, a new neighbor came by to let me know that one of the largest Israeli shoe chains was offering free shoes to refugees that night in Har Nof.*

*“The next morning, our guests reported how everywhere they went the previous evening people came up to them to wish them the best and offer assistance. Apparently, father’s and son’s Na-Na-Nachman kippot identified them as likely recent arrivals from Uman.*

*“Meanwhile, I was inundated with responses to my posts on the neighborhood list — including davening times in the Breslov minyan, and offers of help from members of the local Breslov community and many others. Among the numbers I received was that of the woman at the local community center charged with responsibility for any incoming refugees. Since our first conversation, she has called repeatedly to discuss schools for the kids; medical treatment, despite their lack of insurance; and just to find out what they need. She sent her sons with treats for the kids and a beautiful doll before Shabbos. And just today, she showered them with diapers, food, and all sorts of basic necessities. Even then, she did not forget more presents for the kids...*

*“On Motzaei Shabbos, the little girl reported severe tooth pain. Within a short time, one of the mother’s friends had located a clinic offering free dental care, and the next morning, the little girl had her cavities filled. That night another friend called with news of a hospital in Bnei Brak offering a comprehensive prenatal exam. The representative of the hospital even offered to pay for a cab ride from Jerusalem to Bnei Brak, and the next day, there was staff on hand to entertain and feed the children during the many hours in the hospital. And the best part of the*

*daylong trip to Bnei Brak was the hospital's promise that it would handle the delivery and all associated costs without charge.*

*Finally, another friend called them to say that he had located an apartment in Beitar and was busy looking for beds and furniture. A private individual is offering rent support . . .to any refugee.*

*" . . .my spot as a bystander to a tiny sliver of the overall communal response has filled me with an overwhelming pride in being a member of Klal Yisrael."*

In the same vein, I was struck by the following article about a Jew in Poland, apparently an otherwise unremarkable man, and his chesed towards Ukrainian refugees. The headline of the CNN story was: *Jewish man shelters refugees to honor those who saved his own family from the Holocaust.*

*"Jan Gerber handed his apartment keys to the family he had just met. The Ukrainian mother wanted to pay. No, insisted Gerber, this is free. It was days after Russia invaded Ukraine and one of the countless acts of kindness being shown to those fleeing danger and reaching safety in Poland. But for Gerber, 42, it was very, very personal. 'My family survived the war because someone helped them. They were refugees. That's the reason why I'm here,' he said. 'Thanks to that time, I can help other people.'*

*"Gerber is descended from Holocaust survivors, some of the few who lived through Hitler's obliteration of Warsaw's Jewish community, which was then the largest in Europe.*

*"To not help others now is unthinkable to him, so he ...repeatedly invite[s] refugees to stay until they have somewhere more permanent. As a third family arrives, Gerber... inflate[s] a mattress ...and give the bedroom of their 400-square-foot Warsaw apartment to their new guests.*

*"'It is not a big apartment,' he told them, apologetically, though the refugees replied it was just the shelter they needed from the war. Gerber said he hoped the woman from Kyiv and her young son would finally be able to rest. 'Everything which I own and have in my life is in this apartment,,' Gerber told CNN. 'I don't know if it's faith or tradition. But I have to.'"*

So when we begin our Pesach preparations thirty days in advance, and again when we sit down to recreate our liberation from slavery in Mitzraim, we set the tone with the act most characteristic of us as a spiritual people—representing internal freedom—**by expressing our desire to do chesed:** to feed the hungry and to look out for those in need. It is not just a mitzva—it is the definition of a Jew; part of our faith and tradition.

This is a challenging time for the world at large and for the Jewish people in particular. It is a time when acts of chesed are needed more than ever. Let us remember that we all have the ability to reach out and share our lives, our financial resources, and our time with others. We can brighten someone's life with a simple call, a smile, and an offer to help. In that *zechus*, may we soon to see an end to this terrible war in Ukraine, and may we celebrate next year's Pesach Seder together in *Yerushalayim habenuya*. As we say at the end of the seder לשנה הבאה בירושלים הבנויה...amen.