

Sermon by Rabbi Eliezer Hirsch Pesach 21 “Speech, Speech!”

Chag Sameach. As we mentioned last week, this is an atypical year, when Erev Pesach falls out on Shabbat, and so there are some modifications we have to make in order to fulfill the requirement of preparing for Pesach.

I think there is a lesson to be learned from the fact that we flow directly from Shabbat into Pesach. We know that Shabbat was established as a reminder of the Exodus, which is somewhat perplexing. The Rambam in Hilchot Chametz U'Matzah 7:1 makes the analogy that just as we are commanded to remember Shabbat and make it holy, it is a mitzvah to remember and tell the story of the Exodus. He understands this analogy as a lesson from Shabbat as to **how** we should remember Yetziat Mitzrayim. On Shabbat, we **recite** kiddush. Drinking the wine is not sufficient – we must **articulate** its meaning out loud. Similarly, **articulation** is fundamental to our Pesach seder.

There are numerous references to speech in the Exodus story and in the Haggadah, which literally means *the act of telling, relating or declaring*. As the Arizal teaches, when we divide the Hebrew name for Passover, *Pesach*, into 2 words – *Peh Sach* – it means *talking mouth*. And our seder declaration seems to encapsulate the Passover theme: *Kol hamarbeh l'saper harei zeh mishubach - the more we speak at the seder, the more praiseworthy we are!* During the seder, speech facilitates our self-expression, a vital element of the freedom we celebrate on Passover. It's not enough to know the facts of the story; we must **articulate** them. As I explain in my book, *Bringing Order to the Seder*, in order to attain *da'at*, the true knowledge that emerges from experience, we cannot be a spectator, nor can we simply feel as if we are reciting ancient history on Pesach. The seder is telling us that to attain freedom, we must be engaged, and a critical element of engagement is active self-expression. In fact, it is so important to speak and ask questions at the seder, that you must do so even if you're alone that night, with no one to talk to but yourself.

One of the ways the Torah expresses the mitzvah we fulfill by holding our seder is **v'higadita l'vincha**, which means to **relate** to our children, in other words, to form a relationship with people, with events, with the story we tell, and of course, with the next generation. Pesach is a reminder that we can only retain the freedom we attained in Egypt if we reject passivity and stay actively engaged in our lives. Chag sameach.