

Parsha Ponders

Pesach #2 | March 25, 2021 | 11 Nissan 5781

Who knows one?¹

אחד, מי יודע? אחד, אני יודע! אחד אלקינו שבשמים ובארץ

Who knows one? I know one! One is our G-d in the Heaven and the Earth²

After an uplifting *seder*, we're on an all-time high. We jubilantly sing about how we performed all the *mitzvos* of the evening³. We're all inspired to bring the Pesach offering next year in Jerusalem⁴, and pray that the Temple be rebuilt⁵. However, one song seems to be the odd one out. A favorite of many children, "Who knows one?", is a classic Pesach song. However, if we think about it, what does it have to do with Pesach? It's seemingly random things in Judaism that are associated with numbers, ranging from one to thirteen. What's it doing at the end of the *Seder*?

One explanation⁶ can be gleaned from a parable. When someone is feeling proud of their heritage and ancestry, they show off emblems and artifacts from their family's past. They show them this medallion, that ancient manuscript, these articles of clothing. They get more excited as they number off the things they've collected. The same is true for *Seder* night. We've just witnessed all the miracles of the Exodus⁷. We have a special relationship with the Creator of the World. We're so excited and on such a high, we just have to "show off" all the things we have to be proud of and to connect to.

One is for the One G-d, our Father in Heaven. We have such a special relationship with Him! Two is for the two stone tablets of the Ten Commandments, which represent the covenant with Hashem. Three is for the Forefathers. Four is for the Foremothers. What tremendous ancestry! Five is for the Five Books of Moshe. Six is for the orders of the *Mishnah*. Seven is for the days of Creation. Eight is for the days until a baby boy receives *Bris Milah*. Nine is the months of pregnancy. Hmm....this one doesn't seem to fit. What's there to be proud of or excited about with nine months of pregnancy? The others fit the parable nicely⁸, but not this one...⁹

Chazal reveal¹⁰ to us a fascinating insight into what goes on inside the mother's womb. An angel teaches the fetus the entire Torah for nine months. Upon birth, the Angel taps it on the mouth¹¹, causing the

¹ Based on a *schmooze* heard in 5781 from Rav Binyomin Finkel *shlita*, the current *mashgiach* of Yeshivas Mir

² Haggadah shel Pesach

³ Known as *Chasal Siddur Pesach*

⁴ Known as *Uvchen Amartem Zevach Pesach*

⁵ Known as *Adir Hu*

⁶ Rav Binyomin Finkel said he saw this written in the name of the Ba'al HaTanya, Rav Shneyer Zalman of Liadi. I wasn't able to track down the source. What's interesting is I found that Lubavitch *chassidim* don't have the custom to recite this song on *Seder* night

⁷ חייב אדם לראות את עצמו כאילו הוא יצא ממצרים (Pesachim 10:5)

⁸ Rav Binyomin Finkel admitted 11 is for the stars in Yosef's dream also doesn't seem to match. However, he didn't elaborate on it

⁹ Rav Binyomin Finkel said that if he merits (to the resurrection of the dead) he would try to suggest this explanation to the Ba'al HaTanya. Maybe the latter would accept it

¹⁰ Niddah 30b

¹¹ The *gemarra* simply says בפיו סרטו, on his *mouth*. However, Otzar HaMidrashim | *Yetziras HaVlad* p. 243 (Eisenstein ed.) is more precise by saying מכה אותו תחת חוטמו, *under his nose*. Many understand that this is the source for the ridge between the nose and the lip, known as the philtrum. However, I heard in the name of Rav Aharon Lopiansky that this latter concept has no source in Jewish literature. Although, Rav Chaim Kanievsky *shlita*,

baby to forget all the Torah that it learned. Why would it do that? And what then was the point of teaching it the Torah in the first place? The reason is¹² because knowing all the Torah without exerting any effort is no accomplishment. We're put in this world to toil in Torah, and it is for the toil that we are rewarded, not for the knowledge accrued¹³. However, if we hadn't been taught the Torah in the first place, it wouldn't have been possible to learn it through our own efforts. Since it was something we once had, toiling in Torah will yield the desired success. It's akin to finding a lost object, which the owner once had, but was taken away from them¹⁴.

It turns out then that the nine months of pregnancy we "experienced" are something to cherish. They're the very reason we're able to learn Hashem's Torah. This realization should inspire us on *Seder* night to recommit ourselves to spending our time wisely. In fact, a person very often has two very strong excuses to be lazy and not learn¹⁵. They think that they've missed their opportunity, so there's no point in trying. They'll never amount to anything with the time they have left, so why bother. On the other hand, a person may think they have all the time in the world. Why learn today, if it can be pushed off to tomorrow? Both of these are very dangerous thoughts, as their result is the same: doing nothing.

Seder night is a chance to commit to ignoring these tempting thoughts¹⁶. After counting off "who knows one", "who knows two", upon reaching, "who knows nine", and truly contemplating its significance, how can one not take advantage of this inspiration? We have the opportunity to try to relearn everything we forgot in the womb! This is a tremendous occasion to be proud of our mission, and to accept it willingly and practically.

Good Shabbos and Chag Sameach!

quoted in Chanoch LaNa'ar Chapter 2 *Lelamed Livnosav*, seems to take it seriously, as he uses it as proof that women are also taught Torah in the womb

¹² Ma'alos HaTorah Ma'alos HaMa'aseh (p. 110), quoting his brother the Vilna Gaon

¹³ Rav Binyomin Finkel, somewhat jokingly, proved this from the fact that if knowledge gained in such a fashion was something to respect, the mother, immediately after giving birth, would have to stand up in respect for her *talmid chochom* baby. He also added that the same angel that taught you Torah in the womb will test you after living in this world to see how much you regained. I'm not sure what his source was

¹⁴ See Megillah 6b: יגעתו ומצאתו תאמין

¹⁵ Rav Binyomin Finkel quoted this from the Kotzker Rebbe, although I was unable to source its origin

¹⁶ Rav Binyomin Finkel connected this idea to the *Hashkiveynu* prayer we say in the evenings: וחסר שטן מלפנינו. ומאחרינו. I'm not sure if this was his insight or also from the Kotzker Rebbe