

## Shabbat HaGadol

# The Four Cups during the *Seder* and Our Four Mothers

By Rebbetzin Chana Bracha Siegelbaum

### ***Women at the Pesach Seder***

Taking an active part in the Pesach *Seder* is an important mitzvah for women, since the Exodus from Egypt took place "in the merit of the righteous women..." (*Babylonian Talmud, Sota 11b*). Perhaps an additional reason why we read most of the *Hagadah* before the meal, is to keep the women at the table, free from their kitchen chores for a few more hours. Women are obligated to drink the Four Cups of wine during the *Seder*, and to take an active part in all the rest of the matters that pertain to the *Seder* (*Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 472:14*).

Maharal explains that whereas Pesach Matzah and Maror are in the merit of the *Avot* (Fathers) the Four Cups correspond respectively to our four holy *Imahot* (mothers) (*Maharal Gevurat Hashem* 48).

### ***Why are the Four Cups linked to Our Four Mothers?***

Just as the grapevine cannot be grafted with any other tree, and is a modest tree in the recesses of the house, likewise the mothers were *tznuot* (chaste) (*Ibid.* 60). We open the *Seder* with the First Cup of *Kidush*. Likewise, women are the initiators who bring holiness into their homes. The fact that drinking the Four Cups of wine also continues after the meal symbolizes the long lasting effect of women's wisdom. Wine alludes to the פנימיות (inner dimensions) as it states, "When wine enters the secret emerges" (*Babylonian Talmud, Iruvin 55a*). Women's spiritual connection with inner dimensions of the Torah mirrors their physical hidden dimensions.

### ***The First Cup Corresponds to Sarah***

The First Cup corresponds to the first of the four languages of *geulah*: והוצאתי אתכם מתחת סבלת - מִצְרַיִם - "I will bring you out from under the burdens of Mitzrayim" (*Shemot* 6:6-7). This promise comprises physical liberation. When we drink the First Cup it is good to meditate and pray for removing our physical suffering such as pain, illness, anti-Semitism, terrorism etc. Sarah was the first woman who integrated the *emuna* in Hashem into the very fiber of her body. In this way she created the spiritual genetics from which the Jewish People would issue. The First Cup is the cup of *Kidush* which elevates and separates the holiday from the

mundane days of the week. Likewise, Sarah, was the first woman to become separate from all other people in the world. May we learn from Sarah to strengthen our *emuna* even if it goes against the grain of the world, and may we be able to integrate our *emuna* into our daily chores in the physical world!

### ***The Second Cup Corresponds to Rivkah***

The Second Cup corresponds to the second of the four languages of *geulah*: וְהִצַּלְתִּי אֶתְכֶם מֵעֲבָדָהּ *I will deliver you out of their bondage*. This promise includes delivery from both physical and spiritual enslavement. We may not be aware, but many of our actions derive from various unconscious scripts imprinted in our psyche from childhood wounds and traumas, which cause fears, jealousy, and anger. Although Rivkah came from a severely dysfunctional family, she was able to heal her childhood wounds by attaching herself to *kedusha*. Even at a tender young age, she was not afraid to detach herself from her family, and familiar environment, in order to follow a strange man to an un-known place. When we drink the Second Cup, it is good to meditate and pray for removing all our attachments and addictions. This cup also has the *segula* (ability) to free us from the confinement of performing the mitzvot only out of rote because we are expected to, without conviction and excitement. Rivkah was totally in touch with her *neshamah*, and all her actions were permeated with her spirit of enthusiasm. The Second Cup corresponds to the reading of the *Hagadah*. Just as the *Hagadah* begins with disgrace but concludes with praise (*Babylonian Talmud, Pesachim 116a*), so did Rivkah emanate from the thorns of her cradle, yet became an everlasting rose (*Vayikra Rabah 23:1*). May we learn from Rivkah to detach ourselves from all the negative influence of our past!

### ***The Third Cup Corresponds to Rachel***

The Third Cup corresponds to the third of the four languages of *geulah*: וְגָאַלְתִּי אֶתְכֶם בְּזְרוֹעַ נְטוּיָהּ *I will redeem you with an outstretched arm*. Hashem promised to bring our *geulah* in the *zechut* (merit) of our mother Rachel's ultimate *Ahavat Yisrael*. In her selfless mercy, she overcame her jealousy and allowed her sister to marry her beloved, in order to avoid embarrassing her (*Eicha Rabah Introduction 24*). Likewise, Israel will merit redemption, when we overcome the conflicts and jealousies among our people, and learn to truly unite. When we drink the Third Cup, it is good to meditate and pray for removing gaps

between different segments of our people through tolerance and acceptance, so that we may repair the schism between the children of Rachel and Leah. The Third Cup is for *birkat ha'mazon* (Grace after Meals). *Geulah* is to reveal Hashem's *malchut* (kingdom) within the physical world manifesting *shefa* (sustenance) to the world. This revelation can only take place when there is unity among us. Rachel's son, Yosef, was able to bring sustenance to the world because he did not keep a grudge, but forgave his brothers for what they had done to him. Moreover, Rachel was the mainstay of her home, and the blessing of *parnassa* (sustenance) in the house comes in the merit of the wife (*Babylonian Talmud, Baba Metzia 59a*), who causes shalom to reside in her home. May we learn from Rachel to go beyond ourselves for the sake of *כנסת ישראל* – gathering of the dispersed segments of Israel, and engender true *Ahavat Yisrael*!

### ***The Fourth Cup Corresponds to Leah***

The Fourth Cup corresponds to the fourth and last language of *geulah*: *אֶתְכֶם לִי לְעָם וְהָיִיתִי לָכֶם לְאֻלָּמִים* *I will take you to me for a people*. After having removed our physical, emotional and spiritual blocks by means of the three previous cups, we are now ready to actualize our relationship with Hashem and communicate directly with Him through praise and prayer. The Fourth Cup concludes the *Hallel* (prayer of praise) at the end of the *Seder*. Leah is the first person to truly thank/praise Hashem, when at the birth of her fourth son Yehuda she exclaimed, "*This time I will thank Hashem*" (*Bereishit 29:35*), (*Babylonian Talmud, Berachot 7b*). Rav Arosh explains that although others from Adam to Avraham surely thanked Hashem before Leah, no-one thanked Him with her level of conscious intensity. Leah's *chidush* (new approach) was to truly thank Hashem even for all the hardships she had encountered. With the birth of Yehuda she realized that it was necessary and worthwhile to experience all her previous suffering for the sake of giving birth to Yehuda, the father of King David and Mashiach. When we drink the Fourth Cup, it is good to meditate and pray for strengthening our relationship with Hashem, that we may experience the connection with Him during both prayer, and in everyday life. May we learn from Leah to always recognize, thank and praise Hashem for bestowing us with His continuous blessing!



Midreshet  
B'erot Bat Ayin

Holistic Torah Study for Women

(011-972-2) 995-4945

info@berotbatayin.org

www.berotbatayin.org

## ***Women, Let Your Voices be Heard***

The inherent connection between our Sarah, Rivkah, Rachel and Leah and the Four Cups of the *Seder* teaches us how each of the four steps of redemption is in the *zechut* (merit) of one of our holy Mothers. The midrash teaches us how Hashem redeemed us in the merit of both our Fathers and Mothers as it states, (*Michah* 6:1) "Arise, contend before the mountains, and let the hills hear your voice" (ותשמענה הגבעות קולך). Whereas the fathers correspond to the mountains, the hills represent the mothers Sarah, Rivkah, Rachel and Leah. We learn this from the feminine form of the verb "to hear" used in the verse (*Batei Midrashot* 2, *Midrash alfa Beita, Mesechta* 315). The *Sefer Hachinuch* states that both men and women are obligated to tell about the Exodus from Egypt on this night (Mitzvah 21). It is specifically the mother who is called to answer the son who does not know how to ask, as it states: פתח לו את - "You open [the conversation] for him" According to Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, the feminine form of "you" alludes to the women's obligation to tell the story about our Exodus from Egypt (*Otzar Meforshei Ha-Hagadah*). Therefore, women, remember during the *Seder* night that Hashem wants to hear your voice!



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