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לזכות רפואה שלמה לר' חיים יצחק בן חנה מינדל

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Haggadah Prep

As we recite Rosh Chodesh Bentching we are reminded that Pesach is around the corner. Preparations have (hopefully) begun, and destinations have (hopefully) been decided. Are we studying the Haggadah too? The Haggadah has a passage, "One may think that [*sippur yetzias Mitzrayim*] begins from Rosh Chodesh ..." until the *passuk* informs us that it is to be done when we have matzah and maror before us. Do these words make it prohibited to recite it before Leil Haseder or just make it not required?

Interestingly, the Rama cites the custom to recite the Haggadah (*O. C. 430*) on Shabbos Hagadol (from the section of *Avadim Hayinu* to *L'chapeir al kol avonoseinu*), although he does not offer a reason for this custom.

The *sefer She'aris Yaakov* provides an explanation. (Incredibly, the Fisher Family Legacy Haggadah rediscovered this obscure, forgotten Gadol and his *sefer*, which was published only once 300 years ago!)

The Mishnah (*Shabbos 11a*) rules that on Shabbos one may not read from a book by oil light, as there is a risk that the

oil will roll away, causing one to tilt the lamp to make the light brighter, thereby violating Shabbos. The Shulchan Aruch (*O. C. 275:9*) permits reading the Haggadah from a book on the night of Pesach when it falls on Shabbos. This is because even an unlearned person is somewhat familiar with the Haggadah and thus only needs to occasionally refer to the book, minimizing the risk of tilting the lamp.

The She'aris Yaakov suggests that to ensure everyone is familiar with the Haggadah, the custom was to read beforehand – on Shabbos Hagadol. Although this custom was initially meant for when Pesach falls on Shabbos, the Rabbis did not differentiate between years, making it a general practice to guarantee familiarity with the Haggadah. This approach also clarifies why the Rama specifies reciting the Haggadah in the afternoon of Shabbos Hagadol rather than at the beginning of Shabbos. At the start of Shabbos, individuals might

be unfamiliar with the Haggadah, having not reviewed it in nearly a year, and therefore would risk tilting the lamp when reading by oil light on Friday night.

This explanation is mentioned by others and sourced to R'



Yisachar Ber's *Peulas Sachir* (os 177), on the *Maaseh Rav* of the Vilna Gaon. R' Yisachar Ber (8 Adar 1779 – 16 Av 1856) was a Morah Tzedek in Vilna for close to 40 years! The *sefer She'eris Yaakov* seems to be the earliest source. There are some points that are addressed by others. See *Divrei Menachem* (3:1) and *Haggadah Birchas Nesanel* (169).

1. One is usually not alone on the night of Pesach, and the fear that one would tilt the lamp is only when one is alone. A group of people may read a book by oil lamp on Friday night even when not familiar with the text.

2. Is the one-time reading on Shabbos Haggadol enough to make one familiar with the Haggadah? Maybe we should begin reciting it earlier, perhaps from Rosh Chodesh Nisan.

3. Only a portion of the Haggadah is read on Shabbos Haggadol, how does this help one read the entire Haggadah by oil light?

4. The custom should be limited to when the night of Pesach falls on Shabbos, why is it read each year on Shabbos Haggadol? [The *sefer She'eris Yaakov* addressed this question.]

By Rabbi Dr. Eliezer Brodt

The *sefer She'eris Yaakov* (Altona, 1727) was authored by R' Yaakov ben R' Yoel. We do not know much about him, including when he was born or died. His name appears in R' Aryeh Feinstein's book on Brisk *Ir Tehilah* (p. 192) but with no additional information about him. However, we can learn some details when carefully learning his *sefer*. The *sefer* is extremely rare and was never reprinted, which might also explain why it is barely ever cited. (Yes, a reprint is on the Zera Emes' to do list.)

R' Yechezkel Katzenellenbogen (1667-1749), the Knesses Yechezkel, writes that although he refrains from giving *haskomos* to works on *drush* or works that are not halachic, he makes an exception "for the Rabbinic exalted, elderly author R' Yaakov, as he knows the author, growing up with him in the same community." R' Katzenellenbogen continues: "all his days he did not stop learning, and he is an expert in all of shas *mamash* by heart!" He adds that the reason why R' Yaakov wrote the *sefer* was because he did not have any *zera shel kayama*, and that is why it's named *She'eris Yaakov*, which means the remainder of Yaakov so there should be some kind of *zecher* for him..."

We have the personal testimony of R' Katzenellenbogen, who knew him from his birth city of Brisk, and testifies that R' Yaakov was a great *talmid chacham* who was expert in Shas. As an aside R' Katzenellenbogen, refers to R' Yaakov as old at this time (as does the publisher) and one question to Gedolim that received no answer (p. 34a) is from 1677, 50 years earlier!

In the brief introduction R' Yaakov recounts how he lived a life of extreme hardship and a lack of calmness on a weekly basis. At one point, he had a son whom he describes as being an expert in five hundred and fifty *blatt* before his bar mitzvah. Tragically, he died eight days before his bar mitzvah. He had three more sons and a daughter who was married, but after a plague, they all died leaving him childless. As a remembrance of his life, he published this *sefer*.

He writes about himself in a humble manner, describing that all he did his entire life was learn Tanach, Shas, and Poskim the entire day in his hometown of Brisk. He adds remarkably that as he got older, he would review Shas each year and Tanach and Shulchan Aruch every month.

How could someone who learned his whole life afford to publish a *sefer*? R' Yaakov writes in a cleverly written passage that he had the privilege of making the acquaintance of the very generous R' Yosef AVB"D of Helshivah, son of the famous R' Dovid Oppenheim, who supported him for a while and contributed to the publication. In addition, while in Hamburg publishing the *sefer*, the famous learned and wealthy R' Yehudah Zeligman Hacoheh provided him with a place to sleep and contributed nicely to the publication. R' Yaakov writes this was similar to how his famous father acted, referring to R' Yissachar Berman, the famous learned court Jew of that time.

The *sefer* is a collection of Torah related to Chumash, Megillos, and Shas. It does not cite many sources. He mentions (16a) something he later found in Rashbam in the recently published Chumash (the Rashbam was first published from manuscript in 1705). Going through the *sefer* we find various passages from Gedolim of his time and before, including material he heard at the *hesped* (30a) for R' Shmuel of Vienna (most likely referring to R' Shimon Wertheimer who died in 1724) and other such material. He quotes his father many times (see. p.5a, 8b, 11b, 28b, 58b, 79a, 86b) referring to him as "My father my teacher." He also cites his 10-year-old son (p. 51a), who as cited, passed away before his bar mitzvah with an impressive answer that he gave to a difficult question (*ly"H* in a future Zera Emes Weekly).

There are various interesting passages in this volume including one about the custom in his region of wearing tefillin on Chol Hamoed, but not reciting the *brachah* loudly (p. 97a) and a sharp piece against those who have the custom to say Tefillas Yom Kippur Katan, Erev Rosh Chodesh (p.70a).