

Rabbi David Ingber | Pesach Day 7 2026

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Such a beautiful teaching this morning from the family of Ishbets, the Lehner family, the Lehner family, Lud, Lamed, Yud, Yud, Nun, Resh. Family, the Lehner family is from, obviously, from Poland, from a place called, well, it's originally from Ishbets. And the, excuse me one second.

So the Hasidic lineage of Ishbets is a pretty radical lineage. I mean radical, like if you were to read some of the Torah that came out of Ishbets, you would blow your socks off. We've taught it here in the shul many times.

It was lost for many, for a number of, for decades. It was considered too heretical, in a way, until Rabbi Shlomo Carbach brought Ishbets back. The Mea Shiloh, the original Mordechai Yosef Lehner from Ishbets, was a student of, it was originally from Tamashov, only the story is that Mordechai Yosef was originally from Tamashov, a town in Poland, and he became, he was a student of the Yiddish Kaddish, the Holy Jew of Psish.

And then when the Holy Jew of Psish passed away, he became a student of his friend, Menachem Mendel Morgenstern, who was known as the Kotzker. So Mordechai Yosef Lehner was really, he was a senior student, really, of the Yiddish Kaddish, but he didn't ever want to be a rebbe. So when the Yiddish Kaddish, when Yaakov Yosef passed away, he lowered himself.

He kind of became a disciple of his own friend, who was really his contemporary, the Kotzker. And he was with the Kotzker for 13 years as this student. And then he broke away from the Kotzker in a very famous, one of the more famous stories in Hasidic history, that schism, that break between the world of Kotzk and the world of what became the world of Ishbets.

It happened on Simchas Torah, 1840. Some other time we could talk about it, but the Ishbetser was a radical. And he was known for teaching Torah that some would say might be highly deterministic.

He was a kind of determinist of sorts. He believed that everything happened according to God's will, and he didn't really believe in free will in the way that we usually think of it, the way that's classically formulated by Maimonides and others. He kind of, he turned a lot of teachings on their heads, and he interpreted the Torah in really beautiful ways.

For that reason, he got the name Mea Shiloh. The name of his book was called The Waters of Shiloh, because he was named by his rabbi. The rabbi called him deep like the waters of Shiloh, that he had depth in ways that were unseen.

He considered him to be like the deepest of all of his students. And so the line of Ishbets, that universe, when he moved from Tamashev to the town of Ishbets, and then was called the Ishbetser, Mordechai Yosef Lehner, his whole family are involved in kind of inversions of typical texts, just to give you that context. Because his son, Yaakov Lehner, who was Mimala Macomo, he became like the next in the lineage.

In his statement on, in his book, The Bais Yaakov, he has a Torah on Maror that I wanted to share with you. It's like an inversion. It's like a classic inversion.

But I want to begin, though, with something subtle, but that I think he's speaking to, which is very deeply human. And I think that he's saying that sometimes the hardest prisons to leave are the ones that feel comfortable. Comfortable prisons.

You know, a comfortable prison is a hard place to leave. It's not the obviously painful situations, but the ones that are just good enough. The just good enough ones, where something in me already knows and can acknowledge I'm not free, but I'm also not desperate enough to change.

It hasn't reached that level of desperation where you say, like, you've hit rock bottom. Like in that famous poem about when you knew you had to leave from my brain. Oh, Mary Oliver's poem, right? Wild Geese.

The time came when you knew you had to leave. So the time hasn't come when you know you have to leave. Like, you're comfortable, and it's not desperate yet.

And there are parts of our lives where we've made peace with a kind of quiet compromise, constriction. We all have Egypts that don't feel like Egypt. And that's the truth that he's trying to point out here.

You're going to hear this. It's really amazing. We all have Egypts that don't feel like Egypt.

A pattern that limits us, but also soothes us. Relationships that aren't right, but they're familiar. Spiritual numbness that feels like a stability.

We don't leave not because we can't leave, but because, like the Ishmuser is going to say, it feels better to be a slave here than a prince somewhere unknown. That's the most dangerous exile, he says. The one we don't experience as exile.

So listen to this teaching. Maror zeh sheanu ochlim al shumma. He points out in the Haggadah, it says, we point to the maror.

We say, right, Rambam Gamliel in the Haggadah says there are three things we have to say on Pesach. If we don't say them, really what he means is we don't understand in grok the depth of the symbol, then we haven't fulfilled our obligation. Lo yetzan eidei chavatenu.

So that's in the Haggadah. So the Ishmuser will quote that and says, like, when it comes to the maror, we say al shumma. Why do we eat the maror? And we quote the verse in the Bible.

Vayim maroru et chayim b'avodah kasha b'chomer u'lmenim. That they made their lives maror, vayim maroru, their lives were made bitter. So what does he say? He says in the Gemara, he says, it says in the Talmud that when the word for hard labor, perech, is pe-rach, soft mouth.

Soft mouth, that's what the Gemara says, that perech, when we should say hard labor, vayim maroru et chayim b'avodah perech, it's usually back-breaking labor. But the Talmud

mysteriously calls the word for back-breaking labor, perech, mouth, rach, soft. What does that mean? Ki iker hagalutz haya shehaya nidmeh be'enayim yeshivas metzrayim, nemakum unag betafnukei malchim.

The essence of their slavery, the essence of their exile was that it was seen to them in their eyes that living in Egypt, settling in Egypt, was a place of, I guess, I guess, middle-income comforts, like air conditioning and indoor plumbing. They had tafnukei malchim, they had royal amenities, royal amenities, royal amenities. They had the amenities of the king.

It seemed to them that it was a makum unag, it was a place that was distinct with its amenities, like royal amenities. V'zeh haya ma sheh nisgar b'mechilteh says, this is the meaning of another midrash in the Mechilteh that says, amru mitchilah lo hayah evid yachol ivroch mitzrayim kei haaretz kei gan Adonai. It says in the Mechilteh that in the beginning, the Midrash says that in the beginning, no slave could ever leave or never ran away from Egypt.

V'zeh haya noach lo liyosham evid miliyos sar b'medina acheres. It was easier to be, like an evid there, it was easier to be a slave there than to try to be a prince in some other land. V'zeh romez maror.

And this is the meaning of what maror is. This is the illusion of maror, of that bitter herb. Sheher ala ma sheh misbarach, that God showed them, akhare galusolahem, shem eheya, hergishu mirirus galusam.

It says, when God showed to the children of Israel the name I will be, eheya, they began to feel the bitterness of their exile. V'alzeh kosov arizal shech tzarch limat kol beshnayim sheyargis miriruso v'zeh hamta kosov. That you have to sweeten the maror, right, with, like, afterwards.

In other words, it has to feel, you have to be able to taste the bitterness and then to make it sweet. Right, there's something about, if you only have bitter, you don't know what's... You had to feel the bitterness by really tasting how bitter it was and then sweeten it. Like, Ari says, you can't sweeten the maror too much, it has to first taste bitter, and then, and only then, can you then come afterwards, beshnayim, afterwards, right, to sweeten it.

שעו נצמח באדם כוח תפילה This is amazing. Only in that moment is the power of prayer awakened in a person. Only when you really taste how bitter it is, can the yearning to pray to God be born in you.

You start wanting a way out. You've hit rock bottom, you start saying, the first step, 12 steps. If you don't realize you're an addict, you don't start working.

It's like you think you got it under control, everything is fine, you know, I'm okay. Because when you feel the bitterness of where you are, then, he says, the koach of tefillah, the power of prayer is awakened in the soul to say, please God, help me get out of this. כי קודם Before that, there's no power to pray.

לכן הדין, and then he says, this is the meaning of Jewish law. The law, the halacha that says, בְּבִלְיָ מִרְשָׁה לֹא יֵצֵא That if somebody swallows maror, if you swallow a whole piece of maror,

you don't fulfill your obligation. If you don't bite into it, you have to bite into it and taste its maror, its miru, its bitterness.

כי זה עיקר הגלש שלא הרגישו שיבודם The essence of being in exile is to not feel that you're in exile. וכשיארגיש אדם ייצא כלשהם אז ייוושע And when you wake up, then you pray to God and you can begin the process of healing. The core of the Egyptian exile was not suffering, it was the inability to feel that they were suffering.

Egypt worked through a kind of softness, פרח, a seduction, a kind of comfort. And redemption begins with one thing, maror, the recovery of bitterness. It's like the bitterness that can lead to health.

It's like Melanie Klein's The Depressive. And until you're actually depressed, and she meant this in a holy way, that depression means the reality of where you are, not depression in that sense of, oh, we're depressed, but like seeing clearly about what things are. It's only then, he says, that God, it becomes a need, as it were.

When God reveals God's self to the people, people suddenly, they feel, oh, I'm bitter. What do you think is going on with the word Eheya? So he says that when God said Eheya, the people said, oh, oh. They're like, whoa, wait a second.

We're in Galut, we're in exile, we're in suffering. Specifically that name for God, the God of the possible, the God of the future. Like there's something better.

Isn't that the worst thing? When you're in your little Egypt, and then you get a taste of being outside of Egypt, and then you have to run back into Egypt, you think, what was I thinking? It's almost like you don't want, I know this about myself, if you're deluding yourself, and you know you're deluding yourself, you don't want anyone to show you what you're missing, because then you can't go back to normal life. It just unsettles you, and you're like, wait a second. I'm settling for this? And then somehow we always are able to convince ourselves it's okay.

Because we don't want to rock the boat, we don't want to make changes. So the Ishvara says that if we don't have awareness, there can't be prayer, and if there's no prayer, there's no redemption. Another way of saying that is, if we're not aware that we're suffering, we can't look for the way out.

It's like the Buddha's deep truth. When the Buddha said life is suffering, the Buddha was not proclaiming that we should, you know, go home and sit our wrists. He wasn't saying life is suffering, and therefore you're never going to get out.

He said you can't get out until the first truth is acknowledged. There's no eightfold noble path in Buddhism unless there's the first four principles of reality. Because if you're not in suffering, and not acknowledging it, then you're not going to look for a way out.

And so along comes the Ishvara, and he says you can live your whole life in a kind of mitzrayim. That's a really beautiful teaching, no? I was like, wow, I read this, like, damn, that is good. It kind of just made me think to myself, like, where? I mean, of course it's not like, sometimes with Torah it's so shocking that you wouldn't think of it.

It's not like, I'm telling you, is this new to anybody? Like, of course not, right? No one here is thinking, oh, I've never, you know, I know. It's like a chedish, it's nothing new here. But it's a chedish in maror.

It's a chedish in maror. It's something new in what, why? It's not just that we were bitter. It's just that the bitterness was not known to us then.

And you think, well, our ancestors also were living lives, I mean, their lives were horrible. And here we are, we're middle class. I think about the ways in which, as a Jew, I'm going to go to the Jew place, you can stay in the Universal if you want to, we can go to the Universal too, I'm going to go to the Jew place for a second, in my own Jewish identity.

There are ways in which my Jewish identity and the privilege of being a Jew in America, I've become numb in certain ways to, you know, some of the erasures of my identity over the last, you know, my lifetime, lifetime of Jews here in America. And I think in the last three years, a lot of us have, we woke up, we said, oh, wait a second, what was the price for not saying that part of my identity? What was the price that I, like, there are prices that we paid, and so we thought we were in our middle, you know, middle income, everything's great. And then we woke up, we said, oh, I'm not willing to pay that price.

But it's also true, obviously, interpersonal relationship doesn't have to be about being a Jew, being a human is deeply, to have this, like, where have I numbed, where I've mistaken comfort for freedom, where have I stopped crying out? And so the Ishvitcher is saying, don't rush to sweetness. That's what I loved. Don't rush to sweetness.

Like, every rabbi knows that you can't give a sermon that doesn't have redemption at the end. There's never a mic drop where a rabbi stands up at the bimah and says, it's really horrible, end of story, mic drop. Like, it's almost like you have to go to rabbinical school, you have to leave people with, like, some chia, some hope.

I'm reading Rachel Goldberg-Pollin's book now, it's heartbreaking, shattering, it's absolutely, unbelievably raw book. Rachel Goldberg-Pollin and her husband, John, lost their son, Hirsch, lost their son, Hirsch was murdered. And her book is really this.

I mean, honestly, her book is maror in the Ishvitcher vein. It's like biting into the bitterness, and she lays on a little bit of sweetness here and there, but she won't, she won't code it in chocolate for the reader to be like, oh, really? We want you to give us, like, some uplifting silver lining. Like, you know, you saw, you know, the light afterwards, she's like, she says there's the before, she calls it with capital letters, the before, which was before Hirsch, before October 6th, and there's the after.

And she won't let us as readers, as people who didn't go through what she went through, necessarily, I'm sure some who read it have, but she didn't give anybody, like, an out. But she also doesn't leave you in that place, because she won't stay there. She's always going to be there, but she also ventures outside into the sweetness, and then goes back in.

And she's living in the heyeh of it's horrible, and it could've been better, and I'm still here, and I'm writing, and I'm sharing, and I'm living. And it's really remarkable, I think, that this

teaching from the Ishvitcher is like, like, wake up, and name what's painful, and don't spiritually bypass it. Name what's painful, and don't morally bypass it.

Name what's painful and unjust, and don't whitewash it, or splain it away. Like, things will not get better until they get worse. And by worse means they won't change until they become what they are.

I think I've shared this, I shared this in my stay-in-the-room sermon many years ago, where, I remember being a recovering religion addict at the age of 23. And I'd just been five years in, you know, in some whirlwind of being a chassid, and, you know, some black hat guy, and I woke up one morning and said, like, whoa, what was that? And my journey out of there, and back into, like, a different place, and then eventually forward, was punctuated by a book called Taming Your Gremlins, which was an amazing book, Taming Your Gremlins. And I gave it, I remember giving a sermon about this, in stay-in-the-room, a sermon in stay-in-the-room.

And the guy who wrote that book said something that I'll never forget, he said, you will never change until you are able to sit with what is. And he said that's, he called it the Zen paradox. Nothing changes until it becomes what it is first.

In order for something to change, it has to be what it is, and then it can become something else. But as long as what is is not what it is, it won't change. Like, the first stop is, what is it? Right? What is happening in this body, in this moment, in this relationship, in our minds and hearts? I think it's a tall order.

I don't think it's easy. I think it's like, yeah, it's easy for you to say, like, that's great. The rest of us, we go in and out of seeing what we need to do, and then we, like the moon, kind of hides behind a cloud of our own amnesia and our own fear.

But it's a bracha. Like, to bless us to be able to bite into the marrow of our lives, and then to sweeten it.

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