

WHO NEW?

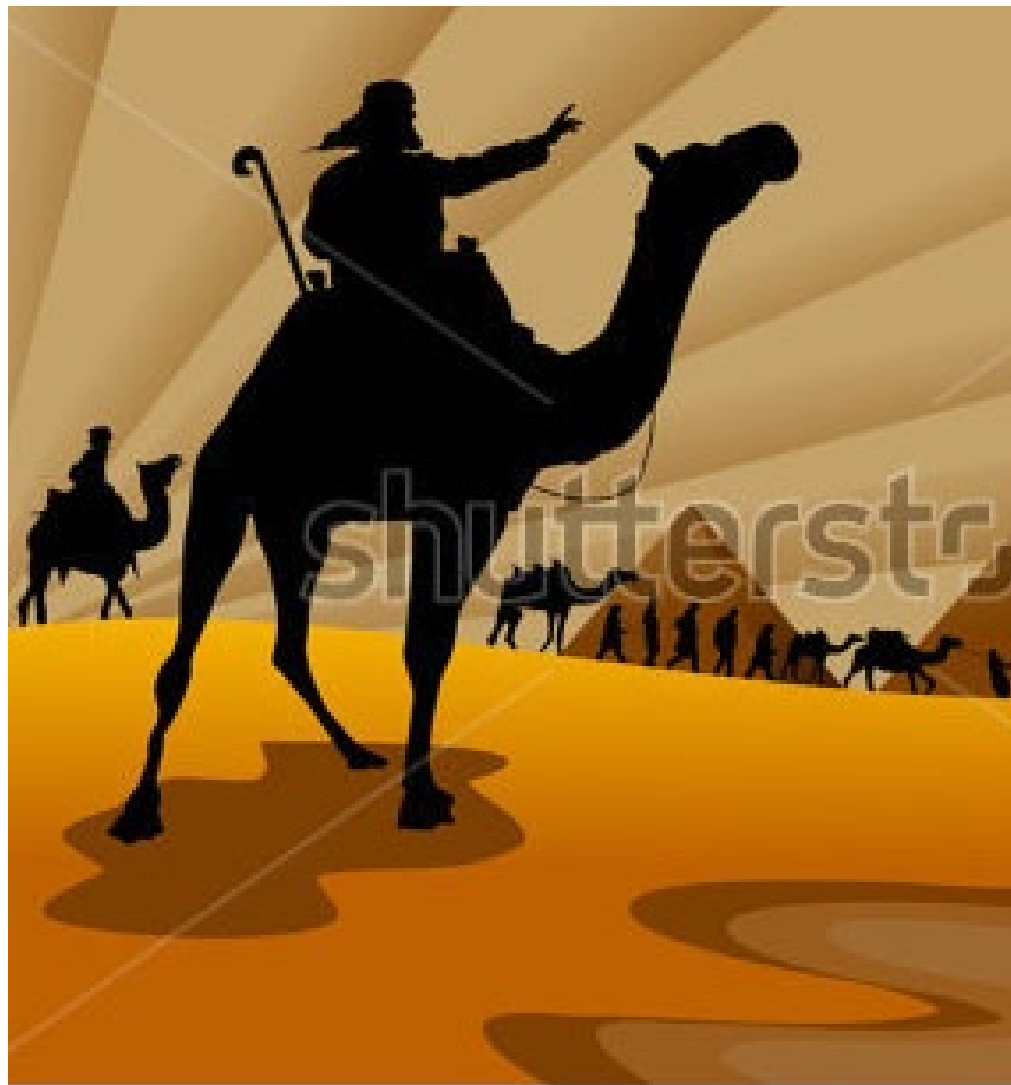
Once I took a young Russian Jew to *shul*. Although she was twenty-four, she had never seen or met a rabbi before. When I opened the *aron kodesh* and showed her the contents, I watched her expression as she gazed at the scrolls through ever widening eyes. Suddenly, I too saw them again for the first time; my familiarity had been stolen from me. That's when I remembered: *sifrei Torah* are stunningly beautiful.

There is not a more seductive word in any language than “new.” Think of the car you drive and compare it to the next year’s model. Or think of the iPhone that comes out with a slightly bigger screen. New is exciting, interesting and enticing. Old is dull and boring.

Parshas Tzav challenges Aharon to be excited about a *mitzvah* whose appeal might be diminished because people will have to spend money on it. The appeal of any *mitzvah* is also diminished because we have done it a thousand times. The one thousand and first time becomes automatic—“*mitzvas anashim melumadah*” (*Yeshayahu* 29:13). What should be exciting becomes robotic, perfunctory, or in Yiddish, “*yotzei zein*.”

When we sit down at the Pesach *sefer* in a few days, perhaps the dutiful fathers will glance at some *Haggadah* notes from last year or the year before, ready to repeat the same questions and provide the same answers. All over the world, good and loyal wives will be smiling and nodding, pretending they’ve never heard any of it before. Less loyal teenagers may silently mouth the words verbatim to each other and roll their eyes.

But the *Haggadah* declares, “A person is obligated to see himself as though he is the one going out from Egypt.” With the *Haggadah*’s invitation to climb inside a time machine, we travel back three and a half thousand years. Instead of comfortable homes, we are standing among ragged and demoralized Jews, watching their expressions as they gaze—through their own ever-widening



eyes—at miracles: miracles beyond anything the Egyptians could even dream of; each one stunned and shocked them, and stunned and shocked us.

We saw something new and we were all blown away by it. We were blown away at the *Yam Suf*, and this continued all the way toward *Har Sinai*.

It wasn't easy in Egypt, leaving the old behind. It is not easy in our time either. And that is the challenge that fathers conducting the *sefer* have to grapple with when they paint the picture of *yetzias Mitzrayim* again: to make the story new, to cause our eyes to widen. *Divrei Torah* have to be fresh, new and exciting. So does our *Yiddishkeit*. Old stories and worn explanations will

not suffice in modern times, where “innovative” and “cutting-edge” are sought-after qualities. To keep us passionate, Torah has to literally “blow us away.”

This is something important for throughout the year—that’s why the *pasuk* specifies “in every generation.” This message of the *Haggadah* directs us to strive to discover more and more about Torah: a new *chiddush*, a new *sefer*, a new *shiur*—in fact, a new Torah, like we received on *Har Sinai*. ■

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