

Kehillah #15

THE PERTINENT PARASHA



Are We Returning to Mitzrayim?

Rabbi Yehoshua Pfeffer

The festival we commonly refer to as Pesach is termed by the Torah as “Chag Hamazos.” Pesach, strictly speaking, is the one-day (or one-night) festival that accompanies the Pesach offering. The seven-day celebration that ensues is the “Festival of Matzos.”

The year round, we serve Hashem with the fullness of our selves. With personality. With chametz.

The question we should ask ourselves is why. Why are the matzos important enough to have the entire festival named after them? Why is the matzah constitutional to celebrating our redemption from Mitzrayim? The answer relates to the essence of matzah, which is a negation – the negation of chametz.

Throughout the year, bread is something positive: “Bread shall satisfy the heart of man” (*Tehillim 104:16*). Every important meal, whether on Shabbos

and festivals or at weddings and other occasions, begins with bread. Yet, for seven days of the year bread becomes evil, something we need to eradicate.

How are we to understand this seeming paradox?

Chametz represents the notion of self-inflation.

Rather than adding substance, chametz triggers a chemical reaction that causes dough to rise. In human terms, chametz is arrogance and conceit. We are self-inflated, not with the substance of wisdom, goodness, and righteousness – in these we are sorely lacking – but simply with ourselves.

Unrelated to Pesach, when Chazal articulate what distances us from Hashem, they mention two basic



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factors. One is the subjugation of foreign nations. The second is "the yeast in the dough." The first is superficial, the hardships of exile. The second is internal: when we are full of ourselves, there is no space for Hashem.

Yechezkel notes that Pesach is our national birthday: "And your birth, on the day that you were born" (Yechezkel 16:4). But ours was no ordinary birth. It came together with Hashem's revelation and the initiation of His eternal relationship with the Jewish People. On Pesach, we celebrate our national birth together with our newly forged relationship with Hashem. We do so with the matzah.

The year round, we serve Hashem with the fullness of our selves. With personality. With chametz. But before we reach this maturity via a process that culminates at Shavuot, we need to begin with a special diet that negates self-inflation and makes maximum space for Hashem in our lives. This is the diet of matzah, the diet of no-chametz.

It is for this purpose – for making space for Hashem, for trusting Him and yearning for His closeness – that we came out of Egypt. "I am Hashem, your G-d, who brought you out of the land of Egypt; open your mouth wide and I will fill it" (Tehillim 81). Yetzias Mitzrayim teaches us to open our mouths, to place our hope and trust in Hashem, to revel in our relationship with Him. For seven days a year, the Festival of

Matzos trains us in how to do it.

Eating matzah trains us for something else, too. Aside from relationship with Hashem, we empower our relationships with one another. Rabbi Akiva taught that "Love your fellow as yourself" is

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the great principle of Torah. Leaving Mitzrayim, the house of bondage in which slavery superseded the very concept of human relations, means making space both for Hashem and for others. Doing so is the great principle the Torah desires from us.

I cannot think of a more crucial message for the present time. Israeli society seems to have deteriorated to a place in which contending groups are unable to make space for each other, unable to listen to, understand, or empathize with each other. It is a return to Egypt, to bondage. It is a dire situation. With or without the "Chametz Law," we all need a large dose of matzah.

Wishing all readers, and the entire Jewish People, a Chag Kasher Vesame'ach.

TORAH INSIGHT FOR THE WEEK



Moshe the Peacemaker

Rabbi Yaacov Haber

In a midrash concerning this week's parasha, Moshe, in writing down the Torah at G-d's dictation, has noticed something strange. Nowhere, in the description of priestly functions in the book of Vayikra up to now, is his brother, Aharon, referred to directly. Repeatedly the instructions refer to Bnei Aharon (the sons or descendants of Aharon). Why is this?

According to the midrash, Moshe pleads to G-d on behalf of his brother in the following way: "Lord, is it possible that you hate the well but love the water that flows from it?" Meaning: How can You hate Aharon by refusing to refer to him, but still love his sons? And G-d, according to the Midrash, does not say: "You are being hypersensitive – I'm not annoyed at Aharon!" He responds, in fact: "Very well, because of your plea, I shall relent." And the very next verse (beginning this parasha) says: "G-d spoke to Moshe, saying: Command Aharon and his sons thus ..." (Vayikra 6:1). G-d's annoyance is over!

This is a strange midrash. What is the reason for G-d's annoyance? We know Aharon was a tzaddik. If it was for the sin of the golden calf, we know that Aharon has already done teshuva. Further, G-d had appointed him Kohen Gadol. Why should He do that if He were annoyed with him?

The explanation, I think, is the following. There is teshuva, and there is teshuva. One

may perform teshuva for a particular sin, according to all the rules spelled out by the Rambam, but something is missing. There is still part of one's nature that led to the sin in the first place. This has not changed and remains a blemish on one's soul.

The last step in the Rambam's list of steps for teshuva is the sincere statement by the

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penitent: "I am someone else, not the same person as the one who sinned." What does to be "someone else" mean? It does not mean that the penitent has changed his appearance and is now sporting the "baal teshuva look." It means something deeper – that he has removed this blemish from his soul. Rabeinu Yona, in *Shaare Teshuva*, says that a ben Torah in doing teshuva must start anew. This is the same idea.

So Moshe perhaps understood G-d's displeasure with Aharon in the following way. Aharon had indeed gone through all the technicalities of teshuva for the sin of the golden calf and was therefore qualified to be Kohen Gadol. Yet there was this final step that perhaps Aharon had not (yet)





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done, and that was responsible for G-d's continuing ire.

How do Aharon's sons (the "water from the well") come into this? The *Chovos Halevavos* makes a fascinating comment on the upbringing of children. He says that a child is much more perceptive than we may realize. A child knows what his parents really deep down want from him. Even if the parent should say: "I want such-and-such from you," if that is not in accordance with the parent's deepest wishes, the child will realize this and behave accordingly.

So Moshe was saying, in effect: See how wonderful Aharon's sons are! They must be that way in response to the desires of Aharon's deepest nature, which they can perceive. And that proves that Aharon has indeed carried out this final, deepest step of teshuva.

When you're just about to give up, realize that there is still one thing left – prayer. Although Aharon had performed the final step in teshuva, and was therefore worthy of being brought back into G-d's favor, he needed Moshe's prayer on his behalf to make this happen.

G-d obviously knew that Aharon was worthy of forgiveness. It is as if He was waiting for someone to pray on Aharon's behalf. And this Moshe did, even though his own status might be reduced once Aharon was restored to G-d's good graces. Moshe's unselfish behavior here should be a lesson to all of us. As the GEMARA says, "When you pray for someone else, your prayer will be answered first for you."



MEKOM AVODA Workplace Ethics & Halacha

Chometz and Our Responsibility for Other Jews' Property

Rabbi Asher Meir

The Gemara (*Pesachim 13a*) tells of someone who left a deposit of a large quantity of chametz with Yochanan Chakukaa. By erev Pesach, he still had not come to collect it. Rebbe advised Yochanan to hold on to it as long as he could. When the last hour to sell arrived, Rebbe told him to sell it on behalf of the owner. (We learned a few weeks ago that he may not sell it himself, because of the suspicion of self-dealing.)

This ruling, brought as a story in *Pesachim*, is the subject of a Mishnah and Gemara in *Bava Metzia (38a)*. There, we learn that any shomer (guardian) is required to sell the deposit if it is in danger of significant loss. Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel explains that he must sell it because this case is "just like returning a lost object to its owner". Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel says that the sale should be done before a beis din to ensure a fair price.

The case of Yochanan Chakukaah is brought down in one of the first chapters about Pesach in the *Shulchan Aruch (OC 443)*, the unique insight being that the shomer should wait as long as reasonably possible before taking the drastic step of selling the chametz. Recall that, unlike today, in the time of Chazal most sales of chametz were not reversible. The owner, therefore, would be left with only whatever sum the shomer was able to obtain, this being on short notice and on erev Pesach, which was a buyer's market. (The idea of a reversible sale is not an innovation of the Acharonim; it is found in the *Tosefta Pesachim 2:12-13*. But it did not become routine until the time of the Acharonim.)

The case is also brought down in the laws

of deposits in *Choshen Mishpat (292:17)*; it is there that the *Shulchan Aruch* mentions Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel's consideration of "returning a lost object." This statement is at the heart of a fascinating dispute



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among the Acharonim regarding the liability of a shomer. The *Magen Avraham* on *Orach Chaim* rules that if the shomer fails to sell the chametz, he is liable and must reimburse the owner. Any other poskim, including the *Chasam Sofer*, agree. The *Chok Yaakov* on this chapter distinguishes between a paid and a voluntary shomer. Others, such as the Alter Rebbe in *Shulchan Aruch HaRav*, exempt the shomer entirely in this case, and the Mishnah Berurah favors this ruling.

The distinction appears to be whether the obligation to return a lost object is an aspect of the shomer's special obligation or whether it is a completely distinct consideration. If it is part of his responsibility to safeguard the deposit, then the shomer would have to sell, and he would also be liable if he was remiss. If it is a distinct consideration, then any person would have an obligation to sell this person's chametz, which is a speedy way to total loss. The shomer himself would not be liable for failing to do so, just as anyone remiss in returning a lost object cannot be

sued by the owner.

As we consider a particular halachah of shemira in the context of Pesach, we should mention the *Shelah*, who connects the two at a fundamental level. In *Matza Ashira Drush 1*, he points out that shemira – watching – is a recurring theme in the Pesach commandments. We are commanded to watch the matzos (*Shemos 12:17*), and the Seder night is called "a night of watching" (*Shemos 12:42*). We may add that the lamb for the sacrifice must be "watched" (*Shemos 12:6*), the day of the holiday is also "observed" (*Shemos 12:7*), and the entire service is "observed" (*Shemos 12:24, 12:25*).

The *Shelah* explains that Torah observance in its entirety is a deposit in the responsibility of each Jew. Our attitude is what determines our level of liability. Each person should strive to be a shomer chinam – an unpaid shomer, who performs the



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mitzvos without expecting any reward. In the light of our topic, we might add that we are all responsible for returning lost mitzvos to their owners, and we should always be proactive in increasing the general level and merit of mitzvah observance among the Jewish people.



The Truth About Competition

Rabbi Tzvi Broker

Whether one owns a business or is an employee, competition is something we all encounter in our parnassah.

The double usage of the word beard indicates that Moshe was as joyous and excited for Aharon as if he himself would have been chosen for the position.

Business models are designed to evaluate competitors and build strategies to win the market. In the workplace, managers will often use competition between employees to motivate performance. Even if that is not the case, employees commonly feel the need to outdo their colleagues in order to position themselves to earn a raise or promotion. Job seekers naturally feel they are competing against other candidates as they apply and interview for potential positions.

A frank question we need to ask ourselves is how we feel inside when our "competitor" gets the client we were working on, a coworker wins the employee-of-the-month spotlight, or

a colleague is offered the position we were eyeing.

In this week's parasha, Hashem tells Moshe to gather all of Bnei Yisrael to be in the audience at Aharon's inauguration as Kohen Gadol, which Moshe himself would perform. The Midrash (*Shemos 27:1*) gives us insight into what may have been going through Moshe's mind at this moment. Moshe had thought that he would have been given the position of Kohen Gadol, to lead the service in the Mishkan, the very place whose construction he had orchestrated. In fact, the Gemara (*Zevachim 102a*) tells us that Hashem intended to appoint Moshe as the Kohen Gadol but took this away from him and gave it to Aharon.

Instead, Moshe was chosen to install Aharon as Kohen Gadol and dress him in the very clothes he would have been awarded to wear in front of all of Bnei Yisrael. What might have been our internal response if we were in Moshe's shoes?

The Midrash (*Rabba Vayikra 3:6*) reveals the answer in an explanation of a pasuk in *Tehillim 133*:

"Like fine oil on the head that is dripping to the beard, the beard of Aharon".

Did Aharon have two beards? If not, why is the word beard used twice?

Rather, as Moshe saw the oil dripping down to Aharon's beard, he was joyous as if the oil was dripping down on his own beard.

The Midrash explains that the double usage of the word beard indicates that Moshe was as joyous and excited for Aharon as if he himself would have been chosen for the position! Despite being denied the elevated position of Kohen Gadol, Moshe understood that each person has his own designated role and purpose.

In our own lives, we can get caught up in what we narrow-mindedly think is best for us and others. This trap results in experiencing feelings of jealousy about others' successes. We can feel that they, in some way, diminish us. Moshe's emunah left no room for negative feelings towards a

"competitor's" success, because it's clear that competition doesn't exist.

In our day-to-day interactions at work, we are challenged with either seeing

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things from a superficial or spiritual perspective. From a superficial perspective, every potential client, promotion, or job could have been ours but was grabbed by someone else.

From a deeper spiritual perspective, every client, promotion, or job has a name tag on it that was placed there by Hashem. When we are able to incorporate this truth into our own outlook, unhealthy feelings of competition dissipate. We can then react to the successes of others the way Moshe did – with a good eye and a sincere sharing in their joy.





Challenges in Being the Nice Kid

Rebbetzin Ilana Cowland

Since we spoke last week about the mean kid, it's only fair to say something about the nice kid. You know the one I mean. The most helpful, the best sharer, the mevater queen, the volunteer king. All we have to do for these kids to turn out well is not to interfere with their natural trajectory.

They are thoughtful, considerate, and often burdened with a huge guilty conscience. That may be a curse for them, but it certainly works to the advantage of the parent, poor child. So here is what we have to know about these children:

- 1) They are easy to take advantage of.
- 2) They are who they are naturally.

There is no need to talk about taking advantage of them. We all know when we do it, and we probably know that it's not a great idea. It's the second point that I'd like to focus on. When we publicly over-praise children for who they are naturally, we are putting them in a difficult situation.

Of course, the child who helps a lot deserves appreciation. But there's a fine line between appreciating someone and turning him into a mascot for ideal behavior. When praise for the helpful child serves as a rebuke

to the other children, you are not doing him any favors.

Nice kids know that they are naturally kinder, more available, or more willing than their siblings. It's who they are. It's often no effort at all. And here they are being penalized for it. They have to live with the reactions of their brothers and sisters. To turn a child into the cause for sibling jealousy is to dismiss his experience.



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Thank a child privately, yes. Praise a child who has done something really exceptional, sure. Encourage a child who has worked on themselves and broken through a challenge or test, absolutely. But don't pit the nature of one child against the nature of the others. It's cruel.

And there's more. We all have to work on our middos. Even this child. But for the "yes" kid, working on his middos

may not be about becoming even more compliant. It may be about developing inner strength to see that his own needs are met, being a mevater when it's a good thing but not turning into a shmatte.

If we lavish this child with praise for all the chesed that he does, we make this real growth much harder for him. For these kids, making better choices and decisions as they grow up may be about saying no.

We may enjoy the children with naturally kind and giving dispositions, but we must not make them feel valued for their usefulness or bound to their identity as baalei chesed. Chesed should always have an element of choice. If we're not careful, we can be the parents who turn chesed into a compulsion rather than a choice, because the fear of letting us down is too much.

These kids are very aware of their siblings and do not want to be the cause of jealousy. They need to feel that we love them for who they are and not just for how much they give. They need to know that we will love them just as much when they eventually discover their right to boundaries.



FAMILY MATTERS: QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

Educating for Responsibility

Rebbetzin Tamar Pfeffer

Question:

Hi, my question is about kids and homework. And chores. My kids simply don't do them! They come home, grab something to eat, sit on the couch, go out with friends, and do anything they want without thinking about homework – literal homework of the school type or homework of the doing-stuff-at-home type.

I always have to be the "bad guy" that makes them do homework and home chores. And even then, they do the bare minimum and that's it. I have to finish it on their behalf. Now, coming up to Pesach, there are plenty of chores to be done, and it's a constant struggle.

How should I approach the issue? I know this isn't good. They need to grow up and become responsible individuals. Right now, that's not happening. How can I make a change?

I have three children ages twelve, ten, and nine.

Thank you so much.





Dear Mother,

Thank you for your question. You are clearly a caring mother, and I was struck by your honesty and your insight. Yes, it is certainly important for your children to take responsibility; and yes, it begins during childhood.

I'll introduce a few words about the general subject, and then approach the specific issue. Responsibility depends on education rather than age. It's a process. If your ten-year-old son still doesn't make his bed in the morning, and you believe it's about time he does so, you can't suddenly force the matter on him. Internalizing the mindset of responsibility is a process. It takes time.

Responsibility is also a burden. Somebody needs to "own it." That's the difference between a responsible mindset and one that isn't: the appreciation that it's up to us, and if not for us it won't happen. Just as in the field of Torah and mitzvos, which Hashem leaves to us, responsibility comes together with accountability. You can only be responsible if you are accountable for the results.

For example, once you take responsibility over your children's homework, it becomes impossible for your kids to do so. They know that, even if they forget, you will remind them; that even if they do a bad job, you'll finish it. The minute you start to let go of your own responsibility, which is a process, you begin to give them space for their own process.

These two points lead to an important insight, which involves making mistakes. Taking responsibility inevitably includes stumbles and errors. Without these, we cannot be in a learning process. You will only be able to relinquish

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your own responsibility when you come to terms with your children's mistakes. To allow them to make mistakes is part and parcel of their

(and your) growth and progress.

It is possible that your kids aren't doing homework and chores because they know that you will "finish the job" anyway. You write that you're always finishing the work on behalf of the kids, and maybe that's the problem; they know that they're not responsible, that you will finish it for them.

Beginning the process is important for your children's education and for their becoming productive and responsible. It will do them only good. Tell them it's time for them to be responsible for their own homework, which is why from today on, as part of the process, you will only give them one reminder during the afternoon. No more reminders afterwards, and no homework after dinner. (This is one example. You know best which rules to apply). Same goes for chores. Making the bed is your responsibility. If you don't do it, it will stay messy.

As the process unfolds, by trusting the kids and understanding that mistakes and stumbles are part of the growth process, you will see that

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eventually even one reminder isn't necessary. Children want to take responsibility. They will grow into it.

There's no need for you to sit with them during homework time. You can, and even should, be around while they are doing homework. If a question or a problem comes up, you can help them solve it. But the responsibility stays with them. They can come to you, and not the opposite. The same goes for chores, including Pesach chores. If you force them, they'll hate it. If you allow them to take responsibility, they'll rise to the challenge.

I wish you success with the wonderful process of responsibility,

Tamar Pfeffer





Giving Genuine Thanks: Of Bus Drivers & Four Cups of Wine

Rabbi Shmuel Kimche

It was motzei Rosh Hashanah in Bnei Brak, one of Israel's most densely populated communities. Thousands of visiting families of every age and description congregated around bus stops, waiting for their rides home.

The bus stop reserved for the 402 line to Jerusalem was extremely crowded. Seniors and tired parents blessed with many children, some crying infants, were waiting (not so) patiently for a bus that

The parents of a wailing infant approached the driver and said, "Have you no heart at all?"

was nowhere in sight.

The overfilled buses were simply driving by; the hour was late and the disheartened crowds were getting desperate. Some members in the crowd began making calls to Egged, but no bus was forthcoming.

As the hour passed midnight, the crowd started to become frantic: "Why don't they simply charter another bus for us? What kind of service is this?" they cried out. We can all imagine.

After an eternity of waiting, at about 12:30, an Egged bus was spotted in the distance. Relief turned to dismay as

the bus pulled next to the stop. It was the #318 bus, heading for Rechovot, not Jerusalem! The poor driver was besieged by the disappointed passengers: "Look at the size of this crowd! Can't you help us get to Jerusalem?" they pleaded. "Have mercy on the elderly and babies who have been stranded here waiting forever!" The driver, while sympathetic, pointed to the numbers 318 and said, "This bus goes to Rechovot, and there's not much I can do about it."

The parents of a wailing infant approached the driver and said, "Have you no heart at all? Please, for the sake of the babies who are suffering here by the roadside..."

This personal plea resonated with the driver, who actually got up from his seat and announced, with some resignation in his voice, "Okay, okay. We're going to Jerusalem." He fiddled with buttons that transformed the bus into a #402 Express.

The elated crowd spontaneously cheered. As they climbed aboard, the passengers thanked the driver profusely for his extraordinary kindness. As the bus started to travel the highway up and into Jerusalem, passenger after passenger came up to the microphone to give brachos to the driver: "May you live a long, healthy life. May you prosper greatly," said a grateful young mother. "May you see nachas from your children."

Just minutes before reaching the Central Bus Station in Jerusalem, an elderly man approached the driver and asked, "Do you mind if I asked you a question?" "Not at all," said the driver.

"Despite your really beautiful act of kindness, I just can't wrap my mind around the fact that you were prepared to lose your job over what you did. No self-respecting bus company would ever let a driver get away with changing his route like that, regardless of how nice a gesture it is."

The driver responded with a chuckle. "Let me tell you what really happened. Back at the depot we've got cameras trained upon all the busier bus stops. At some point, my supervisor saw the swelling crowd at the #402 bus stop. The kids screaming, their parents complaining, you know what it was like. You were there."

The supervisor called out on the intercom - "Who wants to do the Jerusalem run?"

Silence.

My friend Dovid said, 'Not me. I don't want to be on the receiving end of those people who have waited an hour.' My buddy Shimon called out, 'Me neither!' A third driver called in, 'It's already 12.30, and now you are asking?' And so it went with all the drivers.



I called out, 'I'll take it, and I want to make a bet that I can transform the complaints into heartfelt blessings!' They responded to me like I was nuts, but I just climbed onto the bus, changed the numbers to 318, and it worked like a charm! I haven't been blessed like that since my Bar Mitzvah!"

Through his kind act, the driver transformed the passengers' complaints into heartfelt, grateful blessings!

In the Gemara, the Vilna Gaon famously connects the four cups of wine we drink at the seder to the four categories of persons that are required to make a Birkas HaGomel. (Brachos, 54b).

1. Those who walked the desert
2. Those who crossed the sea
3. Those who were sick and recuperated
4. Those who were in prison

Birkas Gomel blesses and thanks Hashem for bestowing "all good" upon the grateful recipient. Significantly, it must be recited in a minyan, and all those that hear respond, "amen."

On Pesach, we remember that B'nei Yisrael survived all four dangers that require the Gomel blessing. We express a deep sense of gratitude and recognition that each incremental level of freedom is reason to be grateful.

Thank you.



Blood on the Birthday Cake

Josh and Tammy Kruger

Once upon a time:

The boys sat around the table enjoying birthday cake with their friend Ephraim, who just turned seven.

"This is a great birthday cake," said his friend Yonatan. "What's in it?"

Ephraim's brother Avraham proudly spoke up. "It's mainly vanilla, mixed with chocolate chips. I helped to make it. Oh, my! That was a really weird chip that I just swallowed."

"Avraham!" exclaimed Ephraim, "Your mouth is bleeding!"

Avraham grabbed a napkin and touched it to his mouth, "I am! Omigoodness I think my loose tooth fell out!"

Yonatan grimaced, "Oh no, it wasn't a chocolate chip that you swallowed, you probably swallowed your tooth."

Ephraim held the napkin to his gums to help stop the bleeding. He couldn't believe that he had swallowed his tooth.

Yonatan moved Avraham's plate away, "I don't think you're allowed to eat that cake now. There's a small drop of blood on it."

"But it was the last piece of cake!" protested Avraham. "I don't mind if there's a tiny speck of blood on it. I'm already swallowing a lot more blood than that."

"Actually, I don't think you're allowed to swallow your blood," said Yonatan. "I think you have to spit it out".

Is it forbidden for Avraham to swallow his own blood? Can he eat his cake? What would you do?

The Discussion

Q: What is the connection between our story and the parasha?

A: The parasha states "and you shall not eat any blood" (*Vayikra* 7:26).

Q: Does Avraham have to spit out his blood?

A: The prohibition does not include blood that is in one's own body. If someone has a cut or sore in his mouth, he is allowed to swallow that blood because it has never left the body (*Yoreh De'ah* 66:10).

Q: Should Avraham throw away his whole piece of cake?

A: It is alright for Avraham to cut away the part of the cake that has the drop of blood on it and also a little part next to it to make sure that none of the blood will be eaten (*Yad Yehuda on Yoreh De'ah* 96:5; *Yoreh De'ah* 66:10).

Q: If Avraham hadn't noticed the blood drop on his cake and it had all been crumbled together, is he still allowed to eat that bit of cake?

Surprisingly, it is okay to eat food that has human blood mixed into it as long as the redness is not seen (*Yad Avraham, Yoreh De'ah* 66:10; *Darkei Teshuvah* 66:71).

Back to the story:

Avraham did not want the incident with his lost tooth to distract attention away from Ephraim's birthday celebration. He left the dining room with his plate. After the bleeding stopped, he carefully removed the part of the cake where he could see the blood. He then returned to the dining room and rejoined the celebration.

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