

# Introduction To The Text And Structure Of The Haggadah

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Rambam states that there is a positive commandment to engage in discussing the events of yetziat mitzrayim on the night of the fifteenth of Nisan. There is no specific formula which must be recited in order to fulfill the mitzvah, but there are a number of elements which must be incorporated into the retelling in whatever shape and form it takes. They include: 1) To speak of the miracles that occurred in mitzrayim; 2) To begin the discussion with the abject physical situation of the Jews in mitzrayim/state of spiritual impoverishment of the Jewish people in its formative stages;<sup>5</sup> and 3) To speak about the significance of the three foods eaten on the night of the fifteenth, i.e. the meat of the paschal sacrifice, the matzah, and the maror. Along with this, Rambam emphasizes that one must attempt engage the children in the discussion.<sup>6</sup>

There is, nevertheless, a long history to the idea of fixing a text of the “haggadah”. Many of the sections of the haggadah used today are already mentioned by the mishnah and some of them were can be shown to have been in use on the night of the fifteenth while the Second Temple was still standing and the qorban pesach was being brought. Almost all of the material existed already by the end of the period of the Tannaim, even if not all of it was being used on the night of the fifteenth.

We present here a brief overview of the origin of the various segments which comprise our haggadah.

<sup>5</sup> This is an adoption of the geonic position to incorporate the opinions of both Rav and Shmuel as to the nature of the גנות in the mishnah’s “מתהחיל בגנות” into the text of the haggadah.

<sup>6</sup> Obviously, however, this cannot impede fulfillment of the mitzvah as one is obligated to perform it even if there are no children present.

Most, if not all, of the material has been distilled from Daniel Goldschmidt’s seminal work הגדה של פסח.

## 1) הא לחמא עניא

This introduction to the הגדה, which in our version contains three unrelated sentences, is not mentioned in the gemara;<sup>7</sup> some early medieval collections contained one or two sentences only, or contained them in a different order. Many versions, including that of Rambam, contained an additional sentence at the beginning: בבהילו יצאנו ממצרים, “In haste we left Egypt”.

## 2) מה נשתנה

The Mishnah already speaks of the question of the מה נשתנה along with three answers, i.e. differences between the night of Pesach and other nights. From the mishnah it appears that the מה נשתנה was not the question of the child but rather that which a father would teach his child who was not astute enough to ask.<sup>8</sup> This understanding is also clear from the gemara<sup>9</sup> and during the geonic period as well.<sup>10</sup> It is

<sup>7</sup> The expression 'כל דכפין ייתי ויכול דצריך ייתי ויפסח' is quite similar to the invitation Rav Huna use to issue before every meal he would eat, 'כל דכפין ייתי ויכול' (Bavli *Ta'anit* 20b).

<sup>8</sup> The text of the mishnah reads:  
וכאן הבן שואל אביו ואם אין דעת בבן אביו מלמדו מה נשתנה הלילה הזה מכל הלילות ...

<sup>9</sup> The gemara, *Pesachim* 115b, cites that Abaye (as a child) asked Rabbah about something which was done in an odd fashion on the night of the seder and he responded: 'פטרתי מלומר מה נשתנה'. From Rabbah’s response, it is clear that it was his responsibility, not Abaye’s, to say the מה נשתנה for the benefit of the child

among the Rishonim that we first find the opinion that this is the question of the child, although the Tur and Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chayyim 473) adhere to the approach that the question is asked by the reciter of the haggadah in the absence of the child asking.<sup>11</sup>

The mishnah records only three “questions” (i.e. differences) in response to the question of מה נשתנה,<sup>12</sup> the first relating to maror, the second to matzah and the third to the paschal sacrifice. As societal circumstances have changed (the absence of the qorban pesach; we no longer normally eat reclining on a bed or couch), the details of the responses changed.

### מתחיל בגנות ומסיים בשבח 3)

The above statement is found in the mishnah. (Pesachim 10:4) Rav and Shmuel debate whether the גנות מתחלה עובדי עבודה זרה היו, or the physical state, עבדים היינו לפרעה, במצרים. The geonic practice eventually accepted both opinions and the text of our haggadah reflects this view.<sup>13</sup>

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was not alert enough to ask; once Abaye demonstrated his awareness, the מה נשתנה became redundant.

<sup>10</sup> גנוי שכטר, כרך ב' p. 180.

<sup>11</sup> See the *Ra'avayah* II, 163 and *Smag* #41 (positive commandments).

<sup>12</sup> The text of almost all of the manuscripts of the gemara and mishnah contain only the following three questions:

שבכל הלילות אנו מטבילין פעם אחת הלילה הזה שתי פעמים  
שבכל הלילות אנו אוכלין חמץ ומצה הלילה הזה כולו מצה  
שבכל הלילות אנו אוכלין בשר צלי שלוק ומבושל הלילה הזה כולו צלי

For a longer discussion of the individual statements, see Goldshmidt, pp. 10-13.

<sup>13</sup> Goldschmidt suggests that these two segments are theoretically unnecessary since the core of the haggadah according to the next statement in the mishnah is the expounding on אבי אבד אבי (the passage which we might term as the “Torah’s Haggadah”), which itself begins with גנות and concludes with שבח. He theorizes that these two segments were originally alternative *haggadot* which the Amoraim wished to preserve along with the more standard midrash of ארמי אבד אבי; hence he views these as “introductions” to the midrash.

First we recite the passage of עבדים היינו which begins with an approximate quotation of the verse from Deuteronomy 6:21. The paragraph of עבדים היינו concludes with the idea that it is laudable to discuss the Exodus beyond the minimum requirement which leads us into the story of the Sages in Bnei Brak who exemplified this model behavior. The story in Bnei Brak is found nowhere else in Rabbinical literature, although it finds a striking echo in the last chapter of Tosefta Pischa in a story which occurred in Lod involving Rabban Gamliel and the elders.<sup>14</sup>

Next the section contains the mishnah from Berakhot (1:5) which discusses the obligation to mention the Exodus every evening (זכירת יציאת מצרים), a mitzvah closely related to the specific obligation to discuss the Exodus at length (סיפור יציאת מצרים).

Finally, we have the midrash of the four sons, which can be found outside the haggadah in two places with a number of variants, some major and some minor. Both the Mekhilta (Parshat Bo, #18) and the Yerushalmi (Pesachim 10:4) contain this tradition. Both of those versions use the word 'טיפש' instead of 'תם' and the order of the children as well as the verses cited for each child vary within the two.

It is unclear however, why this midrash is placed at this point in the Haggadah. It may be that it originated as midrash to Deuteronomy 6:21 (עבדים היינו), which is the verse which begins this section and hence was included at the end. The section of עבדים היינו concludes with passage from the Mekhilta which expounds on the last verse cited in the section on the four sons, although the necessity for its citation, too, is not clear.

The second version of מתחיל בגנות is considerably shorter; it contains only the verses from the book of Joshua which are Joshua’s retelling of the story of the Jewish people, including the Exodus and the entry into the land of Israel. Our haggadah ends its

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<sup>14</sup> Tosefta 10:12. The text reads:

מעשה ברבן גמליאל וזקנים שהיו מסובין בבית ביתוס בן זונין בלוד והיו עסוקין בהלכות הפסח כל הלילה עד קרות הגבר הגביהו מלפניהן ונועדו והלכו להן לבית המדרש.

citation of the passage with the Jews going down to Egypt. The next two verses deal, respectively, with the Exodus and the entry into the Land of Israel, both which constitute the *מסיים בשבה*. That we omit them is probably a reflection of the fact that the primary fulfillment of the obligation to begin with *גנות* and conclude with praise is fulfilled through the midrash of *ארמי עובד אבי*.<sup>15</sup>

#### 4) The Midrash of *ארמי עובד אבי* and the additions to the Midrash

The mishnah (Pesachim 10:4) states:

דורש מארמי עובד אבי עד שיגמור כל הפרשה כולה.

The core of our haggadah consists of such a Midrash, although our text does not complete the entire text of the parshah, but stops right before the verse which speaks of God having brought us into the Land of Israel. It is safe to assume that before the destruction of the Second Temple and the subsequent exiling of much of the Jewish people that the midrash continued to expound the next several verses, but that this material was omitted when it was no longer relevant.<sup>16</sup>

The Midrash in this form is not known from any early tannaitic collections (i.e. the Sifra, Sifrei or Mekhilta), although a number of individual pieces can be found in the midreshei halakah collections we possess, either on *ארמי עובד אבי* or elsewhere.

After the midrash itself (which concludes with the Ten Plagues), there are a number of additions to the Midrash which are not found in the geonic works or in the haggadah text of Rambam. These include the midrash of the plagues that the Egyptians suffered at the splitting of the Red Sea and the poem of *דיינו* with its abridged version which follows it immediately. These “tosafot” were considered optional; however, even those whose haggadah did not contain them may have recited them. R. Avraham b. HaRambam testifies that his father (despite having excluded them from his haggadah) nonetheless recited them.

#### 5) Rabban Gamliel's *שלשה דברים*

<sup>15</sup> Goldshmidt, p. 17.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. p. 30.

The mishnah (Pesachim 10:5) cites a statement in the name of Rabban Gamliel that one who has not recited these three “words” or “items” has not fulfilled his “obligation”. Which “obligation”? The predominant view among the Rishonim is that the obligation referred to is that of *יציאת מצרים*.<sup>17</sup> In accordance with this dictum, we recite the formulation of Rabban Gamliel's statement in the mishnah along with the expounding of the reason for each of the three commandments. The explanations found in our haggadah are taken from the mishnah, but appear slightly modified and expanded.

The three “items” of Rabban Gamliel are followed by the statement that every generation must view itself<sup>18</sup> as if it was the generation of the Exodus and thus we are obligate to give praise to God for all of the miracles he wrought on our behalf. Most of the text of these two sections is found in the mishnah immediately following Rabban Gamliel's statement.<sup>19</sup>

#### 6) Hallel and the *ברכת הגאולה*

The mishnah continues its discussion (Pesachim 10:6) with a debate between Beit Shammai and Beit Hillel as to how many paragraphs of the Hallel are to be recited before concluding the haggadah. Our text, not surprisingly, follows the opinion of Beit Hillel that we read the first two paragraphs. The mitzvah of *מגיד* concludes with *ברכת הגאולה*, “The Blessing of Redemption”; this, too, is found in the mishnah there where the basic form of the blessing is debated by the Tannaim.

#### 7) *שפך המתך*

<sup>17</sup> The Ramban? Raises the possibility that this refers to the mitzvot of eating matzah and maror (and pesach), but the placement in the haggadah certainly does not assume this position.

<sup>18</sup> In many versions (including Maimonides') the word 'להראות', “to show”, appears instead of 'לראות' (“To view”). This reading is the origin of the Yemenite practice of physically re-enacting the Exodus by ..???

<sup>19</sup> The words "בכל דור ודור ... ואותנו הוציא משם" are missing in a number of the early (*Eretz Yisrael*) manuscripts of the mishnah. Goldschmidt suggests that this line was probably inserted from some *baraita*. The verse cited to prove this obligation is missing in some witnesses (סדור ר' (סדור ר' סעדיה גאון, הגדה של הרמב"ם) and the words beginning with 'לא את אבותינו' are not found in the mishnah at all.

Before beginning the second part of the hallel after the meal, we recite several verses in which we beseech God to punish our Gentile oppressors. This practice is found in all communities, although the specific verses vary. The practice is not mentioned in the gemara, nor by the Geonim, nor by a number of Rishonim. Its origin is probably in the early medieval period (? Middle Ages?) (10th or 11th century).<sup>20</sup>

### 8) Conclusion of הלל and ברכת השיר

We then continue with the recitation of the הלל, until the end of Psalm 118. The mishnah states that upon the conclusion of the הלל we recite the ברכת השיר. What is the "ברכת השיר"? The Bavli records two opinions on the matter. R. Yehudah asserts that it refers to "יהללך" (the conclusion we usually recite at the end of the הלל) and R. Yohanan asserts that it refers to "נשמח כל חי". The predominant opinion among the Geonim and Rishonim is that the halakha follows Rav Yehudah; however, the text of our haggadah adopts the opinion of those who suggested reciting both. Many haggadot contain both concluding blessings (i.e. מלך מהלל בתשבוה and that of ישחבה); however the common practice is to recite only one of the two blessings to conclude the הלל.<sup>21</sup>

In between the two alternative "ברכות השיר" the practice is to recite the הלל הגדול, Psalms chapter 136 which contains the phrase 'כי לעולם חסדו' twenty-six times. The origin of this is in a baraita cited in Pesachim (118a) which states:

תנו רבנן רביעי גומר עליו את ההלל ואומר הלל הגדול  
Our Rabbis have taught: On the fourth [cup of wine] one completes the Hallel and recites the Hallel haGadol.

### 9) Concluding פיוטים

The remainder of the seder consists of piyyutim most of which were not composed originally for the haggadah.<sup>22</sup>

a) חסל סידור פסח is a קרובה<sup>23</sup> recited on שבת הגדול written by R. Yosef Tov Elem (11th century) which is first found in haggadot in the 14th century.

b) אז רוב נסים is a קרובה recited today on שבת הגדול (originally intended for Shabbat Parshat Bo) by Yanai (6th Cent.)

c) אומץ גבורותיך is a קרובה by HaKalir (6th-7th century) written for shacharit of Pesach.

d) כי לא נאה and אדיר הוא were songs not originally written for פסח but were songs which were sung on the festivals. The first connection to the night of the seder that can be traced for כי לא נאה is in the thirteenth century and אדיר הוא can first be found in the fourteenth.

e) The last two songs in the haggadah, מי יודע אחד and חד גדיא, which do not appear until at least the fifteenth century, appear to be modeled upon folk-songs.

With the advent of the printing press, and in more recent centuries with the widespread availability of printed books, major changes are no longer taking place in the text of the haggadah. Expansions on the text are done either orally or through commentaries. Once upon a time, the exhortation to be מרבה לספר ביציאת מצרים resulted in accretions to the text; today the text itself has become "canonized" (popularly speaking at least) and our being מרבה לספר ביציאת מצרים has been transformed into the exegesis of the text of our haggadot, the products of many centuries of the creativity of the Jewish people.

<sup>20</sup> Goldschmidt, pp. 61-64.

<sup>21</sup> See משנה and the שלחן ערוך אורח חיים סימן ת"פ סעיף א' in ברורה סעיף קטן ה'.

<sup>22</sup> Goldschmidt, pp. 96-8.

<sup>23</sup> A קרובה is a piyyut which was recited as part of the חזרת הש"ץ on special shabbatot. They can be found as part of the יוצרות which are still recited in some communities today on the shabbatot of the שבת הגדול and ד' פרשיות.