

# The Pesach Haggada: Developing an Experiential Commemoration

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Commentaries highlight the numerous distinctions between the daily obligation to recall the exodus termed "*z'chira*"<sup>82</sup> and the unique Pesach one called "*sippur*,"<sup>83</sup> including both the form and content of the seder night commemoration. The Torah describes *sippur* as verbal, utilizing questions and answers, and involving children.<sup>84</sup> The mishna outlines its content as including: *g'nut* and *shevach*, *Arami oveid avi*, and references to pesach, matza, and maror.<sup>85</sup>

One wonders what goal the various distinctions aim to accomplish. Close study of the makeup of our haggada, carefully composed in line with the aforementioned criteria, will show how the various distinctions create a unique form of experiential commemoration.

Recognizing the diverse etymology of the haggada's various segments, scholars traditionally assumed the presence of some all-inclusive structure impossible.<sup>86</sup> Recently, though, some have begun to point out significant relationships between various segments.<sup>87</sup>

## The Framework

One need not search further than the haggada's introduction and conclusion to appreciate its careful construction. Notwithstanding its exclusive focus on the Exodus, the haggada opens and

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<sup>82</sup> The basis for this terminology is Sh'mot 13:3 and D'varim 16:3.

<sup>83</sup> See Minchat Chinuch 21, Chiddushei HaGrach (on Shas) 40.

<sup>84</sup> Sh'mot 13:8,14. See also Sefer D'varim.

<sup>85</sup> P'sachim 116a.

<sup>86</sup> See Introduction to Goldschmidt's Haggada Shel Pesach.

<sup>87</sup> See "Haseder Shebeseder", Shimon Gezunteit, Alon Shvut 101:55-9.

closes with similar references to our hope to celebrate next year in different circumstances, *L'shana haba'a b'ar'a d'yisrael* and *L'shana haba'a b'yerushalayim*

Despite the obvious cultural gap between the opening piece of *Ha lachma anya* (written in aramaic) and the closing one- *Chasal sidur pesach* (written in Hebrew), they create a consistent framework for the story told within.

## Matchil B'g'nut U'm'sayem Bashevach

We begin with the first components mandated by the Mishna, the Ma Nishtana and the answer described by the mishna as *matchil b'g'nut u'm'sayem bashevach*. The gemara quotes a debate between Rav and Shmuel regarding what Biblical portion best accomplishes the *g'nut* and *shevach*. Shmuel recommends *Avadim hayinu*, while Rav prefers *Mit'chila ovdei avoda zara*. Shmuel chooses a simplistic recapitulation of the physical slavery, while Rav mandates a broader view of the story, one that by beginning with our idolatrous ancestors and concluding with our discovery of G-d, relates to the exodus's spiritual significance.

Our answer includes the suggestions of both Rav and Shmuel. Their respective answers are set within independent frameworks of questions and shevach:

Part/Opinion	Shmuel	Rav
Questions	Ma Nishtana	Four Sons
Answers (G'nut)	Avadim Hayinu <sup>88</sup>	Mit'chila O'vdei ...
Shevach	Baruch Hamakom ... <sup>89</sup>	Baruch Shomeir ...

We begin with simple questions which relate to the obvious uniqueness of the night. These questions are universal, as any child takes notice of these differences. The answer is just as basic; *Avadim hayinu* presents the basic theme of the night- our emancipation from servitude to Pharaoh. The unit's *shevach*, likewise, reflects its simplicity- "*Baruch hamakom baruch hu*" is said by one who does not yet appreciate the deeper significance of y'tziat Mitzrayim.

The second unit also opens with four questions, but these are presented by four distinct children stereotypes and, thus, reflect their unique characters. The response also provides greater depth for it presents y'tziat Mizraim in its broader context as the culmination of a purification process that began with G-d's prophecy of Jewish servitude and promise to emancipate. The *shevach* reflects this realization by recognizing G-d's fulfillment of His promise- "*Baruch shomeir havtachato l'Yisrael.*"

Having completed the second *g'nut/shevach* section, we reach the "*V'hi she'amda*" paragraph in which we recognize the promise's timelessness. The second *g'nut/shevach* section allows for a

<sup>88</sup> The pieces beginning "*Ma'aseh*" and "*Amar*" are tangentially related to the end of *Avadim hayinu*.

<sup>89</sup> Even if one assumes "*Baruch hamakom*" and the four sons to be of similar origin, its two distinct parts serve as a transition from the first to second *g'nut/shevach* sections.

more relevant portrayal of y'tziat Mizraim. As opposed to *Avadim hayinu* which bases its relevance on the fact that non-redemption of our forefathers would have left us too as subject to Pharaoh, after having presented y'tziat Mizraim as the process of G-d's fulfillment of his promise to the avot, we can see parallels "*b'chol dor vador*." Although absolute slavery was a one time event, dangerous threats are unfortunately all too repetitive. The presentation of y'tziat Mizraim not merely as emancipation, but as G-d's fulfillment of his commitment to protect the Jewish people, allows us to realize its perpetual relevance.

## Arami Oveid Avi

The next section of the haggada implements the mishna's next dictate- "*V'doreish mei'arami oveid avi ad sheyigmor kol haparasha kula*." The usage of the term "*v'doreish*", translated by the haggada as "*tzei u'l'mad*", signifies the goal of this next unit- to depict in detail the story's various aspects. The mishna utilizes *Arami oveid avi*- the Torah's most detailed description of the exodus- as the context for *d'rashot* that further delineate the story's nuances. Here we relate to the circumstances of Ya'akov's descent to Mitzrayim, our miraculous propagation, the nature of our enslavement and persecution, the basis for G-d's heeding of our cries, and finally G-d's mode of action, first in Mitzrayim, and then at Yam Suf.

The detailed description leads naturally into the detailed praise- "*Dayeinu*." *Dayeinu*, composed to stress the abundance of favor showered upon the Jewish people, can only be sung once we have studied the story's details.

## Rabban Gamliel

Having discussed the events in such detail, we are shocked by Rabban Gamliel's insistence concerning our efforts' insufficiency. Rabban Gamliel's claim can be understood in light of the piece juxtaposed by both the mishna and haggada to his description of pesach, matza, and maror- "*B'chol dor vador chayav adam lir'ot et atzmo k'ilu yatza miMitzrayim...*". As opposed to the yearly commandment to commemorate the Exodus, the seder night aims to recreate it. Absolute commitment to G-d can be based only on personal appreciation of G-d as emancipator. Rabban Gamliel's linkage of the story to the ceremonial objects allows the detailed historical anecdote to become "imax" reality. Like one who dons the garb of an earlier period in order to feel part of it, we discuss and eventually eat the objects central to the redemption narrative in order to imagine ourselves thrown back in time to it .

The "*B'chol dor vador*" segment culminates our attempts throughout the haggada to make the ancient exodus contemporary and relevant by sharpening the formulations of our two earlier attempts - *Avadim hayinu* and *V'hi she'amda*.

Earlier Attempts:	B'chol dor vador:
Ela she'b'chol dor vador om'dim aleinu l'chaloteinu v'hakadosh baruch hu matzileinu miyadam. (V'hei she'amda)	B'chol dor vador chayav adam l'r'ot et atzmo k'ilu yatza miMizraim
V'eilu lo hotzi Hakadosh Baruch Hu et Avoteinu Misham,	Lo et avoteinu bilvad ga'al

Harei ani u'vaneinu u'vanei vaneinu m'shubadim hayinu l'far'h b'Mizraim. (Avadim hayinu)	Hakadosh Baruch Hu, ela af otanu ga'al imahem...
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In *Avadim hayinu* we strain ourselves to consider the implications of an ancient Exodus on contemporary society, in *V'hi she'amda* we parallel current events to that exodus, but in *B'chol dor vador* we present the Exodus as a current event.

## Hallel

The unique experiential commemoration inspires an equally unique hallel. Rav Hai Gaon described the hallel Pesach night as one of *shira*, as opposed to the regular form of *k'ria*. Like the Jews at Yam Suf, we recite *shira* in response to having personally experienced G-d's miracles. We read "*B'tzeit Yisrael*" not as ancient history, but as a description of our own encounter.<sup>90</sup>

Personal experience as basis for the seder hallel is born out both by the hallel's introduction and conclusion. The paragraph "*l'fichach*" (therefore) introduces the hallel as one linked to the preceding declaration of personal experience and defines it as one meant to thank for miracles performed- "*la'avoteinu v'lanu*" - not only on behalf of our forefathers, but on our behalf as well.<sup>91</sup>

The concluding b'racha, recited over the second cup, blesses G-d- "*asher ga'alanu v'ga'al et avoteinu*" - as the one who redeemed us and our forefathers. The b'racha repeats the redemption verb (*ga'al*) in order to distinguish between the ancient and contemporary redemptions. Interestingly, the conclusion mentions our redemption before that of our ancestors. In the course of the seder, y'tziat Mitzrayim becomes so vividly contemporary that it eventually eclipses its historical antecedent.

## Celebration and Reflection

The second cup completes our experiential commemoration and ushers in shulchan aruch- the celebratory feast. The celebration is obviously enhanced by our feeling of personal emancipation. After the meal we reflect on the night's events and return to contemporary reality with a new appreciation of G-d's role within it.

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<sup>90</sup> See Tosefta (P'sachim 10:6) where Beit Shammai and Beit Hillel debate when best to read "*B'tzeit Yisrael*." Both assume the need to say it while personally experiencing the exodus.

<sup>91</sup> Note, also, the continued stress on the chiyuv by Rabbi Gamliel- '*lo yatza y'dei chovato*', *Bechol dor vador chayav..*, and the transition to Hallel- '*l'fichach anachnu chayavim...*'