

## Understanding the Haggadah

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\*The following ideas are based on *shiurim* that I have heard from my Rebbi, Rav Aharon Kahn *lc"v* over the years.

If you are standing too close to an oil painting, and have difficulty discerning the composition, you should probably take a step back. If you are having trouble understanding why the *Haggadah* is a cholent of seemingly disparate texts and concepts, you should probably do the same.

I find that most commentaries to the *Haggadah* serve to clarify isolated points within the *Haggadah*, but few provide the necessary birds eye view, which allows us to appreciate the broader message. As a general rule, problems can typically be dealt with most effectively by understanding the background, structure and purpose of that in question.

The most important question to ask about the *Haggadah*, is regarding its purpose. What is the purpose of the *Haggadah*? What are we trying to accomplish?

The essential purpose of the *Haggadah* in general, and the *maggid* section in particular, is to provide us with a formal structure through which to properly fulfill the *mitzvah* of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim* – telling over the story of the exodus from Egypt. We are commanded in the Torah, to not only verbally remember the exodus daily, but on the night of the fifteenth on *Nissan* specifically, to relate the broader story in greater detail. Our *Haggadah* is the formal composition through which the Jewish People have fulfilled this commandment for centuries.

The purpose and value of this ancient sacred formulation being clear, I would like to point out some of its idiosyncrasies, in order to better appreciate the tapestry that lies before us at the *seder*. Imagine that you are a five year old child attending the *seder*, or a *baal teshuvah* who has been to many *Shabbos* meals, but has yet to experience the *Pesach seder*. The freshness and simplicity of this approach, will enable us to take a fresh look at the *Haggadah* and better understand what it is trying to express.

### I. Curiosities of the *seder*

#### *Kadeish*

The first thing that the *seder* presents us with, is not at all surprising: *kiddush*. This is something with which every religious Jew is familiar, as we perform this rite every *Shabbos* and *Yom Tov* eve. The night of the *seder*, however, the *kiddush* takes on added significance as it is the first of four required cups of wine expressing our freedom. Be that as it may, this point is almost<sup>1</sup> entirely absent to the eyes of the onlooker.

#### *Urchatz – Karpas*

Following the *kiddush*, the *Haggadah* again presents us with something familiar enough, the ritual washing of the hands. While normally, we expect to partake of the *chalah* after washing, the night of the *seder*, we anxiously anticipate to eat the *matzah*. However, we are somewhat disappointed when instead, we are given a tiny sliver of celery, parsley or potato, to dip in salt water instead. Our five year old is willing to go along with this exercise, because you get to dip it in salt water, and that is real fun; nonetheless, the *matzah* will have to wait. At this point, our curiosity is stirred. Why did we not make the blessing and eat the *matzah*?

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1. The manner in which the wine is drunk is unusual, in that one is required to lean. Already, before anything else has begun, we notice that the chairs have been set up in a manner enabling those present to lean while they eat and drink. A Sefardi friend pointed out to me that they set up mattresses on the floor and eat off of a low table, an even more shocking picture.

### Yachatz

We are not surprised when the leader of the *seder* proceeds to pick up one of the *matzos* (although we are curious why he picked the middle one), because we are expecting to hear the blessing recited upon eating *matzah*. Things take a turn for the worse, however, when, in a sudden fit of rage, the *seder* leader proceeds to karate chop the *matzah* in two. The larger part he deposits in a bag, which he puts away (and is perhaps snatched moments later by our older brother or sister), and the remainder he returns to its original place between the other two *matzos* at the table. He then declares, “This is the bread of affliction which our fathers ate in the land of Egypt. All who are hungry come and eat, all who need come and take part in the *pesach*...” Being that it is probably around nine o’clock at night, and we have not eaten anything for many hours, we quietly remind the *seder* leader that, um, we, are in fact hungry... and we could use some food!

### Maggid

At which point, we are thoroughly shocked by what happens next. All the food is surreptitiously removed from the table. Now, the burnt egg and the dried out shank bone that has been sitting out at the table for several hours, didn’t look all that appetizing anyhow, but a spoonful or two of the *charoses* would have really hit the spot. At this point, the children at the *seder* are convinced, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that the old man has finally lost it. Which is why the children are then allowed to ask the fundamental question, “What in the world is going on?!” – more familiarly known as the *mah nishtanah*.

Since the curiosity of the children, and perhaps a few thinking adults, has been piqued, we have no choice but to respond. The *seder* leader lets the proverbial cat out of the bag and declares, “We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, but the Lord our God took us out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm.”

Okay, got it. Stories over. Let’s eat!

But he continues:

*“Had God not taken our fathers out of Egypt, then we, our children and grandchildren would still be enslaved to Pharaoh in Egypt. Even if we are all wise, and perceptive, experienced, and versed in Torah, it would still be our duty to tell about the exodus from Egypt.”* In fact, *“The more one talks about the Exodus, the more praiseworthy he is.”*

You know, I remember when Rabbi Akiva made his *seder*, *“It happened that Rabbis Eliezer, Joshua, Elazar ben Azariah, Akiva and Tarfon were reclining at the seder table in Bnei Brak,”* they talked about the exodus the whole night! Their students even had to come inform them that it was time to say shema! Hey, you know, speaking about the shema, Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah, wasn’t sure if we should say the third paragraph at night, you know, the paragraph that talks about the exodus, until Ben Zoma explained it to him like this...

Like an old man, with so many years of life experience and stories, the *seder* leader seems to tangent into random stories about Rabbis having *sedarim*. He also informs us of a discussion revolving around the *mitzvah* to remember the exodus daily, and whether or not it applies at night – something which has absolutely nothing to do with the *seder*, nor the *mitzvah* of telling over the story of the exodus on the night of the fifteenth! Then he tells us about someone else’s four sons and what one should respond to their questions. He even starts mumbling something about having a *seder* two weeks ago on *rosh chodesh*, but he couldn’t because the *mitzvah* is specifically tonight (and we are

starting to wish that we had had the *seder* two weeks ago, while he was still at work!).

Finally, he returns to the story of the exodus. About fifteen minutes ago, he had told us that we were slaves in Egypt and God took us out. This time, instead of telling us about the ten plagues or the sea splitting, he begins the story with Terach, the father of Abraham, informing us that he worshipped idols.

That is a bummer.

So what?!

Anyway, he had a great-grandson named Jacob, who ended up in Egypt and his grandchildren ended up slaves to Pharaoh.

Oh.

At this point, we feel that at least we understand what's going on. The *seder* leader is now relating the story of the exodus, he just wanted to give us some background. We're just a little mad at him for his earlier tangents – but maybe it was the wine.

What is strange is the way in which he tells the story. He could have said it in his own words, or maybe read from the sections of the *Torah* that speak about the Jews' lives in Egypt and the redemption (you know, like the first half of the book of *Shmos*!). Instead, he reads a verse from the paragraph that a farmer would recite upon bringing his first fruits to the Temple in Jerusalem:

*“An Aramean sought to destroy my father, however, he went down to Egypt and sojourned there few in number and there he became a great, mighty, and numerous nation...”*

He then takes each phrase in the verse and explains what it hints to... usually by quoting a verse from *Shmos* where the story is actually related explicitly! Why doesn't he just read from the book of *Shmos* then?!

He finishes the story, including a list of all the miracles on the sea, we get to sing *dayeinu* and he decides to point out, and explain the symbolism of the various items on the table. The bone represents the *korban pesach*. The *matzah* represents the bread that didn't have time to rise when God took the Jews out of Egypt (which is confusing, because at the beginning of the *seder* he told us we ate it when we were slaves!), and the *maror* represents the bitter slavery.

Okay, thanks for sharing.

Anything else?

Yeah, just one more thing. In case you were wondering, every generation has an obligation to see itself as if it had personally left Egypt. I guess the *seder* leader takes that very seriously, because the next thing we know, he's singing *hallel*, praising God for taking him out of Egypt.

With that, he makes another blessing on his wine, and drinks cup number two.

*Rochtzah etc.*

We wash again, and this time, we actually eat the *matzah* and the *maror* and the meal begins.

Fairly simple and straightforward, no?

## II. What we need to understand

I would like to understand the basics of the seder. As the simple son asks, “Huh?” The *Haggadah* is supposed to be the official formulation of the story of the exodus from Egypt. If we were making the *Haggadah*, if we had been in charge of formulating the guidelines for proper fulfillment of this *mitzvah* – is this how we would have done it?! I imagine that we would have either instructed people to relate the story in their own words, or alternatively referred them to the appropriate passages in *Shmos* where the official story is related by Hashem Himself! However, in the *Haggadah*, we find the following structure:

- (1) Weird behaviors.
- (2) Old man rambling section.
- (3) Story told in “right hand scratching left ear” manner.
- (4) Randomly explaining the centerpiece.
- (5) *Hallel*.

Among the many question we ought to have at this point are:

Why do we have a series of bizarre activities at the beginning?

After the child recites the *mah nishtanah*, we answer that we were slaves and God took us out. Isn't that all we need to say? Did we thereby fulfill our obligation? What do we need the rest of the *Haggadah* for?

Why do we have a complete tangent to stories about how *gedolim* discussed the story?

Why do we talk about the laws of remembering the exodus daily?

Why do we talk about the four sons?

Who cares that you thought you could have had the *seder* two weeks ago. So you were wrong, get over it!

Why do we start the story of the exodus all over again, but this time going all the way back to the father of Abraham?

Why do we have to “*darshun* (extrapolate phrase by phrase)” the passage that a farmer declares upon bringing his first fruit to the Temple in order to tell the story of the exodus? Why don't we just tell over the story in our own words (in five minutes or less)? If you insist on reading from an official text, so read through the first few sections of *sefer Shmos*!

Why do we mention all the items on the table and explain their symbolism? Is that part of the story?

What's going on at the end that we state the need to see ourselves as personally leaving Egypt?

Why are we singing *hallel*? Isn't that something we reserve for *davening*?

There is so much going on at the *seder*, can we make sense out of it all?

As we mentioned above, the purpose of the *Haggadah* is to provide us with a structure through which to fulfill the *mitzvah* of telling over the story of the exodus. So we should begin by understanding what exactly is required of us to fulfill this obligation. Perhaps this will shed some light on the structure of the *Haggadah*.

### III. The Structure of the *Haggadah* Based on the *Halachah*

The Rambam (*Chomeitz Umatzah* 7) details succinctly the necessary requirements to properly fulfill the *mitzvah* of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim* – relating the story of the exodus:

#### *What*

The basic *mitzvah* is to relate the miracles and wonders that occurred to our ancestors in Egypt. The more he expands in this regard, the more praiseworthy he is.

#### *When*

On the night of the fifteenth of *Nissan*, when the (*pesach*) *matzah* and *maror* are before you.

#### *Who*

Even the greatest sage, even if no children are present, must relate the story, even to himself.

#### *How*

One must relate the story to every child appropriately, according to the manner in which he will understand and appreciate it.

One must do unusual things on this night in order to arouse the curiosity of the children, to the point that they ask why this night is different from all other nights of the year, and you must thereby respond by relating what occurred.

Even if there is no child to ask a question, even the greatest sage must ask, even of himself, if necessary, why this night is so different.

One must relate the story of the exodus by beginning with the degradation of the Jews and complete it with their praise. How do we accomplish that? Both by beginning with the fact that our ancestors were idolators and completing the story that God drew us close to the true religion, as well as by beginning with the fact that we were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, including all the evil that was done to us, and completing the story with the miracles and wonders that occurred to us and our being chosen. This is accomplished by extrapolating phrase by phrase from the section of the *Torah* of *aramy oved avi*. The more one extrapolates, the more praiseworthy he is.

One must also mention three things to fulfill his obligation: *Pesach*, *matzah* and *maror*, and relate their symbolism.

All of the above is called *haggadah*.

Every generation, an individual must present himself as leaving the slavery of Egypt at this very moment. Therefore, when an individual eats and drinks on this night, he must do so leaning, in a manner of freedom, and must drink four cups of wine.

#### IV. Understanding the Basic Obligation

##### *Question and answer*

One wonders why we must do strange things to arouse the curiosity of the children, and why is it so significant that each child be addressed in the manner appropriate to him? Why do we not simply direct the story at the lowest common denominator so that everyone will understand? Most surprising is the necessity of *mah nishtanah* according to the Rambam. even if one is alone, he must *ask himself* the *mah nishtanah*!

What emerges from these *halachos* is that the *mitzvah* to tell over the story of the exodus is a *mitzvah* of education. The *haggadah* is **not** a formal recital of an ancient incantation! Reciting the words alone would be to completely miss the point. The reason for the arousal of curiosity, the necessity to address each child in his own way, and the stress on even one alone asking himself the *mah nishtanah*, is because this *mitzvah* is one of education.

Rav Yaakov Weinberg *zt"l* asked why the Torah is compared to water. *Chazal* explain that this indicates that one must be humble in order to acquire Torah. Just like water flows from a higher location to a lower, so too if one makes himself “low”, the Torah will be able to come to him. However, Rav Yaakov Weinberg *zt"l* saw another message as well, related to education:

How many cups of water is one *supposed* to drink daily?

Everyone knows, that every doctor will tell you to drink eight cups of water a day. How many people drink eight cups of water a day? Few, if any. Do you know why so few people drink eight cups a day? Because to drink water, you have to be thirsty. If you are not thirsty, you will not drink.

The job of a teacher in general, and a Torah teacher in particular, is to create thirst for the Torah. If the students are thirsty, they will drink on their own. When one is curious, he searches for explanations, and appreciates the answer. If a child is not curious, there is no question, and little interest, if any. Certainly, the information will not leave a lasting impression.

This is the critical importance of creating curiosity and questions to properly fulfill the *mitzvah* of telling over the story of the exodus. This begins to explain the structure of the *Haggadah*.

##### *The before and after picture*

In addition to the necessary question and answer format that the *haggadah* must have, the Rambam also adds another element that one might label the “before and after picture”.

Almost invariably, every ad one sees for a diet regimen comes along with the picture of success – a before and after image. The benefit of this presentation is for the viewer to fully appreciate the effects of the diet. If all one saw was the resulting skinny individual, he would not fully appreciate the value and effect of the diet.

Similarly, the Rambam instructs us to not merely relate the story, but to do so with a before and after picture. We must begin at the low point and finish the story with the high point. However, there is a Talmudic dispute exactly how to do this. One opinion is that the story should reflect the physical slavery and freedom, while the other opinion is that not merely the local physical freedom be related, but the broader picture of how this relates to the relationship between Hashem and the Jewish people. The story therefore must begin with Terach, the father of Avraham being an idolator and, for our purposes, end with the Jewish people being chosen by Hashem. The Rambam tells us to do both. So our *Haggadah* needs to be formatted in this manner as well.

After seeing the presentation of the Rambam, we can begin to understand the various elements that the *Haggadah* contains. We could now outline the *Haggadah* in the following manner:

- (1) Introduction involving unusual activities intended to arouse the curiosity of the children, followed by their question, *mah nishtanah*.
- (2) The answer to the *mah nishtanah* (*Avadim hayinu*). We already asked what we need the rest of the *Haggadah* for if we just told the story.
- (3) A section relating the various laws of the *mitzvah* to tell over the story of the exodus. Namely, that:
  - (a) There is a *mitzvah* to do this because God took us out.
  - (b) Even the greatest sage must tell the story, even to himself, if necessary.
  - (c) There are four sons, because the story must be individualized.
  - (d) The *mitzvah* is accomplished specifically on the night of the fifteenth of *Nissan*.
- (4) The actual story through the mention of our idolatrous beginnings, followed by the extrapolation of the section *aramy oveid avi* phrase by phrase.
- (5) Mentioning the *pesach*, *matzah* and *maror* and their symbolism.
- (6) Stating the *halachah* that one is required to view himself as personally having left the slavery of Egypt.
- (7) Reciting the first part of the *hallel*.

## V. Explaining the Structure of the Haggadah

Let's go back to the *Haggadah* and see if we can explain it a little better.

The first unusual occurrence was *karpas*. Perhaps it is sufficient to explain it as a way to arouse the curiosity of the children, the purpose for which was explained above.

### *Lechem Oni*

Next is *yachatz*, when the middle *matzah* is broken. What is the purpose of this activity?

On the most basic level, we have just created the *afikoman*, which gives the children something to do, namely hide it and ransom it.

However, it is worth pointing out that *matzah* is referred to in the Torah as *lechem oni*. The word *oni* has three possible translations, and the term *lechem oni* is therefore explained by *chazal* in three ways:

- (a) *Oni* means suffering. This is the bread of our affliction/suffering. This is what we actually say in the *Haggadah* after we break the *matzah*. This is the “bread of affliction” that our ancestors ate while suffering through slavery in Egypt.
- (b) *Oni* means *Uhni*, a pauper. A pauper is forced to ration his bread, not knowing where his next meal will come from or if there will even be one. Therefore, we express this idea in our *matzah* by rationing it, and putting away the larger part for later.
- (c) *Oni* means response. This is the bread that we “answer a lot of words upon”. We are supposed to say the *Haggadah* on the *matzah*, meaning, while the *matzah* is visible before us. Therefore, for most of *maggid*, we are instructed to uncover the broken *matzah*.

### *The halachah section*

After the *seder* leader has created the proper *lechem oni*, he removes all the food (the *seder* plate) from the table. The moment that the meal would typically begin, it inexplicably seems to end. This is to create the curiosity critical to the educational nature of the *Haggadah*. Therefore, the very next part of the *Haggadah* is the *mah nishtanah*, because the child is supposed to be seriously curious and ask questions by this point.

The answer to his questions would appear to be found in the very next paragraph: *avadim hayinu*, wherein we state that this is all because we were slaves in Egypt and Hashem redeemed us.

Did we fulfill the *mitzvah* of telling over the story by answering the *mah nishtanah*? First of all, that was not much of a story, there were no specifics, but if you insist, I suppose we covered the basic point. Second, what is the rest of the *Haggadah* for? Third, what happened to beginning the story with the broad picture of our beginnings as idolators? We made no mention of that! The truth is, we do mention the degradation of idolatry later in the *Haggadah* – but why don't we mention the degradations in chronological order? Begin that our ancestors were idolators, we ended up in Egypt as slaves, God took us out with miracles and gave us the true religion. How do we explain the convoluted structure of the *Haggadah*?



Perhaps the “answer” to *mah nishtanah*, is actually not an answer at all. When we say, “We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, but the Lord our God took us out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm”, it is merely the necessary introduction to the “*halachah* section”. We are simply stating that there is a *mitzvah* to tell the story because we were slaves and God took us out. This is not the actual relating of the story. In fact, this seems clear from the continuation of that statement:

*We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, but the Lord our God took us out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Had God not taken our fathers out of Egypt, then we, our children and grandchildren would still be enslaved to Pharaoh in Egypt. Even if we all were wise, and perceptive, experienced, and versed in Torah, it would still be our duty to tell about the Exodus from Egypt. The more one talks about the Exodus, the more praise he deserves.*

Essentially, this statement is one of *halachah*. One is obligated to tell over this story no matter how well versed he already is. Furthermore, the more one elaborates, the greater the *mitzvah*.

This statement is then followed by a proof. We prove *both* our statements that even the greatest sage must tell the story and also that the more one expands the story the more praiseworthy he is, with a story about the greatest of the sages who spent the whole night involved in “the story”.

*It happened that Rabbis Eliezer, Joshua, Elazar ben Azariah, Akiva and Tarfon were reclining at the seder table in Bnei Brak. They spent the whole night discussing the Exodus until their students came and said to them: “Rabbis, it is time for the recitation of the morning Shema.”*

Despite the fact that these individuals were the greatest sages of their generation, they nonetheless related the story to one another to the extent that they completely lost themselves and were unaware of the impending sunrise.

This could explain the next story in the *Haggadah* as well. The next paragraph of the *Haggadah* relates how Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah finally understood that one has a daily *mitzvah* to remember the exodus even at night. One wonders how this story ended up in the *Haggadah*, after all, the *mitzvah* of remembering the exodus daily has nothing to do with the *mitzvah* to tell over the story on the fifteenth. These are two different *mitzvos*, so why mention this here?

If our structure is correct, then it may be here to demonstrate how far the praiseworthy expansion of the story can go. Anything that is a consequence of the exodus is fair game as a fulfillment of broadening our discussion. In fact, according to some versions of the *Haggadah*, this was one of the things discussed at the previously mentioned *seder* in Bnei Brak!

If this is correct, the actual story that is related in the *next* section of the *Haggadah* is, in fact, bookended with degradation and praise, and it is in chronological order, as we suggested it logically should be. After the child asks the *mah nishtanah*, we relate the *halachos* of telling over the story. Namely, that everyone is obligated, that the more the better, every child must be taught appropriately, and that it can only be accomplished on the night of the fifteenth. After we finish relating the *halachos*, the body of the *maggid* section of the *Haggadah* begins with, “Originally our ancestors were idolators” and culminates with the miracles of the exodus, which may well be the praise, or the “after picture” according to both degradations, as the implication of the exodus depends on your focus, but the historical occurrence was the same according to everyone.

The story is now in chronological order. We first mention that we were idolators, followed by the phrase by phrase extrapolation of *aramy oveid avi*, which states that we descended to Egypt where we were enslaved. Then we relate the miracles that occurred as God took us out.

Once we have completed relating the story, we follow the *halachah* that to properly fulfill *telling over the story*, we also have to point out and explain the symbolism of the items on the table: *pesach*, *matzah* and *maror*.

Finally, the *seder* leader, hopefully, has successfully depicted the exodus in such a way that we feel we can picture it in our minds eye. In fact, he states that we are to view ourselves as personally having left Egypt.

This statement is followed by the *Hallel*. You might have noticed that there is no mention of *hallel* in the presentation of the Rambam regarding the laws of relating of the story of the exodus. The reason seems obvious – *hallel* is not part of the story, it is the result of feeling the reality of the story, as if you have just experienced it yourself. The quality of the *hallel* is in direct proportion to the quality of the relating of the story. *Hallel* is an emotional response to the perception that Hashem just redeemed us from Egyptian bondage.

The outline of the *Haggadah* thus appears as follows:

- I. *Kiddush*.
- II. Activities to arouse the curiosity of the children.
  - A. *Karpas* – dipping a vegetable in salt water.
  - B. *Yachatz* – While being necessary in its own right, it also arouses the curiosity of the children, as we mentioned.
  - C. Removing the *seder* plate.
- III. The child asks *mah nishtanah*.
- IV. Relating the *halachos* of telling over the story:
  - A. Even the greatest of the sages must relate the story.
  - B. The more he expands the story the greater the *mitzvah*.
    1. A story proving the first two points.
    2. A story about remembering the exodus daily, and a proof that we should remember it at night in addition to the day. We suggested this demonstrates how far our expansion can go.
  - C. The four sons – every child must be told the story in a way that he will appreciate. In a word: education.
  - D. *Yachol mirosh chodesh* – The *mitzvah* can only be fulfilled on the night of the fifteenth.
- V. The story itself:
  - A. *Mitchilah ovdei avodah zara* – originally our ancestors were idolators.
  - B. *Aramy oveid avi* – the extrapolation, phrase by phrase, of the story from the passage that a farmer would recite upon bringing his first fruits of the season to the Temple.
- VI. Pointing out the three items on the table and explaining their symbolism.
  - A. *Pesach*
  - B. *Matzah*
  - C. *Maror*

VII. Stating the result that we should be feeling in our bones by now; the feeling that we personally left Egypt.

VIII. *Hallel* – expressing our joy and thanksgiving to God for taking ME out of Egypt.

## VI. Why?

So far, we have only dealt with **what** the structure is. What remains is to explain **why** the *Haggadah* should be structured this way, and, to a degree, its significance.

*The structure of the Haggadah is based on a pasuk*

The Malbim points out that the structure of the *Haggadah* is patterned after the verse that is the source of the *mitzvah*:

וְהִגַּדְתָּ לְבִנְךָ, בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא לֵאמֹר: בְּעֶבְרַת זֶה עָשָׂה יְיָ לִי, בְּצֵאתִי מִמִּצְרָיִם:

*And you shall relate to your son on that day saying: For this, God did for me when I left Egypt:*

**And you shall relate** – Corresponding to this phrase, we state the laws of the telling over (*haggadah*) of the story.

**to your son** – Based on this phrase, we point out that each child must be addressed in his own way (the four sons).

**on that day** – Correspondingly, we point out that the *mitzvah* is specifically on the night of the fifteenth.

**saying** – We then relate the story itself by extrapolation from the phrases of *aramy*.

**For this** – The word, “*this*” always indicates the presence of something that can be identified directly and pointed to.

*For this* refers to the three items that we must identify and explain their symbolism (*pesach*, *matzah* and *maror*).

**God did for me** – We then mention that one must view himself as personally having been freed from the slavery of Egypt.

**when I left Egypt** – This refers to *hallel* as the second paragraph of *hallel* begins almost identically, “*When Bnei Yisroel left Egypt...*”.

According to the Malbim, the entire structure of the *Haggadah* is found in the verse that commands its recital.

*The necessity for the Haggadah to address every child and built in marbeh*

The beautiful explanation of the Malbim notwithstanding, one nonetheless wonders why we get involved with the *halachos* of who is obligated, how to properly relate the story and when, at the time when we are supposed to be *doing* it! It is quite anomalous that we should integrate the study of the laws into the actual performance of the *mitzvah*, and our doing so therefore begs explanation.

Furthermore, it is even more unnerving that one of the *halachos* mentioned therein has nothing to do with the “who, how or when” of telling over the story; namely Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah’s statement regarding how he was convinced that one should remember the exodus on a daily basis even at night. As we mentioned above there are two

distinct *mitzvos* regarding remembering the exodus. One applies every day of the year, namely *zechiras yetzias Mitzrayim*, remembering the exodus, and the other applies solely on the 15th of Nissan, namely to relate the story of the exodus, *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim*. Rabbi Elazar's *halachah* is regarding the daily *mitzvah*, not the one unique to the *seder* night. Why was this included in the official Haggadah of Pesach?

The *halachah* section of the Haggadah points out that not only is there a *mitzvah* to tell over the story, but whomever expands on it is praiseworthy. Apparently, there is a requirement to relate the basic story, but one can broaden the story and fulfill the *mitzvah* to a greater degree. One wonders how far this expansion goes. Is there a limit to this expansion? Is the relating of the story limited to the story of the exodus itself? What about consequences, both direct and indirect? If we discuss the ultimate purpose of the exodus, namely the giving of the Torah, do we fulfill the *mitzvah* to a greater degree? What about the content of the Torah, its *halachos*? What about the *halachos* of the resulting *mitzvah* to relate the story? Is it possible that through a discussion of the relevant laws of relating the story that we fulfill the *mitzvah* to a greater degree than the story alone?

In fact, the response to the wise son's question, as presented in the Haggadah, is:

*And you shall also tell him, for example, the laws of the pesach: one may not eat anything after the paschal lamb.*

While there is some question as to whence the author of the Haggadah derived this answer, we nonetheless see that in addition to the relating of the basic story to the wise son, one should also tell him *halachos*. The implication is that, for the wise son, the relating of *halachos* is at least a fulfillment of expanding the story, if not a necessary element of the presentation of the story itself. For the other children, however, the relating of *halachos* would appear unnecessary, and potentially even inappropriate.

Based on this, we could suggest two reasons for the "*halachah* section" of the Haggadah:

While modern secular media is produced to appeal to the lowest common denominator of viewership, to maximize revenue, the Haggadah, *lehavdil*, was produced to enable each individual of every family to fulfill the obligation of relating the story of the exodus. Therefore, it had to be composed in a manner that would allow even the wisest child to be properly educated. Therefore, the Haggadah was written with the wise son in mind, not only the others. Our Haggadah therefore includes the answer to the wise son, which requires *halachos* in addition to the story of the exodus.

This is not necessarily to the detriment of the other children, however, because, at the very least, there is an expansion of the story as well, with the presentation of the *halachos*. It would appear that there is a built in "expansion" to the story that every Jew fulfills by learning the *halachos* of relating the story.

For these two reasons, namely that the Haggadah was written with the wise son in mind, and even without a wise son, learning the laws is at the very least a praiseworthy expansion of the story, the Haggadah includes a "*halachah* section" at the beginning of *maggid*.

It is therefore fascinating that the statement of Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah regarding the daily *mitzvah* of remembering the exodus is included in this section. It would appear that the discussion regarding that *mitzvah* is also a fulfillment of the *mitzvah* to relate the story of the exodus! In fact, some *rishonim* understood Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah to actually have said this the night that he was having *seder* in Bnei Brak with Rabbi Akiva and the other *gedolim*. If that is the case, then the Haggadah itself is testifying that his statement is a fulfillment of relating the story. One wonders then, how far the expansion can go.

*Aramy*

We have thusfar explained the unusual behaviors that begin the *Haggadah*, as well as the following *halachah* section. What remains to be explained is why we relate the story in the backwards manner of extrapolating *aramy oveid avi* phrase by phrase. Why don't we simply read the appropriate sections from *Shmos* which is where we end up anyway to explain *aramy*!

There are two points that help to provide explanation for this approach. The first of which is the absence of any reference to the ultimate purpose of the exodus, namely the giving of the Torah, and the second relates to the emotional component of the *Haggadah*, the *hallel*.

*Bringing the purpose back to the story with aramy*

Even according to the opinion that the relating of the story of the exodus must begin with the fact that we were once idolators, the story does not end with the commandment of *mitzvos* by Hashem on Sinai. Apparently, the choice of the Children of Israel by Hashem as His nation and their commitment to Him is sufficient (the poetic *dayeinu* that mentions many later accomplishments, was a much later addition to the *Haggadah*). In fact, our story ends primarily on the night of the actual exodus. While it certainly appears strange that, to an extent, the exodus is taken out of context, being that the purpose of the exodus is absent from our story, there is good reason for it.

The last statement we make before we sing *hallel*, is that we are obligated to view ourselves as having been personally freed from Egyptian bondage. We are therefore trying very hard to relive that experience the best we can. It is probably for this reason that we end our story with the occurrences of the night of the fifteenth of Nissan. We synchronize ourselves with that moment in history, and for as long as we can muster, transport ourselves to ancient Egypt. We feel like we are there.

While serving as a mightily successful ploy, it nonetheless comes with the sacrifice of the true culmination of the exodus, namely, the Sinai experience and the giving of the Torah. For this reason, perhaps, we must *schlep* the Torah back into the *seder*.

Instead of a simple reading of the related verses from the Torah that describe the story of the exodus in detail, we *darshun* the story, explaining it phrase by phrase. We read the verses that a farmer would recite upon bringing his first fruits of the year to the Temple in Jerusalem, which relate that he used to be a slave in Egypt, was redeemed by Hashem, and given the land of Israel, enabling him to have his own fields and produce these first fruits. In cryptic shorthand, there are references to various elements of the slavery and redemption in his recital that we expand on and explain by pointing out the corresponding verses in *Shmos* that relate the story in detail. Why are we doing this?

Instead of reading the verses, we relate the story by learning Torah. If you closed your eyes at this part of the *seder*, you would think you were in the study hall listening to a passage from the Talmud! Perhaps that is exactly the point – this was the purpose of the exodus, for the Torah – so we relate the story through learning Torah.

*Aramy as a function of hallel*

Even if we accept the above suggestion, that we want to bring the Torah back into the story, why do we do that through the passage of *aramy*? Is there something unique about *aramy* that it was chosen as the means through which to

relate the story of the exodus?

Rav Soloveitchik would often provide the following explanation. When a farmer would fulfill his *mitzvah* of bringing his first fruits of the seven species of Israel to the Temple, he also had a *mitzvah* to recite the passage of *aramy oveid avi*. The obvious purpose of his recital of this passage, was to arouse his sense of gratitude to Hashem. Only by appreciating the blood, sweat and tears of history, can he truly appreciate how special it is to be able to personally produce these fruits independently, in his own land, and merit to fulfill the *mitzvah* of bringing them to the Temple. His recital of *aramy* is a *mitzvah* of *hakaras hatov* – recognizing favors from others, in this case, from Hashem.

Why do we utilize the passage of thanksgiving for the expression of the story of the exodus?

One part of the *Haggadah* that the Rambam does not mention in his requirements to fulfill the *mitzvah* of relating the story is *hallel*. In chapter 7 of the Laws of *chomeitz umatzah*, he makes no mention of *hallel*. Yet, this is the last thing we do before we begin the meal. Why did the Rambam not mention it?

The answer is that *hallel* is not part of the relating of the story of the exodus. *Hallel* is the result of telling the story so well that one sees himself as having personally been redeemed by Hashem from Egyptian bondage. *Hallel* is an emotional reaction; it is those present at the *seder* spontaneously bursting out in song. This is the goal of the *mitzvah* to relate the story of the exodus. The whole story is supposed to end in a song of thanksgiving to Hashem.

That being the case, there is no better passage with which to relate the story, in the manner of real *limud haTorah* – the authentic style of learning Torah – than the passage of thanksgiving, namely *aramy oveid avi*. Utilizing the passage of thanksgiving, we extrapolate all the details of the exodus so clearly that we feel we were there, and bring ourselves to an acute sense of thanksgiving to Hashem for redeeming us on this very night.

May we all merit to fulfill the *mitzvah* of telling over the story of the exodus in all its details and experience the emotional rush of true thanksgiving with a heart-felt *hallel*.

Next year in Jerusalem! *Chag kasher vesomeach*.