

Haggadah Discussions for the Family: A Collection from Yeshiva University's Community Kollelim

An Introduction to Maggid

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If we were in the position to write our own text for *Maggid*, we would probably not produce something remotely similar to what we have before us in our Haggadah text. As we know, the primary goal of this portion of the Seder is to fulfill the biblical commandment (Exodus 13:8) of *sippur yetziat Mitzrayim*, telling over the story of how our ancestors left Egypt. In excerpting various works from our rich collection of Jewish literature, one would think that the primary text of this story, the Torah's own account of the Exodus, would be crucial. The beginning of Sefer Shemot until the conclusion of the Song at the Sea (15:21) would seem to be an obvious choice for inclusion in one's personalized Seder. Yet, looking at our Haggadah text, one is struck by the absence of this narrative. Even when one finds one of the handful of verses quoted from those chapters, they are never the central focus; instead, an elaboration of another, seemingly less relevant source.

To begin to explain this absence, we can suggest that a central part of the mitzvah of *sippur yetziat Mitzrayim* entails not only recalling the events of the Exodus, but also describing the lessons we can glean from this experience. While there is much truth to such an approach, that would only demonstrate why we should **additionally** include the other major ideas found in *Maggid* – having the primary Exodus narrative laid out in full beforehand, to set the stage for an application of its lessons afterward, would seem most appropriate. Why then, are we not using the Seder as an opportunity to reacquaint ourselves with the very story we're celebrating?

We shouldn't be afraid to respond to this question with a very simple and intuitive answer: The Seder takes long enough. Even as a singular focus, and certainly if combined with the other aims of the Haggadah, the Shemot narrative would make *Maggid* dreadfully drawn-out and time consuming.

Such a concern does not need to merely stem from a selfish desire to progress to the meal (though this too can be justified; see *Pesachim* 68b). Looking at *Maggid* from an educational perspective, it should be noted that keeping things short is not without precedent. The Gemara (*Berachot* 12b) describes how Chazal considered including all of Parshat Balak (Numbers 22:2-24:25) into the twice-daily reading of *Keriyat Shema*, refraining only because of the burden that such a lengthy requirement would impose. A *Maggid* that incorporates the entire Exodus narrative would leave us far too impatient to have a meaningful Seder, with the gains in material being largely offset by a loss of interest. Additionally, the mitzvot of *motzi-matzah*, *maror*, *afikoman*, Hallel and the remainder of the four cups still need to be completed, many within a limited time frame.

For this reason, the Haggadah is, in relative comparison to what it could be, rather short. While we are blessed with many options in choosing a Haggadah, many of which contain lengthy commentaries that make for a substantially thick book, it needs to be kept in mind that the actual *Maggid* text is a mere 2,300 words and could easily fit onto two sides of a page. That *Maggid*, in practice, is at times long and drawn out is a function of our own discussion and commentary, not the text itself. This is not to say that discussions at the Seder are unimportant; perhaps that our short text facilitates such conversation was itself an intention of its compiler. Nevertheless, it needs to be clear to us that *Maggid's* brevity as a whole, as well as the abridged format chosen for the Exodus narrative, is intentional.

This observation explains why we are not reading from Shemot, but it leaves us with a more glaring question: if, in fact, the Haggadah was made brief by design, how do we explain the inclusion of a number of passages that seem to have very little to do with the Exodus narrative? With a quick look at the Haggadah, one can't help but notice that the mitzvah of *sippur yetziat Mitzrayim* doesn't seem to begin until the passage *metchila ovdei avodah zarah hayu avoteinu* (in the beginning, our forefathers were idol worshippers)... (and even then, in a very general sense), with perhaps a brief mention of the Exodus narrative in *avadim hayinu* (we were slaves). This leaves us with a significant number of passages that, despite *Maggid's* terse nature, take up a large amount of our time. Why are they here?

Perhaps we could suggest that the author of the Haggadah intended that these first few paragraphs serve as a primer for the unique mitzvah that we are about to begin. Although it is already late as we begin our Sedarim, and a rush to fulfill the night's many mitzvot is somewhat warranted, the *Maggid* text was kept short so that we should do it well. The author of the Haggadah understood that for any mitzvah to be performed properly, a preliminary reflection on its nature and context can drive us to focus and experience it in the way G-d had intended us to.

As you read through this preliminary section of the Haggadah, notice that these paragraphs essentially serve as a gateway towards answering the who, what, how, and when of *sippur yetziat Mitzrayim*:

- From *Ma Nishtana* through *Ma'aseh BeRebbi Eliezer*, we will discuss **who** is obligated in this mitzvah: everyone, irrespective of scholarship and ability. Additionally, we

immediately see that there is to be an emphasis on keeping our children, the next link of our *mesorah* (tradition), involved in this crucial *mitzvah*.

- With *Amar Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya*, we will properly contextualize **what** *sippur yetziat Mitzrayim* is: giving ourselves an in-depth, comprehensive picture of the Exodus, which we can then reference back to in the course of our daily obligation to remember G-d's taking us out of Egypt.
- The paragraphs dealing with the four sons show us **how** *Sippur Yetzias Mitzrayim* is to be conducted: in a flexible manner which can speak to the needs of different children with different learning styles.
- *Yachol MeiRosh Chodesh* finally emphasizes for us **when** this once-in-a-year mitzvah is to be performed: on this evening, right now.

Ha Lachma Anya, presumably the beginning of Maggid, is somewhat of an exception to this framework. As already noted by Raavan and Abudraham, this paragraph was not a part of the original Haggadah text; the fact that it was written in Aramaic, the language of the Amoraim, shows that it was written later in Babylonia. Nevertheless, its inclusion into today's text demonstrates a more overarching principle: while this evening, a crucial part of the continuity of the Jewish people, is essentially a night of Torah study, we are not to neglect the other two foundations of our world (*Avot* 1:2): *gemilut chassadim*, acts of kindness, which are symbolized by our invitation for others to join us this evening and *avodah*, prayer, which is represented by a short request that this year be the last of our long and bitter exile.

Ma Nishtana

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What is different about this night? What sets it apart from all other nights? Before we begin the story, with the description of our servitude and redemption, we point out a number of interesting differences at the table on the Seder night. We eat only matzah, we eat bitter herbs, we dip more than we do when eating hors-d'oeuvres and we lean while eating.

Questions:

1. Are we really asking anything? All we seem to be doing is pointing out the discrepancies between this night and all others.
2. What makes these questions so central to the Seder? How is it that they effectively introduce the discussion of the Egypt experience?

Answer

The Abarbanel points out that carrying out the symbolic acts of the Seder creates a mood and sets up contrasts. The effect of the first two of these symbolic acts is to confer restrictions on the meal. The remaining two add to it.

The first two are: the commandment to eat only matzah (since this is Pesach and ordinary bread is forbidden), and the specific imperative to eat maror. These restrictions symbolize slavery. The matzah represents a poor man's bread. The maror represents the bitterness of our slavery. This introduces one theme.

We also have two unusual additions to our meal. These are: dipping food twice in the course of the meal, and leaning while eating. They each indicate or symbolize nobility, a seemingly contradictory idea.

The Ma Nishtana outlines these two themes in four simple points; they constantly recur throughout the story of the Haggadah, and provide its tension. On the one hand, we remember our slavery and our meal is tinged by bitter tastes or 'slave' foods. On the other hand, we dine like kings, at ease and with luxurious choice of food. This short paragraph is indeed an appropriate manner with which to begin the story of our exodus.

The Five Sages in Bnei Brak

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Questions

The Haggadah notes that all of the sages gathered in Bnei Brak. Why is their location significant? Furthermore, why did they gather in Bnei Brak, rather than Yavneh, the center of Jewish life in that generation?

Answer

Bnei Brak was Rabbi Akiva's residence; the Talmud¹¹ says, "Follow Rabbi Akiva's court to Bnei Brak." Yet, why did the sages specifically gather at Rabbi Akiva's residence? To address this question, we need to examine an additional source, from the Tosefta:¹²

Once, Rabban Gamliel and the sages were reclining in the house of Boethus, son of Zonin, in Lod, and they were involved in the laws of Pesach all night until the rooster's crowing. They opened the window, collected themselves and went to the study hall.

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.

Rabban Gamliel was the *nasi*, (president of the rabbinic court) during the generation of Rabbi Akiva and the sages mentioned in the Haggadah. It appears that he did not participate in the seder that they organized. Rather, he held his own seder, with other sages. The two *sedarim* extended through the night, but with entirely different content.

¹¹ *Sanhedrin* 32b.

¹² Tosefta, *Pesachim* 10.

At Rabbi Akiva's seder they were involved with 'the exodus from Egypt', as we do in our Haggadah, while the seder of Rabban Gamliel and the elders in Lod focused on the laws of Pesach. Perhaps this was why they separated; according to Rabban Gamliel it was appropriate to involve themselves in the laws of the korban Pesach even after the Beit haMikdash was destroyed, but according to R' Akiva and his colleagues the content of the seder was supposed to change. Due to this debate, there was no central seder in Yavneh, and instead they gathered in two separate *sedarim*.¹³

Some commentators to the Haggadah believe that the debate regarding the seder night was not only intellectual. Rabbi Akiva is known to have been a great supporter of Bar Kochba in his rebellion. Rabbi Yehudah Leib Maimon contends:¹⁴

There is room to hypothesize that the account of the seder in Bnei Brak is also a historical anecdote from some work of midrash or work of aggadah regarding the discussions and counsel of the great sages of Israel when they gathered in the center of nationalist zeal, Bnei Brak, the residence of Rabbi Akiva, to speak of the exodus from Egypt, the time of our freedom, and also to express ideas and arrange counsel in the matter of the movement for freedom which then enveloped the nation... All of them responded to Rabbi Akiva's call, and each came from his place to celebrate the holiday of freedom in Bnei Brak and to take counsel together in one secret seder, without the participation of their students, regarding the appropriate and necessary role of the sages of Israel in the zealous movement which waved the flag of rebellion against Rome.

יש מקום לשער כי גם הסיפור על המסיבה בבני-ברק הוא קטע היסטורי מתוך איזה מדרש או ספר אגדה, על מה שדיברו והתייעצו גדולי החכמים מישראל בשעה שנתאספו למקום המרכז של הקנאות הלאומית, לבני ברק, מקומו של ר' עקיבא, בכדי לספר ביציאת מצרים זמן חרותנו וגם לחוות דעה ולטכס עצה בדבר תנועת החרות שהקיפה אז את האומה כולה... כולם נענו להזמנתו של רבי עקיבא ובאו כל אחד ממקומו בכדי לחוג את חג החירות בבני ברק ולהתייעץ שם יחד במסיבה אחת ובחשאי, בלי השתתפות התלמידים, על היחס הראוי והצריך להיות מצד חכמי ישראל לתנועה הקנאית שהניפה את דגל המרד נגד רומא.

Within this view, the shift in focus on the seder night from the laws of the korban Pesach to the account of our exodus from Egypt invested the ancient story with renewed and current meaning. The exodus from Egypt is not simply a pleasant story to be re-told, and it is not only a tradition to transmit and protect. The story of the exodus from Egypt sets before us a challenge: Do we truly long for freedom? Do we, too, wish to emerge from slavery? On the night of his seder, Rabbi Akiva replied: Yes.

In truth, Rabbi Akiva's hope that Bar Kochba would be Mashiach was dashed. Despite the great will of those students to declare that the time for *Shema* of the morning had arrived, in the end it was revealed that the time to recite *Shema*, the time to sanctify the Name of Heaven,

¹³ Perhaps the split *sedarim* were due to the circumstances surrounding Rabban Gamliel's dismissal from his position as *nasi*; this requires further analysis.

¹⁴ *Chagim uMoadim* pg. 215.

had arrived – but the *Shema* R' Akiva recited, in the end,¹⁵ was *Shema* of the evening, of a great, dark night which descended upon the Jewish people with the collapse of the revolt.

Nevertheless, the sages established Rabbi Akiva's seder, and not that of Rabban Gamliel, as a model for all future generations. When we read the Haggadah, we encounter the exodus from Egypt at length, and very little regarding the laws of the korban Pesach. It appears that Rabbi Akiva's claim still resonates and the account of the exodus from Egypt must be heard even during the night.

It won't be long before we will open the door for Eliyahu haNavi. It is upon us to inquire of ourselves: Were we to encounter Eliyahu haNavi on the other side of the door, and were he to summon us to follow him to Jerusalem and redemption, would we be prepared to go? Is our involvement in the account of the exodus meaningful for us, or do the comfortable seats upon which we recline have a greater hold upon us than the demanding journey on which Rabbi Akiva would have us embark?

"Our masters! The time has arrived to recite the *Shema* of the morning."

The author wishes to thank R. Mordechai Torczyner for his assistance in translating this article.

Amar R. Elazar ben Azaryah

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In introducing the mitzvah of discussing the exodus on Pesach night, the Haggadah recounts Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah's frustration with his inability to convince others that we are instructed to speak of that exodus every night, throughout the year. "Behold, I am like seventy years old!" the sage declares, "and I could not convince the sages, until Ben Zoma provided exegetical support for this ruling."

The Talmud¹⁶ explains Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah's odd exclamation, "I am like seventy years old," in a separate context. Rabban Gamliel was deposed from his position as the head of the study hall, and the sages sought to appoint a teen-aged Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah in his place. Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah's wife protested to him that he lacked the white hair which would mark him as an established sage, worthy of respect. A miracle occurred and he grew eighteen rows of white hair, which made him appear "like seventy."

This approach to Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah's statement that he was "like seventy years" is troubling, for it appears to undermine Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah's own exclamation. What could be the logic in saying, "I am much younger than I appear, and yet I could not convince the sages of my position?"

¹⁵ *Berachot* 61b.

¹⁶ *Berachot* 27b-28a.

The Rambam¹⁷ offers a different explanation for Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah's age-related comment, saying, "He was young, and he would study and learn and read prodigiously, day and night, to the point that his strength was drained and he aged prematurely and he appeared like a man of seventy years. At first he aged willingly, as recorded in the Gemara."

Indeed, Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah believed that his own breed of dedication was more than an exemplary work ethic; approaching Torah with lesser commitment would be a sign of disrespect. Thus Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah declared¹⁸ that a student who pretends to amass great learning, but who actually fails to devote serious time and develops only a superficial understanding, will not live long.

Ben Zoma, like Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah, excelled in Torah study in his youth.¹⁹ The Talmud presents Ben Zoma as a paradigm of scholarship²⁰ and exegetic skill,²¹ and he journeys into the mystical studies of *pardes* with Rabbi Akiva, a sage far senior to him.²²

Ben Zoma is younger than Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah, and so the Rambam explains Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah's shock: "I worked and joined myself with scholars [to the extent that I aged prematurely], and yet I never merited to know the scriptural hint to the obligation to read this portion at night – until [this young student] Ben Zoma taught it!"

This passage belongs in our Haggadah for its technical exploration of the year-round mitzvah of discussing our departure from Egypt, but it also adds to our own seder experience. Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah and Ben Zoma present two different models of participant, the former a lifelong denizen of the study hall who exhausted himself in study from the earliest age, the latter a youthful prodigy who developed an idea which had long eluded his elder. We need both types of participants at our seder, the experienced and the fresh-eyed, the better to learn from each other and develop a stronger appreciation of the greatness of our exodus.

Baruch HaMakom Baruch Hu- Blessed is the Omnipresent, Blessed is He

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We have just finished learning through the passages that expound upon the nature of the mitzvah to study the Exodus story. In a previous section, we learned how the greatest of Torah Sages spent the entire night performing this mitzvah, presumably delving into the depths of the redemption. *Baruch HaMakom* is the introduction to the next section which delineates the "four sons." In this next section we are told that the Torah, in describing this

¹⁷ Commentary to Mishnah, *Berachot* 1.

¹⁸ *Avodah Zarah* 19b.

¹⁹ *Sanhedrin* 17b, *Horiyyot* 2b, and see Rabbi Ovadia of Bartenura to *Avot* 4:1.

²⁰ *Berachot* 57b, *Kiddushin* 49b.

²¹ *Sotah* 49a.

²² *Chagigah* 14b.

important mitzvah, doesn't address great sages or even scholars. Instead the Torah speaks of children.

The mitzvah of the night as described in *Parshat Bo* (Shemot 12:26-27) is to respond to the question of a child. Whether that question is a simple "what's this?" or a sincere request to know more or a sarcastic "what's *this*?" the Torah is interested in how we teach our children. Even those children who have spent weeks learning the Haggadah in school and are so overflowing with answers that they are inadvertently in the category of "אינו יודע לשאול", don't know to ask" are not left out. The Torah tells us that we are to teach to the child who does not ask as well (Shemot 13:8). Truly, if any night is a fulfillment of חנוך לנער על פי דרכו, teach a child based in his path (Mishlei 22:6), it is the Seder night.

It is in this context that the author of the Haggadah is suddenly inspired to give an impromptu *birkat HaTorah*, blessing for the Torah. Blessed is the *Makom* that gave the Torah to His nation, Israel. The author was not inspired to make this blessing of praise over the teachings of the great sages. Not even when Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah expressed such excitement at the novel exegesis of Ben Zoma. Only now, when the Torah tells us how we are to raise our children, yet at the same time does not ask them to become automatons. When the Torah demands we take heed as to the particular nature of the individual child and guides us on how to proceed do we make this blessing on the Torah.

Question: There are many blessings and several that are made on Torah learning. This is the only one that uses this particular name "*Makom*." What is the significance of this name?

Answer: The Midrash (*Bereishit Rabbah* 68:9) states that God is given the name *Makom* because He is the place where the world is. Perhaps the author of the Haggadah is using this name to illustrate the fact that God and His Torah can relate to anyone and everyone. Our own presence in this world is due to God giving us the space to be here. He gives us room to express ourselves, and He knows just exactly what we need to hear in order to grow. The author of the Haggadah is thanking God for this notion that allows us to turn to the Torah for advice in all situations.

Rasha: The Wicked Son

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Questions

At first glance, the question of the *rasha*, the wicked son, is not all-too different from that of the *chacham*. The *chacham* asks "What are the testimonies, statutes, and judgments that G-d has commanded *you*?" (Deuteronomy 6:20). The *rasha* asks "What is this service to *you*?" (Exodus 12:26). Yet, the *Ba'al HaHagaddah* (compiler of the Hagaddah) infers from the *rasha*'s question that the *rasha* excludes himself from the Jewish people, and thinks that the laws are for "you, and not to him." How does the *Ba'al HaHagaddah* know that the *rasha* intends to exclude himself from the Jewish people?

Additionally, if we look at the question of the *rasha* in *Parshat Bo*, we see that the Chumash gives a different answer than the one that the *Ba'al HaHaggadah* quotes. In Exodus Chapter 12, the Chumash answers the question of the *rasha* by saying, "You should say that this is the Pesach offering to G-d, who passed over the houses of the Jewish people in Egypt, when He plagued the Egyptians and saved our houses" (Exodus 12:27). Why does the *Ba'al HaHaggadah* not quote this answer, and instead answers "On account of this G-d has done for me when I left Egypt" (Exodus 13:8).

Answer

R' Yosef Dov Soloveitchik (of Brisk, *Beit HaLevi* to Exodus 12:8), focusing on the phrase "this service," explains that the *rasha* asks: why do the Jewish people have to bring a *korban Pesach* today? According to the *rasha's* reasoning, G-d told the Jewish people to bring the *korban Pesach* because G-d wanted the Jewish people to slaughter the god of the Egyptians, which was the sheep. In subsequent years, the people brought a *korban Pesach* to remind themselves that the gods of the Egyptians are worthless, and that everything is dependent on G-d.

The *rasha* thinks that the Jewish people only bring a *korban Pesach* when there are other people in the world who believe in *avodah zarah*. Nowadays, when people do not believe in *avodah zarah*, and when they certainly do not worship sheep, there is no reason why the Jewish people have to bring a *korban Pesach* to remind themselves that G-d runs the world. The *rasha* essentially asks, "Why are you doing *this* type of service to G-d; nowadays we should serve G-d in a way that fits with our current time period."

The *Beit HaLevi* continues that the Chumash states that the response to the *rasha's* question is "You should say that this is the Pesach offering to G-d, who passed over the houses of the Jewish people in Egypt, when He plagued the Egyptians and saved our houses." This is not a direct response to the *rasha*. Rather, after hearing this type of heresy, one must strengthen *oneself* and respond to oneself. Thus, the *Ba'al HaHaggadah* does not use this verse as the answer to the *rasha's* question.

The *Ba'al HaHaggadah* instead answers the *rasha* with the verse "On account of *this* G-d has done for me when I left Egypt," meaning that G-d took us out of Egypt *because* we did mitzvot—because we brought the *korban Pesach*. We tell the *rasha* that he has the opposite understanding of cause and effect. The *rasha* thinks that we bring the *korban* because G-d took us out from Egypt, but in reality, G-d took us out from Egypt because we kept the mitzvot. Effectively, we tell the *rasha* that we do mitzvot because G-d commands us to, and not because of our rational understanding of those mitzvot.

The Vilna Gaon, in his commentary on the Haggadah, suggests that the Chumash itself tells us to not answer the *rasha*. In the answers to the questions of the other children, the Chumash mentions the word "children." In the answer to the Rasha, the Chumash does not mention children. Instead, the verse states "You should say that this is the Pesach offering to G-d..."

Additionally, from the text of the Haggadah, it appears that we not address the *rasha* directly. The Vilna Gaon points out that that the Haggadah says "had he been there, he would not have

been redeemed.” If the father was speaking directly to the *rasha*, the father would have said “to me and not to *you*, had *you* been there, *you* would not have been redeemed.” Instead, the father tells the other children, “to me and not to *him*, had *he* been there, *he* would not have been redeemed.” Furthermore, the verse that the father answers the *rasha* with is the same as the one the father answers the child who does not know how to ask. Thus, we see that the father is actually speaking to other children in his house.

The above demonstrates that we do not address the *rasha* directly, and that we use his question to strengthen ourselves, and our other children. But at some level, the *rasha* does not totally exclude himself. After all, he is sitting at the Seder with the rest of his family! Why does the Haggadah not provide an answer to the *rasha* that will draw him back to his faith?

Perhaps, the answer that we give to the *rasha's* question actually is the best way to draw him back. There are three ways to respond to this type of question. One can send the *rasha* out of the house, respond directly, or respond indirectly. R' Aharon Kahn (RIETS Rosh Yeshiva) explains that by not sending the *rasha* out of the house, the father shows the *rasha* that he is not totally rejected. By not responding directly, the father shows that the *rasha's* question is not a valid question, and that the *rasha* must change his attitude from within. By snubbing the *rasha* and directing an answer to himself and to the other children, the father gives the *rasha* an opportunity to do *teshuvah*. By rejecting him, but keeping him at the table, the father shows the *rasha* that we reject what he stands for, but we wait with open arms for his return to Torah observance. By keeping the *rasha* seated at the Seder, we hope that he absorbs the message that we perform mitzvot because that is what G-d tells us to do, regardless of the reasons that we may attribute to those mitzvot.

Tam: The Innocent Son

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Tam, the third of the four sons, is typically understood to be the ‘simple’ son. Unlike the one who does not know how to ask, he has questions, even if they lack the sophistication of the *chacham's* (the wise son's) inquiries. He is positive and participatory unlike the tone of the wicked son who asks “What is this work *to you*?” On the surface, he is exactly what his description suggests, simple. He just wants to understand what is being celebrated. However, an alternative understanding of the Tam may challenge us to see him as more of an ideal or inspiration, rather than an adolescent seeking to grasp a basic concept.

Rabbi Yitzchak ben Moshe Arama (Spain c. 1420 – 1494) author of *Akeidat Yitzchak* (end of *Parshat Bo*), argues that the Tam takes his name from the root of *t'mimut* – innocence, rather than simplicity. Shlomo Hamelech writes: "תַּמִּית יְשָׁרִים תִּנְחַם וְסִלְףֵי בִּגְדֵי־יָם יְשָׁדֵם - The innocence of the upright leads them, but the distortion of the treacherous robs them." (Mishlei 11:3) Innocence or *t'mimut*, in this context, refers to a purity of ideals which motivates the virtuous behavior of the upright.

Commenting on this verse, the Malbim (Mishlei 11:3) contrasts the personalities of the *tzaddik* and the *yashar*. The *tzaddik* is a person whose desires pull him towards the pleasures of the physical world; he possesses these desires and fights to overcome them. His stature is achieved through his religious struggle to overcome his human nature. However, the *yashar* is wired differently; he has a predisposition towards the moral and the ethical. The *tzaddik* must struggle to habituate to a life of Torah and mitzvot, but the *yashar* simply assimilates these imperatives into a personality which is already inclined to live ethically. Accordingly, Shlomo HaMelech's "*yesharim*" behave with *t'mimut* – the innocence and purity that fuels an ethical human being.

R' Shimshon Raphael Hirsch understands this to be the way we are first introduced to Yaakov Avinu:

Jacob was an ish tam. A man who only knows one direction and gives himself up entirely to that is single-minded. He gave himself up, as Abraham's grandson and as Isaac's son, to fulfill his mission, and thereby become a yosheiv ohalim, a man who recognized and taught that the highest mission in life lies in achieving the knowledge and practice to be obtained in the sphere of ohalim, the homes of mankind. (Bereishit 25:27)

Yaakov is the paradigm of truth (*titen emet L'Yaakov*-give truth to Yaakov, Micha 7:20). According to R' Hirsch, he did not dwell in the tents because it was simple, but because it was what he believed was the truth. He was 'single-minded' in his pursuit of Hashem's highest mission.

The Tam's question should not be seen merely as practical. He asks, "*Ma zot* – what is this?" This direct yet ambiguous question mimics the words of Yaakov Avinu when he discovers that Lavan had tricked him into marrying Leah rather than Rachel: (Bereishit 29:25) "וַיְהִי בַבֹּקֶר וַיִּהְיֶה הוּא לְאֵה וַיֵּאמֶר אֵל לָבָן מַה זֶאת עָשִׂיתָ לִּי הֲלֹא כָרַחֵל עַבְדְּתִי עִמָּךְ וְלָמָּה רָמִיתָנִי – And it was in the morning and behold it was Leah! He said to Lavan, '**what is this** that you did to me?' Did I not work for Rachel? Why did you trick me?" Yaakov's reaction to Lavan is an ethical one. Yaakov asks, "Did we not have an agreement? Why would you trick someone who presents no harm to you at all?" Yaakov reacts, not out of anger or righteousness, but out of basic moral values. If I have not harmed you, why would you harm me?

This is the question of the *tam* as well. He does not ask, *what* is happening at the Seder; rather he seeks to understand the rationale behind it. For him, performing the seder night, as a mitzvah, is not sufficient. The *tam* seeks to embrace the night, not only religiously, but intellectually. How appropriate then, is the answer he receives. Although he is well-versed like the *chacham*, he is told simply that we commemorate this holiday because it is a reminder of G-d's saving us in our time of need. He is told that this is a mitzvah he can embrace wholeheartedly; it is a fulfillment of true *hakarat hatov* for a miracle like no other.

The message of the *tam* is an eternal one. While we strive to reach the *chacham's* understanding of halacha and live out that understanding in a perfect observance of Pesach, pursuing an intellectually meaningful experience is equally important. Whether we seek to embrace the aspect of freedom, Divine intervention, family or national identity, Pesach can and must speak to

us. As we sit around the Seder table we should seek to discover our own *ma zot* – the questions and answers that will integrate the messages of Pesach into our very identity.

Vehi She'amda- This Promise has Sustained

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The author of the Haggadah has just described how Hashem took care to ensure that the enslavement in Egypt was exactly in accordance with His promise to Avraham Avinu at the *berit bein habetarim*, the covenant of the pieces (Bereishit 15: 13-14). At this point the Haggadah explains that this promise that was given to Avraham 430 years before the exodus is the same promise that has “stood” for our fathers and still stands for us today.

This section is the conclusion of the middle portion of *maggid*. This portion of *maggid* describes that just as Avraham was saved from his pagan background, we too were saved from the Egyptian culture. At this point we realize and acknowledge the fact that we are constantly under threat from negative forces: whether they are spiritual or physical.

In the next section, the Haggadah will build on this point and present the juxtaposition between Pharaoh and Lavan.

Question

Many people are astounded at the fact that we would bring up another oppressor. Isn't this night about the exodus? Why are we spending time on other events, let alone claim that they might have been worse than the genocide in Egypt?

Answer

Vehi She'amda teaches us that we are supposed to feel the special care that Hashem takes of us as a nation and to recognize that He looks after us at all times. The first appearance of this special providence was at the exodus and that is why when we celebrate that *geulah*, redemption, we also celebrate the fact that Hashem still relates to us as His nation and has always related to us that way since Avraham. It is at this point that many families have the custom to give over their own story of Hashem's special providence as they have experienced it.

The story of the Nation of Israel that was prophetically told to Avraham, and that started with the exodus has continued throughout the generations. That original promise was not only about a one time event. It was just the first chapter of the book of our eternal covenant with *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*.

VaYare'u Otanu HaMitzrim: The Egyptians Treated us Badly

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This section is an exposition of the second sentence of the biblical excerpt which began with the words “אֲרָמִי אֲבִי אֲבִי, my father is a lost Aramean.” After explaining the standing of the Jewish people in Egypt, the Torah describes the steps which the Egyptians took against them. The verse is divided into three phrases, each beginning with a different verb. As with the previous verse, the Haggadah breaks up the verse and attaches it to other verses that illustrate each phrase. First, the Egyptians treated us “badly”. Secondly, they persecuted us. Lastly, they placed upon us backbreaking labor. This leads to the next verse, in which the Jewish people cry out to G-d and He recognizes their suffering.

Questions

The Haggadah connects “*vayare'u otanu* (they treated us badly)” to the planning stage of the Egyptians’ scheme (“הִבֵּה נִתְחַכְמָה לוֹ”) to prevent the Jewish population from expanding. How does their very plot portray the act of “*vayare'u otanu*”? Was their expression of concern for a growth in the Jewish population a sign of doing evil?

Why are “*vayare'u otanu*” and “*vaya'anunu* (they persecuted us)” separate from “וַיִּתְנוּ עֲלֵינוּ קֶשֶׁה עֲבֹדָה קָשָׁה (they placed upon us backbreaking labor)”? What forms of suffering did the Egyptians cause in addition to the backbreaking labor?

Answer

The phrase “*vayare'u otanu*” is strange. If the verse merely informs us that the Egyptians did bad things to the Jewish people, then it would have been written differently. It would have been formulated “*vayare'u lanu*,” which means that they did evil *to* us. Instead, the Torah uses the word “*otanu*,” which implies something different. The Egyptians did not only do evil to us, but they *made us evil*. How did they do that? The Egyptians portrayed the Jewish people as evil and claimed that they were corrupt. They made them out to be bad people. This is the tool through which the Egyptians justified their atrocious actions against the Jews and is illustrated by the plot of the Egyptians (“הִבֵּה נִתְחַכְמָה לוֹ”), in which they decried the Jewish people and depicted them as treacherous.

After validating their mistreatment of the Jewish nation, there were two types of suffering to which the Jews were subjected. One of these is hinted at by the word “*vaya'anunu*” and one is referred to through the phrase “*avodah kasha* (backbreaking labor).” The Jews were forced by the kingdom to do work, building the cities of the king. This served to break the Jewish people (“לְמַעַן עֲנוּתוֹ בַּסְּבִלּוֹתָם”), which followed from the kingdom’s claim that the Jewish people were dangerous. Furthermore, the Jewish people were now treated as slaves by the rest of the Egyptian population. They became servants (“וַיַּעֲבִדוּ מִצְרַיִם”) of their fellow citizens,

maintaining little value in the eyes of their neighbors. The actions taken against the Jews, by the state and by the civilians, were rationalized through the allegations that were raised against them and the evil portrait which was painted of the Jews.

(Based on the commentary of Don Isaac Abarbanel in *Zevach Pesach*)

Questions For Further Discussion:

- The Egyptians succeeded in their plot by claiming that the Jews had evil intentions. Has this tactic been used at any other time in the history of the Jewish people?
- Why is it important to delineate and differentiate the multiple injustices which the Egyptians perpetrated?

Vanitzak El Hashem – And we called out to G-d

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Summary

This section is the crux, the turning point of the story. After all the tension has built up, the Jews react with the one response that is always appropriate in a time of crisis - prayer. They call out to Hashem. In deciding to heed our call, Hashem looks not to our merits, but to the depths of travail that we underwent as slaves. With an understanding and empathy only possible for the Omniscient One, Hashem acted in mercy to redeem His nation-to-be and to punish the offenders for every detail of their crimes. The Midrashim presented here, by the Haggadah, elaborate on the different aspects of affliction that provoked Hashem to react in the manner he did.

Questions

1. The verse cited by the Haggadah indicates that it was only at this point that the Jews cried out in a manner that aroused Hashem's mercy. What changed? After all, the slavery had begun decades earlier, as had the decree to attempt the infanticide of Jewish newborn boys!
2. The Haggadah, following the text of *Mikra Bikurim* in Devarim Chapter 26, writes that the Jews cried out to Hashem. Yet in the verses of Sefer Shemot, Chapter 2, that the Haggadah cites in its *midrash* (interpretation) of that text, it simply says that we cried out, and that Hashem heard our cries. It never identifies that we cried out to Him. Indeed, in the whole story of the Exodus recorded in Sefer Shemot, we don't find a single reference to the Jews praying directly to Hashem. What can we glean from this ambiguity?
3. The Haggadah mentions our cries and afflictions as the impetus for Hashem's acting on our behalf. It also makes reference to Hashem's covenant with the forefathers, Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov. Never does it give an indication that our own merits were part of the initial push. Why not?

Answer

1. The verse (Exodus 2:23, quoted here by the Haggadah) pinpoints the time of the Jews' cries as after the death of the Pharaoh who initiated their affliction. It would seem that his death helped the Jews overcome a psychological barrier that can stand in the way of realizing the depth of any crisis. As the servitude got worse and worse, the Jews could have told themselves, "So what if this Pharaoh is a nut. He can't live forever. We just need to tough it out until he is gone, and things will be better." When after his death, Pharaoh's son upheld his wicked policies, it brought home to the Jews the danger that their terrible situation could become a permanent one. Only when the Jews themselves fully realized their predicament did they cry out in a way that motivated Hashem to listen. If we don't think we have a problem, we can't expect Hashem to fix it.
2. There are those who interpret that in fact, the Jews themselves never explicitly prayed to Hashem. Rav Shimshon Pinkus (*She'arim Batefillah* pp. 41-43) explains that there is a level of suffering at which a person cannot formulate any prayer. His pain has pushed him beyond words, and his prayer is simply a cry.. In Egypt, the Jews sank to that level (see Zohar Shemot, Parsha 20). Rabbi Moshe Weinberger (as heard by the author during a *Shabbat Hagadol Drashah*) went further, positing that at the time of the Exodus, the Jews were in too much pain to even consider prayer. Hashem peered past the veil of cries, into the souls of the Jewish people. There, He heard the subconscious prayer that laid buried deep underneath all of the groans. He knew we were crying to Him, even when we didn't.
3. It's important to recognize that the Jewish people that Hashem took out of Egypt superficially resembled the Egyptians in their manners and deeds. This was so true that when the Jews were standing at the Red Sea, the *Yalkut Shimoni* (Exodus 234) records that Satan at first protested Hashem's command that it split on the grounds that the Jews worshipped the same idols as the Egyptians. Despite these shortcomings, Hashem saw our potential to be the nation who would accept the Torah (see Rashi to Exodus 3:12) and focused on our affliction rather than our sins. It was for these reasons, not because of our merits, that He saved us.

Dayeinu

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Dayeinu is a fifteen-stanza poem that lists off the great acts that God performed for *Bnei Yisrael* from the time of their exodus from Egypt until the culmination of building the Beit Hamikdash. After recounting each act of kindness, we declare, "*dayeinu*, it would have been enough [had God only performed this act and no other]."

There is a strong parallel between *Dayeinu*, which contains fifteen praises of God, and the fifteen chapters of *Tehillim* that begin with the phrase שיר המעלות (Chapters 120-134). This is hinted at in the double meaning captured in the opening line of *Dayeinu* which reads " כמה

מעלות טובות למקום עלינו.” This is usually translated as “How many good deeds has God performed for us?” However, the word “מעלות,” usually translated as “good deeds,” also means “ascents” or “stairs” as is the case in *Tehillim*. Also, in *Tehillim* the fifteen chapters of שיר המעלות are juxtaposed to the paragraphs of *Tehillim* that are recited in *Hallel*; so too, the poem of *Dayeinu* precedes the recitation of *Hallel*, which begins at the end of *maggid*.

Questions

1. Would it really have “been enough” had God not followed through on taking us out of Egypt, and left us stuck at the Red Sea without performing *keriat Yam Suf* (the splitting of the Sea)?
2. If Pesach is a time to remember the exodus, why does *Dayeinu* include the praises of events that took place after the exodus, such as receiving the Torah and the building of the Beit Hamikdash?

Answers

1. In life, sometimes people are only able to help you out part of the way. Someone may only be able to give you a ride one way, or someone may only be able to lend you \$10 when you need \$20. That’s OK! We need to have *hakarat hatov*, gratitude, towards people no matter how much or how little they do for us. The same is true for our relationship with God. Had God only brought us out of Egypt, but not split the sea, nor given us the מן (manna), He would have deserved our undying gratitude. *Dayeinu* is teaching us how much more so we need to recognize the great acts that God performed for us since He left “no stone unturned and no need unmet” all the way from the exodus until we settled in *Eretz Yisrael*. Everything in our lives comes from God, and can be attributed to Him. Even though we sometimes feel that we want or expect more from God, or that God has only helped us some of the way, it is important that we take time in our lives to express our gratitude to Him.
2. Without question, the main historical event that we are commemorating and reliving on seder night is the exodus. However, there are a number of hints sprinkled throughout the Haggadah that point us in another direction. It is true that the exodus gave us our freedom, but it wasn’t until the giving of the Torah that we were given a purpose. That purpose did not come to its complete realization until *Bnei Yisrael* conquered and settled in *Eretz Yisrael*, culminating with the building of the Beit Hamikdash. This explains why *Dayeinu* recounts all of God’s acts of kindness through the building of the Beit Hamikdash. It is our ultimate hope that we will again experience that level of fulfillment with the rebuilding of the Beit Hamikdash. That is why we pour a fifth *kos* (cup) for Eliyahu Hanavi, who will be the harbinger of mashiach. That is why we conclude the seder with the hope and prayer: לשנה הבאה בירושלים הבנויה, next year in the rebuilt Jerusalem!

Bichol Dor V'Dor – In Each Generation

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Questions

In the Haggadah, we are told that “one is obligated to see himself as if he left Egypt.” When reading these words we should ask ourselves, is it possible for us to truly feel that Hashem took us out? What can we do to realize this challenging mitzvah and experience Yetziat Mitzraim in a personal way?

The Rambam (*Hilchot Chametz U'Matzah* 7:6) cites this Halacha, but with a subtle yet significant change in the text: “In each generation one is obligated to **display** himself as if he **now** left from the bondage of Egypt...” Rambam’s adaptation differs from the wording found in most Haggadot. He says “display” rather than “see”. What does he accomplish by doing so?

Answer

We began by asking how is it possible for one to see oneself as having personally escaped the slavery of Egypt. It seems that the Rambam struggled with this very question. Indeed it is quite difficult to “see” ourselves as having escaped; however, a display of freedom is very much within our reach. One who expresses himself behaviorally, acts in an outward display that achieves this objective. The Rambam understood that while our goal is to “see” ourselves as having left, we can only do so by way of displaying what the experience would have looked like if we were in fact participants. The seder night is all about creating the perfect setting, the ambiance which allows us to step into the role we have been cast to play each year on Pesach. Therefore, we eat the matzah, the same food as our impoverished forefathers. We taste the bitter maror as a reminder of their suffering and drink four cups of wine symbolic of the freedom they were given. According to the Rambam, bringing the events of the Exodus to life is the most effective method of reliving the story. By doing this, we come closer to understanding the emotional state of the people who actually left.

The author of our Haggada appears to have a more ambitious goal in mind. Although we do bring the Exodus to life at the seder, we do not stop there. Our ultimate goal is “to see ourselves” as having left personally, not merely understanding the mindset of those who lived it. Through reliving their experience we strive to internalize and personalize the feelings of those whose story we tell on Pesach. Rabbi Soloveitchik, in his work *Zman Cheiruteinu*, makes this very point:

“Man is incapable of praising and glorifying with passion unless he senses the inspiration within himself. The events that occurred are not merely relevant for us... rather they are part of who we are... b'chol dor v'dor is not a mitzvah of eating; it's an emotion and a state of mind. We should awaken our emotions and feel connected to Jewish history. “

The way to envision ourselves as having actually left Egypt on the night of the seder, can only be achieved with astute emotional awareness. The display that we perform around our tables brings us to that sense of connection.

With this understanding, we can answer another well-known question. Many have asked why there is no *bracha* on the mitzvah of *maggid*. We know that the commandment of “And you shall tell your son” is a *mitzvah diorayta* that we fulfill on the seder night. If so, why do we not make a *bracha* for it as we do for all other mitzvot?

The *Chatam Sofer* suggests that in fact, *maggid* does have a *bracha*. As we conclude the *maggid* section of the Haggadah we say “He who redeemed us and our forefathers from Egypt...” and we conclude “Baruch ata... ga'al Yisrael.” But if this is true, asks the *Chatam Sofer*, why does this *bracha* differ from most other *birchot hamitzvah*, which are recited prior to the performance of the mitzvah?

In explaining why this *bracha* is atypical, the *Chatam Sofer* offers a comparison to another such *bracha* that can only be recited after the mitzvah is complete. When a non-Jew completes the conversion process, his final step is immersion in the mikveh. Only when he exits the mikveh can he recite the *bracha*. The most basic reason for this is that prior to entering the mikveh, he is still not a Jew and is still unfit to make *brachot*.

This may explain the concluding *bracha* of the Haggadah as well. When we begin reading the Haggadah we have to see ourselves as those slaves from generations ago. We are subservient to the Egyptian nation and nearly consumed by the presence of idolatry in their culture. Can a person in our situation honestly declare that he is free? Can an Egyptian slave say ‘*Ga'al Yisrael*'?

B'chol dov vador introduces the conclusion of the Haggadah. At this point, specifically, we begin to reflect on the entire journey from bondage to freedom. After celebrating the splitting of the Sea and the burst of emotions that came with the confidence of freedom, we can finally thank Hashem properly in declaring ‘*Ga'al Yisrael*' – that he has given us, in each and every generation, an everlasting freedom.