

# Collected Hagadah Insights

## From RIETS Rabbinic Alumni Living in Israel

### Righteous Women and the Four Cups of Wine

Rabbi Yitzchak Blau '94R



Rosh Yeshiva,  
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Women must drink four cups of wine on the Seder night because they [women] too were part of the miracle (*Pesachim* 108b). Rashbam and Tosafot debate the meaning of this principle which also obligates women in the mitzvot of Hanukah candles and Megilla on Purim. According to Tosafot, women were in the same danger as the men. Rashbam, in contrast, restricts the principle to episodes where women played a central role. Esther's prominence makes the application of this idea obvious regarding Purim, but how does this apply to Pesah? Rashbam cites a Gemara (*Sotah* 11b) which attributes the Exodus from Egypt to the merit of righteous women. According to this account, it was the women who insisted on having children and perpetuating the Jewish people despite the cruel decrees of Pharaoh.

What biblical clues motivate this aggada? The second chapter of Shemot begins with a man from the tribe of Levi marrying a woman from the same tribe. In the subsequent

verse, this woman gives birth to Moshe, implying that Moshe was the oldest child. Yet we know that he had an older sister and brother. Therefore, the aggada asserts that this married couple had separated due to the decree that the Egyptians throw male Jewish children into the Nile. Since the husband, Amram, was an influential figure, other men followed suit. Miriam convinced her father Amram to return to his wife, and the others emulated this move. If so, we understand why Amram's reunion with Yoheved leads directly to the birth of Moshe (for a *peshat* alternative, see Ramban *Shemot* 2:1).

Our search for a textual basis for this aggada requires further effort. The literary clue above only suggests that the parents experienced a period of separation but does not provide a source for women's heroic role. I think that Hazal were simply reading the first two chapters of Shemot carefully. The beginning of sefer Shemot highlights the moral fortitude of three groups of women. In the first chapter, two *meyaldot* defy Pharaoh's murderous decree to kill Jewish babies. The biblical term "*meyaldot haivriyot*" lends itself to two different explanations: Either it refers to the Jewish midwives or to the midwives of the Jews. If we adopt the latter reading, scripture depicts two Egyptian women risking their lives to save Jews. Indeed, our long history includes both gentile persecutions of Jews and righteous

gentiles who swam against the violent tide.

The next heroes are Moshe's mother and sister. His mother successfully hides her baby for a few months and then the sister watches the progress of the baby as his basket floats down the river. Though despair reigns, they clutch to a small strand of hope which pays dividends when Pharaoh's daughter saves the baby and Moshe's sister arranges for the mother to nurse her own child. Of course, the third group of women includes Pharaoh's daughter. Even the royal family risks punishment when it violates a tyrant's decree; yet she defies her father. Perhaps the attendants of this princess also help her hide the truth regarding her newfound baby. The joint efforts of Jewish and Egyptian women enable the survival and ultimate redemption of Am Yisrael. Moshe will soon develop into the greatest leader we ever had, but his ascent is set in motion by various women.

Hazal read Tanakh quite sensitively when they attributed the Exodus to righteous women. In the first two chapters of Shemot, salvation emerges thanks to women with courage, moral commitment, and the ability to cling to hope in the darkest times.

# Kol Dichfin Yeitei V'yeichol — All who are Indigent Should Come and Eat: A Key Element of our Pesach Experience

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**T**he Shalosh Regalim that dominate our Jewish calendar are doubly blessed in that there are two sets of explanations for their existence and our observance of them. There is the agricultural aspect, with each holiday representing a segment of the agricultural cycle — from the planting on Pesach to the first fruits on Shavuot through the harvest of Sukkot. As a long-time resident of the Diaspora and the New York metropolitan area, these designations, while interesting, have seemed pretty foreign. As a result, the historical aspect of the holidays has tended to resonate more resolutely — Pesach as the Exodus from Egypt, Shavuot as the time of Matan Torah, and Sukkot, once again recalling the Exodus. Which should provoke the question: two major holidays to recall the Exodus? Would it not be sufficient to eat matzah in the sukkah and make for a much more efficient observance? What exactly do we accomplish on Sukkot that we missed on Pesach? Or is the significance of the event such that we need to review it twice a year? And if that is the case, why do we

commemorate the same event with two such different sets of mitzvot?

While there may be several explanations to this fairly obvious question, I would like to add what I think is a very important explanation provided by Moshe Glidai in an article published in *Chazon La'Moed: Derashot La'Moadim Ul'Yamim Tovim* (edited by R. Yehuda Shaviv).

Our Torah is a *Torat chaim*, a living book that encourages *ahavat chessed*, a love for charitable activities. Over and over we are commanded to express concern for and act on behalf of the needs of our fellow Jews and fellow citizens of the world. The poor, the lonely, the underprivileged, the weak all need our attention and kindness so that we can provide them all we can to assure their comfort and sustenance. Many of the mitzvot act as reminders of our social responsibilities, and on Pesach and Sukkot, the holidays in which we remember our own deprivation — the slavery and the degradation, the despair and the lack of basic necessities — the Torah gives us the means to empathize with those less fortunate, to feel their pain and thereby be more sensitive and hopefully more giving.

Sukkot corresponds to the harvest, and in good years, not only is the landowner in the Land of Israel prepared for the upcoming winter, so is the poor person. Through the mitzvot of *leket*, *maaser* and *pe'ah* among all the *matnot aniyim*, even the poor person is able to accumulate the necessary food stock to assure his survival through the winter. But while food may not be an issue, the truly poor person is about to confront a winter of rain and cold and perhaps even snow without a proper place to dwell. Where will his shelter come

from? To sensitize us to the particular needs of the poor person at that particular moment, the Torah tells us: move out of your home and into a temporary structure so that you too experience what it means to worry about the cold and the discomfort. That is an issue relevant to the onset of the winter season and best illustrated by the sukkah experience. Dwelling in the sukkah not only helps us fulfill the obligation to remember the Exodus, but based on our own deprivation it contextualizes the response we need to have for those in need.

Pesach time is different. The winter is over; where to dwell does not concern the poor person because the weather has turned and the truth is, he can sleep out in the fields without a problem. The springtime problem is one of food, for the food stored over the winter is now depleted and the *ani's* real concern is not having enough to eat. So at this moment in time, the Jew is told to restrict his own intake. The Jew should feel what it means not to have enough to eat, to eat *lechem oni*, poor person's bread, to have to worry about what his next meal will consist of. And through that act, the Jew needs to feel more empathetic and sympathetic to the less fortunate around him who at that moment is most worried about access to food. The Jew needs to be sensitized to respond: *kol dichfin yeitei v'yeichol*, all who are indigent should come and eat.

There is a social responsibility aspect to the mitzvot of Pesach and Sukkot, and we are required to use the observance of these rituals at these particular moments in time, to understand the full meaning of the slavery experience, to heighten our sensitivity and shape our social consciousness and behavior.

# L'Shana Haba'ah B'Ara D'Yisrael— Next Year in Israel: Living the Dream?

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If I've learned anything in the eight-plus years since leaving the rabbinate for Aliyah, it's this: Americans don't appreciate being lectured by olim about Aliyah. Slogans like, "If I could do it, anyone can!" and Facebook posts like, "Living the Dream! The bus driver wished me Chag Sameach!" probably don't help. Thus, having been tasked with writing as a RIETS alumnus who made Aliyah, I'm in somewhat of a quandary. I want to write about Pesach and living in Israel. I should promote Aliyah. But that's probably the last thing those in the Diaspora want to read. So I won't. Instead I'll share a sense of unease I feel each year at this time.

Every year as I prepare for Pesach, I find the Seder somewhat challenging. From the text of the Haggadah it seems clear to me that Chazal never envisioned the Seder as we experience it today. Their vision of *geulah* did not only include conquering and settling the Land. They could not imagine a Jewish State and Jewish land without a Beit Hamikdash. They assumed that *shivat Zion*, the return to Zion, would obviously include the offering of the korban Pesach. How do I know this? It's intrinsic in the text from the very beginning of Maggid:

הַשְׁתָּא עֲבָדִי, לְשָׁנָה הַבָּאָה בְּנֵי הוֹרִינּוּ.  
Now we are here; next year we will be in  
the Land of Israel; Now we are slaves,  
next year we will be free.

In the final blessing of Maggid we recite:

כִּן ה' אֶ-לֵקֵינוּ וְאֶ-לֵקֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ יִגִּיעֵנוּ לְמוֹעֲדֵים  
וְלְרִגְלִים אַחֲרַיִם הַבָּאִים לְקִרְאָתְנוּ לְשָׁלוֹם,  
שְׂמֵחִים בְּבִנְיַן עִירָךְ וְשִׂשְׁיִם בְּעִבּוּדְךָ. וְנֹאכֵל  
שָׂם מִן הַזֵּבָחִים וּמִן הַפְּסָחִים אֲשֶׁר יִגִּיעַ דָּמָם  
עַל קִיר מִזְבִּיחֲךָ לְרִצּוֹן.

... So too Hashem, our God and the God of our forefathers, will bring us to festivals and other holidays that will come upon us in peace, joyous in the rebuilding of Your city and rejoicing in Your service. And we will eat there from the Zevachim and the Pesachim whose blood will arrive on the wall of Your altar according to Your will....

To the authors of the Haggadah, there are only two options: there or here; freedom or slavery. In the Haggadah we find no middle ground. There is only the degradation and suffering of *galut* on the one hand, or the boundless joy and freedom of Redemption on the other. Chazal could not envision a time when we would, on the one hand, enjoy a wonderful, sunlit Chol Hamoed morning in Jerusalem, when we might park at the Mamilla Mall, walk through a bustling Old City toward the Temple Mount, only to stop at the lower plaza and accept the blessing of the kohanim at the remnants of the Retaining Wall to the complex.

They could not imagine a time when a Jew would live — as I do — a mere forty-minute ride from Jerusalem, but would spend the evening of the Seder at his home in Yad Binyamin, rather than bringing his entire family to camp out in Yerushalayim as they enjoyed the meat of the *shelamim* and a bit of lamb from the Korban Pesach.

And yet, there we are. So close, and yet so far from realizing that ultimate dream. We're not "living the dream" because what we have now is not the dream, but a small sliver of a fragment of the dream.

There is a great deal for which we must be thankful. Here in Israel the Hallel of Pesach becomes intertwined with both the mourning of Yom Hazikaron (יקר בעיני ה' המוותה לחסידיו) — "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints"), as well as the boundless joy of Yom Ha'atzmaut.

At the same time, the binary nature of the Seder night reminds us that with all that we have achieved, and the great blessings we enjoy, our work is far from done. The dream remains ... but a dream.

## How Does Avadaim Hayinu (We Were Servants) Answer the Child's Questions?

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Many of the commentators wonder why the paragraph of *Avadim Hayinu* follows *Mah Nishtana*; we ask four distinct questions but the continuation of the text doesn't seem to relate to any of them. If so much focus is put on the children to ask, then presumably there is an assumption that the parents will answer — and not avoid — these questions. But in what way does *Avadim Hayinu* answer the questions of *Mah Nishtana*?

A number of the early commentators (see *Haggadat Torat Chayim*, pp. 30-31) answer, in essence, that *Mah Nishtana* focuses on two themes, slavery and freedom: the first two questions focus on slavery — matzah is the “bread of affliction” and maror represents the bitterness of the servitude. The final questions — about dipping and leaning — focus on the actions that are characteristic of free men. In response, we explain to the children that the rituals of the Seder are meant to mirror the duality of Jewish experience in Egypt: “*Avadim hayinu le’Pharaoh be’Mitzrayim*,” we eat matzah and maror because we were slaves, and then, “*va’yotzienu Hashem Elokenu misham*,” we dip and we lean on the Seder night because God liberated us from Egypt and gave us our freedom.

Perhaps we can suggest another answer that touches on the essential purpose of the Seder and, in fact, a core principle of Judaism.

In addition to the special obligation of *sippur yetziat Mitzrayim*, retelling the story of the Exodus at the Seder, there is actually a regular obligation of *zechirat yetziat Mitzrayim*, remembering these events twice every day. Moreover, numerous other *mitzvot* — tefillin, mezuzah, and more — focus on this theme. The Ramban (*Shemos* 13:16) famously explains that the reason for our repeated and intense focus on *yetziat Mitzrayim* is that these events express the most basic foundations of our faith. The existence of God, His active involvement in the events of this world, the notion of reward and punishment — all of these *yesodei emunah* are demonstrated through the story of *yetziat Mitzrayim*.

In other words, while we subtly

nurture our faith throughout the year by remembering *yetziat Mitzrayim*, on the anniversary of those events we intensify those efforts through the specific mitzvah of *sippur*. It is no surprise, therefore, that many commentators refer to Pesach as the “*Chag Ha-Emunah*,” the Holiday of Faith.

Thus understood, the prominent role of questions at the Seder testifies to the fact that questions are not a threat or the opposite of faith but, on the contrary, questions are a key ingredient to faith. In Judaism, we have never shied away from or suppressed questions. On the contrary, only people with *emunah* need to ask. We may not always receive answers but we should continue asking because asking Hashem questions — wrestling with God — is itself an act of *avodah Hashem*.

Perhaps this is why *Avadim Hayinu* follows *Mah Nishtana* even though it is not really an answer to the question — because that’s the point! The Haggadah is teaching us that the real value of the question is in the question itself. There may be answers, often there are answers, but that’s not the *ikkar* and that shouldn’t be the focus, and therefore there is no immediate answer to our question. The question of *Mah Nishtana* — and all questions — has intrinsic value and therefore it can “stand on its own” without the need for an immediate explanation.

The Seder is the annual incubator of our faith and the prominent role of questions — even without obvious answers — eloquently expresses our belief that questions play a vital role in nurturing belief. (I thank R. Yaakov Robinson for pointing out a similar idea in *Haggadat Emunat Itecha*.)

## Mitchila Ovdei Avodah Zara: In the Beginning, our Ancestors were Idol Worshipers

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This section of the Haggada is in accordance with Rav’s version of “*matchil b’genut umsayem b’shevach*,” one begins with shame and concludes with praise, as mandated by the Mishna (*Pesachim* 116a). We begin by telling of the disgrace of our ancestor’s idol worship and conclude with the true faith that Hashem brought us close to Him. When would we be considered “brought close” to Hashem? When we received the Torah? When we built the Mishkan? If so, we should have to wait until Shavuot to conclude the Haggada, or at least tell over the story of Mount Sinai at the Seder. Why then are we totally focused on the events of the 15th of Nisan? (See Rambam, *Hilchot Chametz UMatza* 7:1).

By examining the events and the mitzvot of Pesach Mitzraim, we see that the Exodus itself serves as a worthy description of our praiseworthiness as servants of Hashem.

The korban Pesach was a nullification of avodah zara. R. Yosi Haglili in the *Mechilta* (*Masechta D’Pischa* no. 11) teaches that “*mishchu u’kchu*,” draw out and take a lamb (*Shemos* 12:21), means to draw away from idol worship and cling to mitzvot. Earlier, Moshe told Pharaoh that the children of Israel

couldn't possibly worship in Egypt, because the Egyptians would stone the Jews for sacrificing their gods. The Israelites were to roast the lamb whole and put the blood on the doorpost, which served as a public nullification of the avoda zara.

The matza also fits into this theme. In addition to the Torah's reason for eating matza on Pesach, and the symbolism of chametz representing the evil inclination in general (*Brachot* 17a), there is a specific element of avoda zara surrounding chametz. While the Torah prohibits chametz on the altar, the evil king Yeravam enticed the Jews to "Come to Bet-el and transgress ... and offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving of that which is leavened" (Yerushalmi, *Avoda Zara* 1:1). There are multiple similarities between the prohibitions of chametz and avoda zara: Both are prohibited to possess and are destroyed by fire. Neither loses its identity in an admixture, or may be used for one's benefit. The concept of "bitul," nullification, applies to both, and we must search out for both (*Haggada Shelema* pg. 241). Thus, the mitzva of matza serves to counteract the sin of avoda zara.

We see that despite the fact that our complete commitment was not established until Matan Torah, arguably even later, the events of the 15th of Nisan serve as a testament to our emunah and commitment, as well as to our total dismissal of avoda zara, our original "genut." Recounting the mitzvot and events of that day certainly fulfills "mesayem b'shevach."

Perhaps we may add that the korban Pesach serves as a *tikun* for the very wrongdoing that led us into Egypt in the first place. The lamb is steeped with symbolism, going back to the roots of our descent to Egypt. Joseph's brothers

went to graze the sheep, and Jacob sent Joseph to see how the brothers and the sheep were doing. The brothers soaked Joseph's cloak in the blood of the kid. Joseph went on to rule over the nation that worshipped sheep. Finally, the Israelites merited to sacrifice the sheep in Hashem's service (Abarbanel). The consequence of the sin of selling their brother was their descent to Egypt. I heard from the Rav (Tuesday Night Shiur, 5741) that at the core of their fault was the lack of appreciation of *achdus*.

שיר המעלות לדוד הנה מה טוב ומה נעים  
שבת אחים גם יחד.

*A song of ascents for David: How good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together.*

#### **Tehillim 133:1**

The blemish of what the brothers did to Joseph scarred us for generations. Finally, when we are to experience the Exodus, this issue must be resolved, perhaps through the prominent role of family and community in Pesach Mitzraim. The sacrifice was done together with family, "according to the house of their fathers, a lamb for a house."

Family is so prominent in the commandment of *sipur* (recounting the story), "*v'higadta l'vincha*" and with the four sons. The entire nation performed the sacrifice together. Notably, the emphasis on family and *achdus* on the Seder eve continues throughout Israel to this very day.

The korban Pesach serves as a *tikun* for the very wrongdoing that led us into Egypt in the first place.

## **Bekhol Dor VaDor — In Every Generation: Echoes of the Egyptian Exilic Experience<sup>1</sup>**

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In Tanakh, suffering on a national scale usually comes as punishment for evil deeds. Yet in the case of the Egyptian bondage, there is no indication that any particular sin was responsible for the decree.<sup>2</sup> As a result, commentators throughout the ages have struggled to understand what necessitated Israel's exile and subsequent slavery in Egypt. While doing so, many attempted to also answer the "*bekhol dor vador*" question: Why it is specifically our nation that is always targeted for persecution in every generation?<sup>3</sup> Naturally, these commentators utilized their own exilic experiences to illuminate the narrative of the Egyptian encounter, while reciprocally using the Biblical story as a model through which to comprehend all future oppression.<sup>4</sup> This bi-directional process leads to many fascinating insights.

Several commentators focus on how life in exile was critical for the formation of Israel's national identity and the prevention of assimilation. R. Ovadiah Seforno (15th-16th century Italy) asserts<sup>5</sup> that had Yaakov's family

remained in Canaan, they would have gradually absorbed the culture and values of their neighbors. Being exiled to a society that abhorred them<sup>6</sup> and later enslaved them is what enabled the Children of Israel to grow and develop into a nation.<sup>7</sup> As R. Hirsch (19th century Germany) further elaborates,<sup>8</sup> in medieval times, ghettos continued to play the same role as Goshen, ensuring that the Jews remained distinct and did not assimilate.

The Netziv (19th century Lithuania) moves in a similar direction,<sup>9</sup> but focuses on the second stage of the narrative, the oppression, and its utility in combatting assimilation. In contrast to Seforno, he asserts that it was in Egypt that the Children of Israel first began to assimilate, and that it was anti-Semitism which proved to be their salvation. The Netziv adds that, historically, every time the Jews attempted to join surrounding society, the result was non-acceptance and even persecution, the perfect antidote to acculturation.<sup>10</sup>

R. Hirsch<sup>11</sup> views the tribulations of exile as a vehicle not only for religious growth, but also for societal and interpersonal maturation. He claims that both the Egyptian and the current exiles resulted from jealousy and class distinctions. Yaakov's preferential treatment of Yosef and the difference in status between the sons of his primary wives and those of his maidservants led to internecine strife. Similar sectarian divisions have plagued Judaism ever since. Anti-Semitism, though, is blind to such divisions, and it serves as the great equalizer, promoting unity and forging common experiential bonds.

Finally, R. Eliezer Ashkenazi (16th-century Poland) focuses<sup>12</sup> on how the

exilic experience affects not merely the nation of Israel, but also the world at large. The exilic encounter with other nations facilitates the spread of ethical monotheism and Torah values throughout the world, and the miraculous process of redemption from Egypt proclaimed Hashem's existence to all.<sup>13</sup> May it be His will that this process be completed speedily and during our lifetime!

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## Endnotes

1 This article focuses on the positions of only a selection of commentaries. For a more comprehensive treatment of the topic, see "Purposes of the Egyptian Bondage" at: [http://alhatorah.org/Purposes\\_of\\_the\\_Egyptian\\_Bondage](http://alhatorah.org/Purposes_of_the_Egyptian_Bondage).

2 For an analysis of the midrashim and parshanim who nevertheless attempt to identify specific sins as responsible for the exile, see: [http://alhatorah.org/Purposes\\_of\\_the\\_Egyptian\\_Bondage/2#Punitive](http://alhatorah.org/Purposes_of_the_Egyptian_Bondage/2#Punitive).

3 See *Tanchuma* (Buber) *Vaera* 17 which places the following question in Moshe's mouth: "רבנו של עולם מפני מה זאת האומה משתעבדת, שבעים אומות יש בעולם ואינו משועבדות בלבד אלא האומה הזאת בלבד".

4 In some cases, commentators are probably also motivated by a desire to counter Christian polemical claims that the misfortunes of the wandering and downtrodden exilic Jew are a sign of Divine rejection. See, for example, R. Chasdai Crescas (14th century Spain), who valiantly tries to explain that the Children of Israel suffered in both Egypt and his own day as part of "afflictions of love" which God brings upon the righteous.

5 Seforno, *Bereshit* 46:3.

6 Seforno notes that since the Egyptians were xenophobic (as per *Bereshit* 43:32) and would not even eat with the Hebrews, let alone marry them, there was a greatly

reduced chance of assimilation in Egypt than in Canaan.

7 It is noteworthy that, similarly, Rabbinic Judaism developed and flourished in the aftermath of exile and destruction. By necessity, adversity leads to both self-reflection and innovation.

8 R. Hirsch, *Bereshit* 45:11.

9 *Ha'amek Davar*, *Shemot* 1:7, *Bemidbar* 23:9, and *Haggadah Shel Pesach* s.v. *Vehi Sheamedah*.

10 In fact, the Netziv suggests that Hashem's promise at the Covenant of Pieces that Abraham's descendants would always remain foreigners is what maintained Jewish identity throughout history, and is the referent of "vehi" in "והיא שעמדה לאבותינו ולנו". According to his reading, the Jewish people's best efforts to assimilate instead engender the anti-Semitism of "בכל דור ודור עומדים עלינו לכלותינו", through which "ההקב"ה מצילנו מידם" and prevents our assimilation.

11 R. Hirsch, *Bereshit* 45:11.

12 *Ma'asei Hashem, Ma'asei Mitzrayim* 1.

13 He goes so far as to suggest that when Avraham heard news of the upcoming bondage and redemption, he was thrilled that his descendants would serve as the vehicle through which the wonders of Hashem would become manifest to the world.



# Arami Oved Avi — My Father was a Lost Aramean: Out of Exile and Looking Toward our Homeland

Rabbi Shalom Z. Berger Ed.D



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מתחיל בגנות ומסיים בשבח, ודורש מארמי  
אובד אבי עד שיגמור כל הפרשה כלה.

*One commences with shame and  
concludes with praise and then expounds  
on the verses [in the section] “My father  
was a lost Aramean” until one completes  
that section.*

## Mishna, Pesachim 10:4

According to the Mishnah, the centerpiece of the Pesach Seder is the homiletic interpretation of *Mikra Bikkurim* — the *Arami Oved Avi* passage in Sefer Devarim — which is to be expounded in its entirety. As is well-known, current practice is to recite each one of those verses, and then divide them into clauses that are supported — *kemo she-ne’emar* — by other biblical verses, most of them from the first chapters of Sefer Shemot, where the Exodus story is first narrated.

The question that presents itself is obvious. Why choose the passage in Devarim to tell the story, if the ultimate goal is to return to the verses in Sefer Shemot? Surely examining the original story of the Exodus would serve as a better source for discussion and interpretation.

Many answers have been offered to this question.<sup>1</sup> I would like to suggest that a close reading of God’s promise of redemption in Sefer Shemot may offer insight into the need for an alternative text to be read and discussed at the Seder.

As is well known, the four expressions of redemption that appear in *Parashat Va’era* serve as the catalyst for a number of traditions at the Seder. The first three — *ve-hotzeiti*, *ve-hitzalti*, *ve-ga’alti* [I will free you... I will deliver you ... I will redeem you] — all refer to the promise of the Exodus from Egypt. The fourth — *ve-lakahti* [I will take you to be My people] — relates to the promise of becoming a chosen people.

Nachmanides heads a list of commentaries that point out that there is a fifth expression of redemption — *ve-heveiti* [I will bring you] — which offers a vision for the day after the Exodus. It is not enough to leave Egypt; the Children of Israel need a place to go. That place is the land that had been promised to the Patriarchs. It is important to note that *ve-heveiti* is only the beginning of that vision. The verse concludes with *ve-natati* [I will give it to you], a promise that the Children of Israel will not only be brought to the Land of Israel, but that they will inherit it as their own.

These two words *hava’a* and *netina* — bringing and giving — are repeated over and over again in *Mikra Bikkurim*, serving as a leitmotif in that section. Thus, the advantage of using the passage in Sefer Devarim is that it includes a part of the promise of the Exodus that does not — indeed, it cannot — appear in Sefer Shemot. Had the Seder been organized around the story of the Exodus in

Sefer Shemot, an essential part of the promise would be omitted — the vision of how the Exodus from Egypt is complete only when the Children of Israel enter and take hold of the Land of Israel.

This explanation, which is based on clear language parallels, has one obvious problem.

Traditional practice at the Seder is to omit the element of entering the Land of Israel by neglecting to recite the final three verses of *Mikra Bikkurim*. Although this is the text that appears in all current Haggadot, we must recognize that this ignores the clear statement of the Mishnah, and of the halakhah as it appears in the Rambam and elsewhere. All of these sources require that the passage of *Arami Oved Avi* be interpreted in its entirety (*ad she-yigmor et kol ha-parasha*). It seems likely that when the korban Pesach was brought in the Temple, the story of the Exodus reached its crescendo with the proclamation in verse 9:

וַיְבִיאֵנוּ אֶל הַמְּקוֹם הַזֶּה וַיִּתֵּן לָנוּ אֶת הָאָרֶץ  
הַזֹּאת אֶרֶץ זָבַת חֵלֶב וְדָבָשׁ.

*And He brought us to this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey.*

Only in the Diaspora was this verse omitted, because “he who speaks untruth shall not stand before my eyes” (Psalms 101:7).

While we have not yet merited to offer the korban Pesach in our day, recognizing the miracles of our generation, perhaps it is time to fulfill the commandment of the Mishnah, and complete our interpretation of the passage of *Arami Oved Avi* in its entirety.<sup>2</sup>

## Endnotes

1 For example, the first-person account of *Mikra Bikkurim* may better fulfill the requirement to experience the redemption through the activities of the Seder. In his haggadah, Daniel Goldschmidt suggests that in order to accommodate a religious ceremony that took place at home, the Talmudic sages needed to find a text with which the head of the household would be familiar. In an agricultural society, *Mikra Bikkurim* served that purpose well.

2 My colleague, David Mescheloff, has compiled a collection of midrashim on verse 9. They can be accessed at <http://www.lookstein.org/resources/hagada1.pdf>.

## Had'chak — Pressure: The Power of Headspace

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ואת לחצנו- זה הדחק, כמו שנאמר וגם ראיתי את הלחץ אשר מצרים לוחצים אותם

*And our oppression — this is the pressure as it states: I have seen the oppression that the Egyptians are imposing on them.*

In the Haggadah, we recall how Hashem “saw ... our oppression” (Devarim 26:7) in Egypt. The Haggadah defines this oppression as *d'chak*, pressure and constriction. Hashem says that this “pressure” was an impetus for Him to take Bnei Yisrael out of Mitzrayim (Shemos 3:9). The Ritva<sup>1</sup> explains that the Egyptians pressured Bnei Yisrael to adopt Egyptian ideologies. The strategy began to work and Bnei Yisrael stopped performing bris milah and some started to worship idols.

Therefore the “pressure” was a reason that Hashem had to take them out quickly, before they would completely assimilate. The Netziv,<sup>2</sup> however, writes that Pharaoh crammed the Jews into small, airless spaces so they wouldn't be able to think.

While Pharaoh's pressure is understood according to the Ritva, the Netziv's explanation needs clarification. Why would the Egyptians care if the Jews could think or not and why was this “pressure” a reason for Hashem to take Bnei Yisrael out more quickly?

If you look at *Shiras HaYam* — the song Bnei Yisrael sang after crossing the Yam Suf — in a Sefer Torah, you'll be in for a surprise. Each parashah in a Torah scroll is separated from the next by a blank space nine letters wide.<sup>3</sup> By contrast, within a parashah, there's usually only running text, without blank spaces. In the *shirah*, however, there are numerous spaces, even mid-pasuk! On the opposite extreme, toward the end of Sefer Bereishis, between Parashas Vayigash and Parashas Vayechi, there's no space at all. Why sometimes so many spaces and other times none?

In Parashas Shemos, Moshe goes down to Mitzrayim and relays to Aharon everything Hashem has told him, including His instructions to free Bnei Yisrael from Egyptian servitude. Aharon gathers the elders and tells them the amazing news, and they in turn relay it to the rest of the nation.<sup>4</sup> What was the people's reaction? “They believed ... and they bowed their heads and prostrated themselves” (ibid. 4:31). They were ecstatic! Redemption was finally at hand.

Later, in the beginning of Parashas Va'eira, Hashem instructs Moshe to tell Bnei Yisrael that the time has

come to take them out. Hashem uses four expressions of redemption: “*vehotzeisi, vehitzalti, vega'alti, velakachti*” (ibid. 6:6–7). They won't just be taken out (*vehotzeisi*), saved (*vehitzalti*), and redeemed (*vega'alti*); they will have a relationship with Hashem (*velakachti*)! Moshe conveys this message to Bnei Yisrael, promising much more than previously. We therefore expect them to react with far greater excitement. Yet “They didn't hear Moshe, because of shortness of breath and hard work” (ibid. 6:9). What happened? What changed between Shemos and Va'eira?

Between these two speeches, Moshe and Aharon asked Pharaoh to allow Bnei Yisrael to worship Hashem in the desert (Shemos 5:1). In response, Pharaoh increased their workload (ibid. 5:9). According to the Ramchal,<sup>5</sup> Pharaoh's goal was to keep them so busy with nonstop work that they would have no headspace or time to contemplate rebellion. In fact, Rav Eliyahu Dessler<sup>6</sup> adds that “Mitzrayim” literally means “straits,”<sup>7</sup> for such was the essence of Bnei Yisrael's exile there. Confined and constrained, they heard Moshe's speech but couldn't internalize his message — just as Pharaoh had wanted.<sup>8</sup> This is the “pressure” that is referenced in the Haggadah.

Now we can understand why in the *shirah* there are spaces galore, while between Vayigash and Vayechi there are none.<sup>9</sup> At the very beginning of Vayikra, Rashi writes that the purpose of the spaces between parshiyos was to give Moshe the “space” to think about what he had learned from Hashem. In the beginning of Vayechi, Rashi explains that this parashah isn't preceded by the usual nine blank spaces, but instead is “closed,” because



once Yaakov passed away (as recorded at the beginning of Vayechi), the Egyptians began to subjugate Bnei Yisrael, and the pain of his demise sealed their eyes and hearts.

The spaces in a Torah scroll represent the ability to stop, ponder, and process. When the subjugation began, Bnei Yisrael started to lose that capacity, as signified by the lack of space introducing this parashah. By contrast, once Bnei Yisrael left Mitzrayim and crossed the sea, they gained the space to appreciate everything Hashem had done for them, which inspired them to sing.

Pharaoh's scheme to stop Bnei Yisrael from thinking wasn't just a one-time historic occurrence. As the Ramchal<sup>10</sup> points out, this is the strategy of the *yetzer hara* in every generation. The evil inclination preoccupies us with desires and priorities that keep us from contemplating our direction in life.

In today's time, we are "pressured" to be available at any moment. First with the popularization of cell phones and then with the expansion of social networking, we're constantly communicating with thousands of "friends," leaving us little time to think. Communication is good, but it can't come at the cost of reflection. By setting time in our day to stop and think and utilize the powerful headspace that reflection provides, we can be redeemed from our own Pharaohs and lead lives of meaning, growth, and happiness.

## Endnotes

1 Commentary on the Haggadah.

2 *Ha'amek Davar*, Shemos 2:25; *Imrei Shefer* (the Netziv's commentary on the Haggadah).

3 *Shulchan Aruch*, *Yoreh De'ah* 275:2. See Rambam, *Hilchos Tefillin U'Mezuzah VeSefer Torah* 8.

4 Ibn Ezra, Shemos 4:30.

5 *Mesillas Yesharim*, ch. 2, "BeVi'ur Middas HaZehirus."

6 *Michtav MeEliyahu* 2, p. 17.

7 As in "*Min hameitzar karasi* — from the straits did I call" (Tehillim 118:5). In contrast, Eretz Yisrael is "*eretz tovah urechavah* — a good and spacious land" (Shemos 3:8). Although the Land of Israel is relatively small, the Netziv (*Ha'amek Davar* ad loc.) explains that it opens one's mind, freeing him to do what he wants. Hashem described Eretz Yisrael this way specifically when promising to take Bnei Yisrael out of Mitzrayim. Thus, He highlighted the difference between the two lands.

8 See Seforno, Shemos 6:9.

9 I heard part of this answer in the name of Rav Gedalyah Shor.

10 *Mesillas Yesharim*, ch. 2.

## UveZeorah Netuyah —With an Outstretched Arm: The War of the Plagues

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ובזרע נטויה זו החרב כמה שנאמר וחרבו שלופה בידו נטויה על ירושלים.

*And with an outstretched hand — this refers to the sword, as is written (Divrei Hayamim I 21:16), "His sword is drawn in his hand, stretched over Jerusalem."*

The fourth and final verse of the section known as *Arami Oved Avi* describes various aspects of the Divine redemption: "G-d liberated us from Egypt with a strong hand and an outstretched arm..." These clear physical descriptions of hands and arms are incompatible with a non-physical G-d. As such,

the Haggadah interprets these descriptions as references to various "components" of the redemptive process. The Haggadah decodes the term "outstretched arm" or "*zeroah netuyah*" by citing a verse in *Divrei Hayamim* in which Dovid views an angel with an extended arm claspng a sword facing Yerushalayim. He recognizes this ominous threat to the welfare of Yerushalayim and begins a tefila to avert the disaster. Based on this verse and the sword clutched by the outstretched arm of the angel, the term "outstretched arm" of *Arami Oved Avi* must similarly refer to a sword. Unfortunately, the Haggadah does not specify which sword this verse refers to and we have little record of a sword playing any role in the liberation from Egypt.

An interesting *Midrash Tanchumah* (*Bo* section 4) may help decipher the sword in question. There are numerous strategies for classifying the series of plagues. The most popular system is based on Rabbi Yehuda's division of the 10 plagues into three groups of three, with the final plague being appended to the final group (*dezach adash b'achav*). The *Midrash Tanchuma* suggests a very different scheme — that the plagues were organized as a series of incremental "assaults" modeled after ancient warfare. When siege is laid to a city, an elaborate series of measures are carefully calibrated to allow successful capture. First the water source is sealed and afterward deafening sounds are blared to terrify the inhabitants. Subsequently, arrows are shot followed by invading mercenaries who cannot conquer the city but can sow panic and demoralize the residents. As the war effort mounts, fiery boulders are launched into the city, followed by a full-blown invasion. The ten plagues in Egypt mirrored this combat

model. Initially, water was converted into blood, and subsequently croaking frogs shattered the Egyptian sanity through their shrill blare. Afterward, arrows were shot (skin-piercing *kinim*), followed by invading ferocious animals similar to attacking henchmen. Finally, fiery boulders were catapulted (*barad*), preceding the invasion of innumerable armies captured in the metaphor of armies of locusts. This midrash suggests that military combat served as a template for designing the sequencing of the 10 plagues.

The Exodus not only emancipated Jewish slaves from their Egyptian tyrants but also introduced *our* nation to its G-d. In addition to discovering G-d as Father and Creator, it was imperative that the newly liberated people acknowledge Him as a Warrior. This fledging nation would be expected to defeat the formidable armies of Canaan — within months of the Exodus. Of course, this plan was ultimately derailed by the golden calf and *meraglim* debacles, but at this stage, vicious wars were expected to be waged — within months! It was crucial that the people view G-d as a warrior so they might be confident entering pending battles. Ultimately, this vision is solidified by the war waged at the Yam Suf when the nation proclaims, “*Hashem ish milchamah Hashem shmo*” — G-d is a master of war, G-d is His name. Witnessing the chariots of Pharo being tossed among the ocean waves convinced the people of Hashem’s military prowess, and imbued them with confidence that they could wage successful war against all mathematical odds. G-d would fight on their behalf! The plagues in Egypt — modeled after combat strategy — presented Hashem to his people as a Warrior.

For centuries, this image of G-d was almost irrelevant, as Jews were dispossessed of land and army and we wandered from continent to continent through the sands of history. Having returned to our land and to our history we are forced to once again take up arms and defend our homeland — once again against all odds. We have witnessed successful military triumph which can only be attributed to Divine intervention. We daven that Hakadosh Baruch Hu continue to wage war on our behalf; we further pray that our efforts, coupled with Hakadosh Baruch Hu’s providence, will yield a world that acknowledges His sovereignty, embraces the role of His chosen people, and stills the sounds of war for all eternity.

## Dayenu: Giving Thanks

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**T**he main section of the Passover Haggadah, known as Maggid, in which we tell the story of our miraculous liberation from slavery, is capped off by a song, sung to a tune that is known and loved in virtually every Jewish home: Dayenu. This song is comprised of fifteen stanzas, in which we enumerate the miracles that brought us from the house of bondage to our homeland—God’s acts of kindness that we might not have expected or even deserved. As we mention each new step, each wondrous stage in the process of our

emancipation, we say “*dayenu*”: Had God not performed this additional miracle, we would have been satisfied with everything else He had already done for us. Each new miracle would have been, on its own, sufficient reason for us to give thanks.

The purpose of the song is to sensitize us to the myriad acts of kindness performed by God for the Jewish People, to foster a national sense of *hakarot hatov*. To understand the importance of expressing thanks and appreciation, we would do well to consider the first sin, committed in the Garden of Eden, which resulted in the first exile. When we think about that episode, the first thing that comes to mind is the forbidden fruit, but another element altogether may actually have been the real sin.

Adam and Eve eat from the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, the one and only tree God had expressly placed off limits. God conducts an inquiry, as it were; He asks Adam to explain his behavior. Rather than admitting his guilt or taking responsibility for his transgression, Adam blames his wife—and, by extension, God Himself.

וַיֹּאמֶר הָאָדָם הָאִשָּׁה אֲשֶׁר נָתַתָּה עִמָּדִי הִוא  
נָתַתָּה לִּי מִן הָעֵץ וְאָכַלְתִּי:

*The Man (Adam) said, “The woman that You gave to be with me, she gave me [the fruit] from the tree, and I ate.”*

**Bereishit 3:12**

Instead of thanking God for supplying him with a soulmate, Adam is accusative; he blames her for his transgression. Rashi considers this statement, and comments: “Here, Adam showed his ingratitude (literally, ‘denied the good’) for what God had done for him.” Had Adam apologized for his sin, had

he expressed even the most basic appreciation to God for having given him a partner, the story would very likely have had a different ending. Instead, Adam implies that had God given him a better mate, he would not have sinned. Adam blames anyone and everyone else, and turns God's kindness on its head: He does not express any appreciation for the perfect existence God created for him, nor does he have any gratitude for the miraculous creation of Eve. For this, as much as for the transgression of eating from the forbidden tree, Adam and Eve are exiled from Eden.

This gives us quite a lot to think about in terms of the Passover Seder: The Seder allows us to relive the end of the Egyptian exile, one of the most bitter exiles in the long history of Jewish wandering. Each year, as we identify with the Exodus, as we retell and commemorate the events of the Exodus, we, too, sing songs of praise and thanksgiving. The core of the Maggid section is made up of midrashic teachings that expound upon the biblical passage known as *Arami Oved Avi*. These same verses are recited during the Festival of *Bikkurim*; Rashi (Devarim 26:5) tells us that these verses, recited as we bring the first fruits up to the Holy Temple, are an expression of our joy and gratitude for all the good God has given us. With the bounty of the Holy Land in hand, we recite this particular text, which places our joy into historical, national and religious perspective. We offer thanks to God—for His kindness, and for fulfilling the covenant He made with our forefathers.

The expression of thanks that lies at the heart of the joyous *Bikkurim* celebration is, in a very real sense, the culmination of the Exodus, the

end of the exile. The Torah makes this very clear: On the festival of our liberation, we begin counting the Omer—counting the days and weeks to the Festival of *Bikkurim*. The objective of our redemption from Egypt was to bring us to the place where we were able to praise and give thanks to God with full hearts and full hands: The Festival of *Bikkurim* in the Beit HaMikdash, the Holy Temple. For this reason, the song of thanks we sing as we conclude the story of the Exodus—*Dayenu*—culminates in the fifteenth stanza, with the building of the Beit HaMikdash.

In his commentary on the Haggadah, the Gaon of Vilna teaches that the fifteen stanzas of *Dayenu* are parallel to the fifteen steps of the Beit HaMikdash that connected the *Ezrat Nashim* to the *Ezrat Yisrael*. As the Levites ascended these stairs, they sang the fifteen Songs of Ascent, songs of praise and thanksgiving to God. *Dayenu*, then, is both a lesson in the importance of appreciation and an experience of joy. As we sit at the Seder, perhaps our singing should parallel that of the Levi'im on the steps of Holy Temple. As we acknowledge each of the miracles and acts of kindness God performed for us, *Dayenu's* final stanza connects us to the Beit HaMikdash and to its joyous song, enabling us to take a moment to consider, to appreciate, and to give thanks for God's kindness.

## Opening the Door for Eliyahu and Looking Out Over Yerushalayim

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When we open the door at the end of the Seder for Eliyahu to herald the redemption, the *geula*, for us here in Yerushalayim, in Eretz Yisrael, we merely look out the door at the real life unfolding of the *geula* — and we say Hallel differently.

But let me put that emotional statement in a framework of halacha. The opening of the door at the Seder is the pivot from past to future.

The Seder tells the story of the redemption from Egypt. But while we view ourselves as if we were redeemed, for millennia we weren't. Reciting a Haggada that speaks of a wondrous redemption while sitting in Vilna or Baghdad or Kiev (or even in America) is a reality that must have caused us to squirm a bit. It is the story of redemption said by the unredeemed.

Our Haggada confronts this dichotomy directly. We tell the story of leaving Egypt with drama and detail, while dropping hints that we could really use another redemption like that.

We begin the Seder with hints of the absence of the Pesach. "Here is the bread of affliction. All who need, come in. This year here, next year in Eretz Yisrael." This intro to the Seder can be understood as a statement of *Hilchos Korban Pesach*. When we had the *korban Pesach*, we had to be signed

up before it was offered. You can't show up at 7 pm and join the Seder unannounced. But today, with no korban Pesach, just matza, come on in. Next year we won't be able to invite you in at the last moment, because we will be back in Eretz Yisrael, with the korban Pesach.

Wearing a *kittel* at the Seder is a hint to the special linen garments people wore when visiting the Mikdash (Netziv in his introduction to the Haggada). The washing of hands and dipping of karpas is a hint to a time of eating, "*al taharas hakodesh*," with a heightened level of ritual purity. Eating matza and maror together like Hillel did is a reminder of the lack of the Mikdash.

Ours is a Seder of redemption for the unredeemed.

And opening the door too. Rav Avigdor Nebenzahl in his Haggada gives a *Hilchos Korban Pesach* explanation to the door opening as well. Rav (*Pesachim* 85b) says that the upper floors and the rooves of Yerushalayim did not have the kedusha of Yerushalayim. Hence, the korban Pesach had to be eaten on the ground floor. Rav Nebenzahl suggests that once the korban Pesach was finished, the people would open the door and ascend to the roof for Hallel. There was limited ground-floor space

in Yerushalayim, so people had to share the ground floor. To make room for the next shift, Hallel would be said on the roof. Rav says in the Gemara that the Hallel would crack the roof — either from the weight of so many people or figuratively from the loud Hallel, like we say, "raising the roof."

But the completion of the korban Pesach was also the completion of the part of the Seder dealing with the past. The Hallel after the meal is the Hallel of the future. As the Rav pointed out (*Festival of Freedom*, p. 106), we don't just wish for a future redemption, we are so sure that it will come that we say Hallel and are appreciative of that which has not yet occurred.

For us, opening our doors, moving from the story of the past, here in modern-day Yerushalayim — about to recite the Hallel of appreciation of the redemption yet to occur — we look out the door and we see buildings as far as the eye can see, with more being built. We look out over hundreds of thousands of Jews, spilling way, way beyond the confines of the walls of the Old City. A sprawling city, modern, comfortable, with parks for children, homes for the elderly, spreading out right and left, in a country of millions of Jews.

The Haggada speaks of the Yad Hashem, the Hand, plucking the Jews

out of Egypt in one fell swoop, in one night, amid signs and wonders, 600,000 of fighting age, maybe 2 million in all. That is the redemption of the past.

And what will the redemption of the future look like? With Jews scattered to the four corners of the earth, I guess the Hand will be plucking them as He has been over the last few decades. Not in one fell swoop, but one by one. From the east, Iraq and Iran, from the north, Russia and Turkey, from the South, South Africa and Ethiopia, from the West, France, Germany, Poland and even the United States. Bit by bit, not in one night, but over time, 6 or 7 million will be brought back to their homeland.

The end of Hallel is appreciative of the future, while requesting redemption. We in Yerushalayim, who open our doors and gaze out, pivoting from the past to the present and to the future — we can walk out those doors and say Hallel on our roof tops, here in our city, in our land. And we can say Hallel of appreciation and of expectation with hearts that are full, bursting, having been plucked out of our own Egypts and placed here. What a privilege.

Opening the door and looking out is my favorite moment of the Seder.

