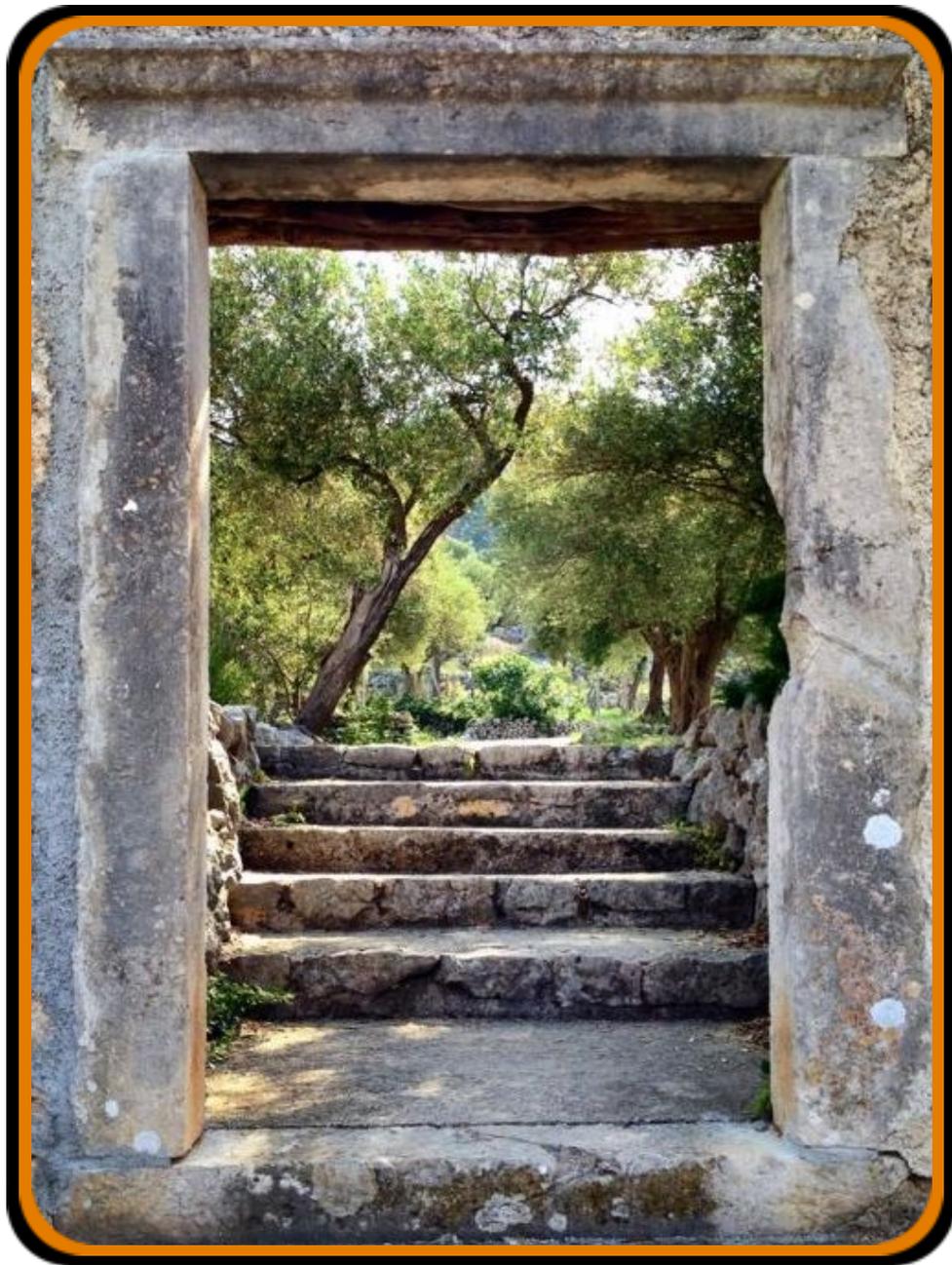




5779 - 2019

*The Migdal HaTorah  
Haggadah Supplement*

על משקוף הקוף המגדל



## הקדמה – Introduction

### ראש הישיבה – Rabbi Dvir Ginsberg

What does it mean to "learn" Torah? It is a common term in Orthodox Jewish vernacular, yet it connotes many different interpretations. Is it about reading what was written by those greater than us? Is it about accessing information that is considered of a higher stature? Is it about pursuing the truth as laid out by God? While all of these may be a part of it, the nature of inquiry and discovery would seem to be critical aspects as well. And of all the events of the year, none capture the idea of intellectual exploration then the night of the *Seder*. The theme of "*She'elat HaBen*", the asking of questions by the children, points directly to the centrality of inquiry this evening. The back and forth that often is heard in the halls of the *Beit Midrash* and in the pages of the *Talmud* are front and center at the *Seder*. The *Haggadah* merely serves as the stepping stone to a deeper level of understanding. If one wants to see the apogee of learning Torah, the *Seder* is the place to be.

Here at Migdal HaTorah, our *rabbanim* and students spend the year on the same path of discovery. The questions asked and concepts derived are the language spoken by all of us. We spend our year sharing our experiences, inviting our parents into the *Beit Midrash*, writing numerous *Divrei Torah*, and offering *shiuurim* to the community at large. It is in this spirit that we have brought forth this special supplement to the *Haggadah*. Each *rav* and student brings their own inquiries to the forefront, their own take on a part of the *Seder*. It truly reflects the *Migdal* experience, and hopefully will stimulate even more learning Torah at your *Seder*.



## ליל הסדר – A Night Unlike Any Other

### Charles Alexander, Shana Bet, Richmond, VA

The *Seder* Night is a unique one. The evening is long, characterized by an inimitable experience of a medley of interesting foods, unparalleled liturgy, cups of wine, and long-winded discussions. Though the different aspects of the *Seder* merge together in our memories, they in fact have a definite orderliness to them. Hence, the name – *Seder* (order). We are all familiar with the steps of the *Seder*, but to make some sense of the greater scheme of the night, let us distill it into a few basic elements.

The skeleton of the *Seder*, so to speak, consists of the obligations of the eating of the *Matzah* (Biblical) and *Maror* (in non-Temple times, rabbinic), the telling of story of the Exodus, (*Sippur Yetziat Mitzraim*), and, when applicable, the offering and eating of the *Korban Pesach*. There is also the obligation of giving praise, *Shevach V'Hoda'ah* for the miracles, recited with *Hallel*. These basic elements are skillfully worked into our modern *Seder*, most of whose elements are outlined in the *Mishnayot* in *Pesachim*. Each of these has a multitude of critical details, such as the requirement that the story be in a question-and-answer format and of transmitting this information to the next generation.

Essentially, we have discrete actions, (*ma'asei mitzvot*), that evoke and recall the miracles. As well, there are accompanying obligations to discuss and reenact the miracle's story and pass it on. Finally there is an obligation to offer our praise for it. The Rabbinic additions, such as *Karpas*, the Four Cups, and Reclining, serve to further this end of reenactment and to promote discussion of the story.

Ok, so that's the *Seder* in a nutshell. This brings us to important observation. The central obligation of *sippur*, telling the story and passing it on to our children, is unique to *Pesach*. In contrast, *Sukkot* has the *Mitzvah* of *Sukkah* that commemorates God's care for the Jews, but has no obligation of telling that story. *Shavu'ot*, though it is interwoven

and closely associated with *Matan Torah*, has no requirements for any commemorations at all. Clearly, there is something special about *Pesach*. The explanation is quite simple. There are many things that make *Yetziat Mitzraim* special. High on the list are that this miracle marked the beginning of Israel as a nation and of God's forging his unique relationship with them. Just as critical was God's great exhibition of His omnipotence in the world. These things are central to our identity as a people and it is certainly logical that they be passed on in a significant way.

I would like to highlight a different idea however, which perhaps also adds to the unique need to perpetuate the telling of this story. The *Pesach* story bears a peculiarity. It started with an obligation to give a *Korban Pesach* (and a concomitant obligation to discuss the miracles) *before* the actual miracle was complete. This *mitzvah*, of course, has its post-miracle iteration. But why bring one before? When commanding the people to bring this initial *Korban*, Moshe instructs them to take a lamb from their flock, slaughter it, and then, on the fateful night before the Exodus, spread the blood onto their doorposts and lintels. According to the *Midrash*, the sheep was a prominent item of worship for the Egyptians at that time. Though they had already seen nine plagues, they still had to overcome hundreds of years of conditioning to perform this *mitzvah*. Indeed, it is implied from the *pasuk* that the fulfillment of the commandment was what merited their last step to salvation:

*“The Lord will pass through to smite Egypt, and He will see the blood that is on the lintel and the doorposts; and The Lord will pass over the entrance and He will not permit the destroyer to enter your homes to smite,”* (Exodus, 12:23).

This creates an incredible dynamic for the entire miracle. It seems that without their actions they would not have been saved. Clearly, this is a key aspect of the *Pesach* phenomenon. It is commemorated as the central part of the *Seder* meal. Perhaps this idea of needing to take action, a little leap towards God, is important to discuss, and consider as well.



## קדש והארבע כוסות – The Four Cups: A Closer Look

**Yehuda Sherman, Shana Aleph, Richmond, VA**

There are certain iconic hallmarks of Judaism that make their way into most Jewish homes. The *Pesach Seder* includes many of these rituals: the *Seder* plate, three *Matzot*, (remembering) the *Korban Pesach*, *Maror*, etc. The Four Cups of wine would also most certainly be included in this category. But there are some questions surrounding this seemingly simple *mitzvah*. Why four? Why wine? And why are they placed specifically where they are in the Seder?

Several explanations are given in the *Talmud Yerushalmi Pesachim* as to why we drink four cups specifically:

1. There are four expressions of redemption in the Torah in regards to *Yetziat Mitzraim*: "**I will take you out** from the suffering of Egypt; **I will deliver you** from their bondage; **I will redeem you** with an outstretched arm and with great judgments; **I will take you to Myself** as a nation..." (Exodus 6:6-7). The cups are to be drunk in correspondence with these four proclamations of God stating He would take us out from slavery. (This first explanation is probably the most well-known)
2. A second opinion believes the Four Cups to be an allusion to the incident of Joseph interpreting the dreams of the butler while in prison. The four cups relate to the four times in the butler's dream that the *pasuk* references Pharaoh's cup.
3. They are symbolic of the four kingdoms/eras where Jews have been oppressed: Egyptian, Babylonian, Greek, and our current time. The reason we drink wine at the Seder is the same reason we lean and - in the times of the *Beit HaMikdash*- eat the *Korban Pesach*. In order to symbolize our freedom and redemption from Egypt, we act like royalty. And because wine was the choice drink of kings, we drink it at the Seder.

When we turn to the *Mishnah (Pesachim 10:1)*, we see a rather blunt mention of the first time that the Four Cups of wine must be drunk at the Seder: "...they must give him no fewer than *four*

*cups of wine.*” Rav Ovadiah Bartenura comments that the cups are a remembrance of the aforementioned four languages of redemption. But the question still remains: why at these specific places in the *Haggadah- Kaddesh, Maggid, Birkat HaMazon, and Hallel-* do we drink the Four Cups? The simplest answer is that each cup was attached to a *mitzvah – Kiddush*, telling the story of the Exodus, *Birkat HaMazon*, and *Hallel* (*Pesachim* 117b). Two of these, *Kiddush* and *Birkat HaMazon* always include wine (the latter at least with a *zimun*.) However, perhaps we can suggest a reason that unifies all four as well. The *Gemara* (*Berachot* 35a) states in the name of *Rabbi Yonatan*, “...there is no praising *HaShem* (in song) without wine.” That would seem to answer the question pretty well; *Hallel* most obviously fits into this category as it is centered around giving praise to Hashem. *Kiddush* and *Birkat HaMazon* are in fact praising HaShem for “bringing us this holy day” in the case of the former and “eating and being satiated” in the latter. And *Maggid*, despite its twists and turns (and length, yeah we’re all thinking it), glorifies God’s redemption of the Children of Israel.

That being said, this answer- and the previous ones- cleared up questions regarding the Four Cups of wine at the *Seder*. I hope this brings to light something about an integral part of our *Pesach* tradition.



## Why Do We Wash? – ורחץ

**Eliyahu Avraham Roth, Shana Bet, Woodmere, NY**

There is a common *minhag* during the *Seder* to wash before we eat *karpas*, usually without a *beracha*. If one analyzes the origin for this *minhag*, one may discover that it has implications for many things we eat such as Oreos in milk, or apples dipped in honey. To understand the source for washing by *karpas*, we must first investigate a few laws pertaining to washing before eating bread and the laws of *tumah*. There are several relevant *halachot*:

1. *Tumah* begins being “spread” by an *Av HaTumah* (that which generated the *tumah*, like someone with *tzara’at*) and generally gets “weaker” as it spreads. Thus, if an *Av HaTumah* touches a person, that second person becomes a *Rishon*. If the *Rishon* touches something it becomes a *Sheini*. In limited cases, this can “spread” further (see below).
2. Rabbinically, our hands are generally defined at *Sheini L’Tumah* because the Rabbis were concerned that we might accidentally touch an unclean part of our bodies without noticing. Thus, they mandate washing hands in certain circumstances.
3. Regular food can only become a *Sheini L’Tumah* or higher (and can only accept *tumah* from a *Rishon* or higher), while *terumah* can even become a *Shelishi L’Tumah* (and accept from *Sheni* and up). Something *Kodesh* can become a *Revi’i*.
4. Anything that can make be *mitamai terumah* (anything *Sheni* and up), when touching one of the seven halakhic liquids (wine, bee honey, olive oil, milk, dew, blood, and water) becomes a rabbinic *Rishon*.

The first *Gemara* to explore (*Chullin*, 106a) says that we wash for bread in order to “create a habit for *terumah* and because of *mitzvah*.” This idea of “*mitzvah*”, *Tosafot* explains, means to have clean hands. In other words, the first reason is that we are worried that if people get used to eating bread with hands that are *Tumot Sheniot* (which is permitted) *Kohanim* will accidentally eat *terumah* without washing their hands (which is a problem, since it would make the *terumah tamei*, and that’s an *Issur D’Orayta*). The second reason is for cleanliness. Rabbeinu Yonah explains that the reason that hand washing was only instituted for bread and not other

foods from which *terumah* is taken (Biblically speaking only wine and oil) is because the most common *terumah* food the *kohanim* touched with their hands was bread.

The next *Gemara* to analyze (*Pesachim*, 115a) says “anything dipped in a liquid you need to wash on.” There’s a *machloket Rishonim* as to the reason for this *D’Rabanan* command. *Tosafot* quote *Rashi* as saying that the reason for this is because our hands are *Sheniot L’Tumah*, and if they touch the water it will become a *Rishon* and make the food *Sheni*: therefore, we need to wash for the same reason as bread. In other words, in order to protect the institution of *terumah* the *Rabannan* made us treat bread like *terumah* being that it is the most common *terumah*. Yet, that wasn’t enough; they didn’t only want to protect *terumah* in the most common form of *terumah* but to protect it by not having *tumah* around at all. Rabbi Dvir Ginsberg, *Rosh HaYeshiva*, explained: “If they allowed people to get the dipped food *tamei*, *tumah* would be like a virus, since now that food can be *M’Tamai terumah*. Therefore, they created a *D’Rabannan* in order to protect *terumah*.” This is the view of the majority of *Rishonim* (including the *Rambam*, *Rosh*, *Mordechai*, and *Tur*) and would therefore mean that not only would one have to wash on dipped foods year-round, but would also have to say a *beracha* on the washing, since it’s just like washing by bread.

The other view is that of *Tosafot*. He rules that this washing wasn’t because of the same reason as bread, but rather because touching water (which takes the status of a *Rishon*) will make your body *tamei*. According to *Tosafot*, this is *assur* (this is a *machloket Rishonim* in *Chullin* whether or not it’s *mutar* to make your body *tamei*). According to *Tosafot*, since this washing wasn’t a unique *D’Rabannan*, but rather a way to avoid violating a different *D’Rabannan* of making your body *tamei*, even in the time of the *Mishnah* and *Gemara* they didn’t make a *berachah*. Nowadays we are impure anyways, so it is pointless to wash on dipped foods and making a *berachah* would be a *berachah l’vatala*.

Because of the *machloket* whether or not to wash, with the implications for *berachot*, the *Shulchan Aruch* rules (*Orach Chaim* 158:4) that one should wash without a *berachah* for food touched by one of the seven liquids. The *Mishnah Berurah* quotes the *Magen Avraham* who notes

that the common *minhag* is not to wash on dipped foods and that certainly has a basis that can be relied upon. Regardless, many *Acharonim* say it's best for one to wash on dipped foods.

Now to return to *karpas*: why do those who generally rule like *Tosafot* only wash for dipped foods on *Seder* night? The *Shaar HaTziyun* says (473:69) that the reason is in order to get the younger kids at the table to ask about this practice. It's yet another thing we do to make *Pesach* night different, fitting into the general theme.



## כרפס – Not Just Another Vegetable

Yosef Nahon, Shana Aleph, Miami, FL

*Karpas*, often almost overlooked due to its brevity, holds great meaning beneath its salty surface (after dipped, of course, in salt water). *Karpas*, just like its taste, creates some unsettling issues to ingest. The word “*Karpas*” does not appear in the *Mishna* or *Talmud*, but the concept is recorded in the final chapter of Tractate *Pesachim*. We see a requirement of dipping a vegetable in salt water/vinegar before reciting the *Haggadah*, which seems to be an odd concept.

Defining the word “*Karpas*”, on the other hand, is quite difficult. The only mention of “*Karpas*” in all of Biblical Canon is in Esther 1:6, where it mentions *Karpas* among a list of cloth items (presumably fine wool). *Rashi* (Genesis 37:3) relates this word in Esther to the “*Ketonet Pasim*” of Yosef, arguing that it was part of the fabric in his coat. Some say that the *karpas* we eat at the Seder alludes to this latter reference. We dip our *karpas* in salt water rather than the blood into which Yosef’s coat was dipped. The ritual of *Karpas* invokes the memory of intrafamily hatred that led to exile, and eventually the enslavement in Egypt. *Karpas* captures the resulting tragedy as well, by representing the tears caused by the backbreaking labors. Thus, *Karpas* invokes both the crime and punishment of the Yosef story.

The more well-known definition is that it refers to some kind of vegetable or green item, something upon which you can make a blessing of “*Borei Pri HaAdama*”, which will count for the *Maror* we eat later in the Seder. A halakhic problem arises as to how much one should eat. Should one eat enough to make a blessing of “*Borei Nefashot*”, or just have in mind the *Maror* by the *Beracha* of *Karpas*, without eating a significant quantity now?

We must also ask what food is used for *Karpas*? A widespread custom for *Sepharadim* is to use celery, while many *Ashkenazim* use parsley. However, due to a series of complexities, many *Ashkenazim* began using boiled potatoes instead. There is, however, room for a variety of vegetables, with people using everything from radishes, ginger, or even bananas and pineapples (and there are more people than you know who use a banana for *Karpas*).

It is odd that while so much of the Seder is dictated down to its last detail, so much leeway is given to *Karpas*. Why does it have no specific structure?

Now, while it seems I've bitten off more than I can crunch, there's actually a simple answer. We include *Karpas* so the kids will ask questions, which is central to *Seder* night. I should add one more point: the complications and variegated customs are what makes *Karpas* a surefire way to get kids to ask questions. They should not only ask what is "*Karpas*". There's always another question to ask as one grows, from the simple "Why aren't we eating yet?" or "Why are we using celery while Mikey uses a banana?" to "Why don't we make a blessing "*Borei Nefashot*" after eating the celery?" and "What are the opinions towards why one should use vinegar?" No matter how old one is there's always something to ask about *Karpas*. Our questions can be ones like Socrates that lead to our own demise, or like a Jew that enlightens our understanding. When you see your children basking in the light of confusion, which then motivates them to start asking questions, your *Seder* is off to a good start.



## **A Mysterious Break – יחץ**

### **משגיח רוחני – Rabbi Ashi Harow**

The “*Seder*” (order) within the *Seder* is that after we make *Kiddush*, we wash our hands in order to fulfill the first dipping of the night, the dipping of the *Karpas*. After the eating of the *Karpas*, the *Shulchan Aruch* instructs us to take the middle *Matzah* and break it in two pieces, separating these two pieces from each other. The larger part is to be used further on for the eating of the *Afikoman*, while the smaller part will be for the initial mitzvah of eating *Matzah*. This action is what the *Haggadah* refers to as “*Yachatz*”.

Why do these two actions of eating *Matzah* have to be done with a *Matzah* that was broken? It is derived from one of the the *Gemara*’s suggestions as to why the Torah defines *Matzah* as “*lechem oni*”, poor man’s bread (*Pesachim* 115b-116a). The *Gemara* cites various opinions as to the understanding of this term. One of the opinions is that this word stems from the word “*ani*” one who is poor. Just like one who is poor doesn't usually eat complete loaves of bread, but rather small pieces, so to the *Matzah* should be eaten in this form on the *Seder* night. Based on this, we eat both of our main eatings on broken pieces of *Matzah*.

While this explains why we break the *Matzah*, it does not explain why we do so specifically at this point in the *Seder*. According to our explanation, the breaking is not needed until later on, when we reach “*Motzi Matzah*” and we actually eat the *Matzah* (see the opinion of the *Rambam*, *Hilchot Chametz U'Matzah* 8:6).

Perhaps we break break the *Matzah* at this time of the *Seder* to accommodate the opinion of *Shemuel* in the aforementioned *Gemara*. He understands “*lechem oni*” as deriving from a different etymology, meaning “call out loud” (“*V’Anita V’amarta...*”). According to *Rashi* (ibid), this indicates that one should recite the *Hallel* and the *Haggadah* while the *Matzah* is present.

However, this also does not suffice as the reason. According to the position that one must recite the story of the redemption of Egypt while the *Matzah* is present, it would have sufficient to have a whole *Matzah* in front of him. Nothing is added according to this position, by breaking the *Matzah* at this point, as *Shemuel* does not think *Matzah* needs to be “poor man’s bread.” Seemingly, he reasons that “*lechem oni*” refers exclusively to the rhetorical value of the *Matzah* and doesn’t refer at all to its quality of being a “poor man’s bread” (see *Shulchan Aruch HaRav* OC 473 for further discussion). If this is the case, we are back to our original question: why should we break the *Matzah* at this point in the *Seder*?

While there are many answers to this question, we will focus on one of them.

Let us begin with two additional questions. How are we not bothered by the tremendous *hefsek* (gap) between the *Kiddush* and the eating of *Matzah*? Normally, we are obligated to start the meal after the *Kiddush* (due to the principle of *Kiddush B’Makom Se’udah*), and according to many opinions if one delays his meal for such a long time, he does not fulfill his obligation to recite *Kiddush*!

Furthermore, after we drink the first of the four cups of wine, which is the *Kiddush* wine, the *Shulchan Aruch* rules that we need not recite a *Berachah Achronah* (a blessing after eating). This also raises halakhic questions. As many of our *Sedarim* continue for a long time before we drink the second cup, and by that time the first wine is digested, nullifying our obligation to say a *Berachah Achronah* according to many *poskim*, we must explain this course of action. Why are we not obligated to recite a *Berachah Achronah*?

We can understand this by explaining the reason behind the obligation to recite the *Berachah Achronah* within the time of digestion. One explanation for this law is that we must praise and thank *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* while we still feel the pleasure from that which we ate; once the benefit has past, we lose the opportunity to recite the *berachah*.

However, another approach is possible – perhaps there simply needs to be a clear connection between a *berachah* and the reason for which it was recited. Just as a *Berachah*

*Rishonah* must be recited right before one's action, “*Over L'Asiyatan*”, a *Berachah Achronah* also has to project its connection to that upon which it is said. As long as one is still full from the food he ate, it is enough of a connecting factor to the *berachah*. But the same can hold true if one is taking part in a continuous *se'udah*, even if the time for digestions has passed. As long as it is evident that you are still in the process of *se'udah*, the blessing is still connected to previous eating or drinking. This is enough to keep the obligation of *Berachah Achronah* “alive”.

With this in our minds, let us go back to the question of *Kiddush B'Makom Se'udah*. The same is true in that matter. What is critical is that the *Kiddush* be connected to the *se'udah*, enhancing the *se'udah* of *Shabbat* or *Yom Tov*. As long as there is a clear connection between the *Kiddush* and the meal itself, we fulfill the obligation of *Kiddush B'Makom Se'udah*. If this idea is correct, we can now understand the need to break the *Matzah* at this point of the *Seder*. We just made *Kiddush*, and we ate some *Karpas*, but now we are about to start a long break by reciting the *Maggid* and discussing *Divrei Torah* on different matters of *Yetziat Mitzraim*. It is very important to us at this point to make it very clear that the *Kiddush* that we made is not separated from the continuation of our meal later on, but rather this is a process that we start with *Kiddush* and continue later with our *Yom Tov* meal. This is the reason that we break the *Matzah* at that point, emphasizing that, even though we are not yet eating our *Matzah*, in a certain sense, we are starting the meal now by breaking the *Matzah* that we will eat soon enough.

The practical issue we can derive according to this understanding is that we should have the right thought when breaking the *Matzah*. We should not only worry about not messing up by breaking the *Matzah* into a tiny piece of *Matzah* in one hand and a large one in the other hand. We must also keep in mind that this is the beginning of the *se'udah*!



## הא לחמא עניא – The Perfect Opener

### Mordechai Cohen, Shana Dalet, Detroit, MI

Everyone knows about the phenomenon of the “once a year Jew” attending synagogue on *Yom Kippur*. But in fact, more American Jews participate in the Passover *Seder* than fast on *Yom Kippur* (70% versus 50%, according to a 2013 survey). One of the main reasons for the popularity of the *Seder* is the resonance of the story that we tell and retell – that of our slavery in Egypt, the subsequent miraculous Exodus, and the birth of our nation. The text of the *Haggadah* is universal, with Jews from all walks of life coming together on the same night to hand down to their children the same tradition given to them by their parents, who in turn received it from their parents, in a chain going all the way back our ancestors who experienced the Exodus first hand.

*“It is a positive commandment of the Torah,”* Rambam writes, *“to relate the miracles and wonders wrought for our ancestors in Egypt on the night of the fifteenth of Nisan,”* (*Rambam, Hilchot Chametz U’Matzah* 7:1). The focus on education, telling the story to our offspring, is derived from an explicit verse, *“And you shall tell your son on that day,”* (Exodus 13:8).

The *Haggadah* is essentially an educational text, reflected by the question and answer structure, starting with the famous Four Questions, commonly known as the *מה נשתנה*. It also explains the various “oddities” of the *Seder*, such as washing one’s hands before dipping the vegetable in salt water. These details are all designed to arouse the curiosity of the children, to elicit the question: “Why is this night different from all other nights?” This whole interactive recounting of the Exodus is formally known as “*Maggid*” and is the longest section of the *Seder*.

Here we encounter something strange. *Maggid* opens with the traditional lifting of the *Matzah* and the words, “This is the bread of affliction....” The *Haggadah* then continues, “Let all those who are hungry come and eat, and all who are in need come and take part in the *Seder*.” The paragraph ends with the hope that next year we will be celebrating Passover freely

in Israel. This opening declaration is strange for a number of reasons. First, when we hold up the *Matzah*, how can we possibly suggest that this is the bread our ancestors ate in Egypt, as though it is the very same *Matzah*? Second, why is the invitation for the hungry not made in the synagogue, where those waiting for an invitation would actually be found? Third, why are we hoping to celebrate “freely” **next year**; isn't the *Seder* celebrating our **current** freedom?

These three questions are part of a much broader question: why is this passage part of *Maggid* at all? It doesn't seem to be contributing anything to the Exodus narrative. It even appears before the Four Questions that trigger the telling of the story to our children.

Therefore, we need to understand exactly how these opening lines, although not exactly part of telling the story, are nevertheless essential for understanding the story and the overall *Seder* experience. The passage is in fact the ideal introduction to the *Maggid* section. The key to understanding this curious opening paragraph of *Maggid* can be found in the *Haggadah's* description of how we are supposed to participate in the *Seder*, in particular how we are meant to relive the Exodus from Egypt. “*In each and every generation,*” it states, “*a person must present himself as if he personally has now left the slavery of Egypt.*” Why is this so important? Isn't it enough to be just tell the history regarding the foundation of our nation? It is as if the *Haggadah* says, “No! If we view the story as merely a history lesson, as something that happened to our ancestors some 3300 years ago, and not something that we experience constantly in our daily lives, then we have missed the essential relevance of the Passover *Seder*.”

Rather than jump straight into a story about slavery and the miraculous Exodus that happened “once upon a time” to our ancestors, freeing them and their descendants to live “happily ever after,” **הא לחמא עניא** comes at the beginning of *Maggid* and tells, “Wait! Don't miss the point! This is also a powerful spiritual story about you today!”

How so? Our Rabbis teach us that the Hebrew word for Egypt, *Mitzraim* (מצרים), is the same as the Hebrew word for “limitations”, “*Meitzarim*” (מצרים). This is no coincidence, but rather transforms the *Seder* from a story about the past to an ongoing story of our lives in

the present. The point of the *Seder* in other words is not just about leaving Egypt, but our daily efforts to go beyond our own self limitations.

So we start *Maggid* by holding up a piece of Matzah and declaring, “This is the bread of affliction.” The *Haggadah* immediately establishes the deeper mindset needed for *Maggid* - the realization that we are still “enslaved,” albeit in very different ways. Can we honestly say that we are not “enslaved” to certain bad habits, character issues, unhealthy desires, and so on? Aren’t we all encumbered by certain “limitations” that hold us back from personal growth and reaching our full potential? Are we, for example, learning as much as we would like to be? Are we keeping our minds as pure as we can? Is our concentration during תפילה as focused as we would hope? Are we the best role models for the people around us, especially those who look up to us? These are our breads of affliction, and the first lesson is to see that slavery is not only physical, but is also and perhaps more importantly, spiritual.

This brings us to the second lesson from the opening *Maggid* paragraph, expressed in the invitation to all who are “hungry” to come and “eat”. There are two types of hunger, physical hunger and spiritual hunger (or “thirst”). As mentioned above, the *Haggadah* is essentially an educational text. This invitation therefore is to alert us not only about our own limitations but of the limitations of others, the community around us. Although we are long out of Egypt, we need to be sensitive that people are still “in need,” whether physically or spiritually, and that we cannot allow either need to go unheard. The “invitation” in this sense becomes part of our personal Exodus, something we take with us from the *Seder* to carry throughout the year.

This leads us to the end of the opening paragraph when we express our wish for the ultimate freedom manifested through the coming of the *Mashiach*. When viewing the words of the Prophets and Sages that describe the coming of the *Mashiach*, we find that they overwhelmingly discuss the material benefits of the Messianic Era. This seems counterintuitive, as Torah Judaism generally encourages spiritual and intellectual pursuits. *Rambam* explains how the two work together: “*The sages and the prophets did not long for the Messianic era so that they may...eat, drink and be merry; but only to be free [for involvement]*”

*with the Torah and its wisdom, without anyone to oppress and disturb them...*” (Rambam, *Hilchot Milachim U’Milchamot* 12:7).

The final lines of **הא לחמא עניא** remind us of ultimate aim of all our years of “slavery” - both physical and spiritual - starting with the first Exodus but continuing until the present. Every year, we express our hope for more clarity in understanding the value of the fight for “freedom”, freedom in the fullest sense of the word, a freedom worth struggling for, the coming of the *Mashiach* speedily within our days.



## הא לחמא עניא – Our Incomplete Seder

### ראש הישיבה – Rabbi Chaim Ozer Chait

We begin the *Maggid* portion of the *Haggadah* with a post-Mishnaic insertion of “הא לחמא עניא” (cf. *Ritva* in the *Torat Chaim Haggadah*). Many of our commentators have offered a variety of ideas explaining this passage, as well as addressing its role as the introduction to *Maggid*. Its basic message is an open invitation to the poor to join us both for a *Seder* meal as well as to partake with us in the *Korban Pesach*. The invitation for the *Seder* meal may be traced back to the *Talmud Yerushalmi* in *Masechet Bava Batra* Chapter 1 *Halachah* 4, where it is stated that the people of a city can coerce its residents to contribute to the “Wheat for *Pesach*” fund, which became commonly known as the “*Ma’ot Chittin*” fund, as mentioned in the *Rama Orach Chaim* 429:1. Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveichick, as found in *Harerei Kedem*, explains that the Vilna Gaon held this is a special requirement of *tzedakah* that stems from the *Mitzvah* of eating *Matzah*. This would explain why “הא לחמא עניא” was said after *Kiddush*, as the *Mitzvah* of *Matzah* is the source of the practice. Furthermore, it should be noted that the *Rambam* points out in *Hilchot Yom Tov* (Chapter 6 *Halacha* 18) that any *Yom Tov* meal that does not include the needs of the poor is lacking in the fulfillment of a *Yom Tov* meal. This reinforces the idea that “הא לחמא עניא” should be recited after *Kiddush* at the beginning of *Maggid* as this is the special requirement of the *Seder* meal.

However, the reference to the *Korban Pesach* is difficult to understand, especially since “הא לחמא עניא” was written after the destruction of the second *Beit HaMikdash* and the *Korban Pesach* was no longer available. Why would someone offer an invitation to a meal he does not have? However, upon a deeper understanding of the *Mitzvot* of the evening, we see that the absence of the *Korban Pesach* fundamentally affects their performance. Without the *Korban Pesach*, *Maror* loses its status as a Biblical Commandment and is rendered a *Mitzvah D’Rabbanan*. Even *Matzah*, which is a *Mitzvah D’Oraita*, lacks in its full expression if it is not accompanied by the *Korban Pesach*.

The recital of “הא לחמא עניא” is an expression of our desire to perform the *Mitzvot* in their most perfect state. Although we may not have a poor person standing outside waiting to be invited to our *Seder* table, had we had the opportunity, we would have invited him in with happiness and true sincerity of heart. Although we do not have the *Korban Pesach*, we deeply yearn for the time when the *Korban Pesach* will be returned to *Am Yisrael* and the *Mitzvot* of the night can be fulfilled to their full extent.

We conclude the “הא לחמא עניא” with the following words “This year we are here, next year may we be in the Land of Israel. This year slaves, next year free men.” The *Shebolei HaLeket* (Rabbi Tzidkiyah HaRofei) explains this is not just a statement of hope; in fact, it contains a concealed prayer that says, “Let it be your will, God, to fulfill this year your promise that we may bring the *Korban Pesach* next year in Jerusalem.”



## מה נשתנה? – Has it Really Changed?

**Avraham Gross, Shana Aleph, Cedarhurst, NY**

We do it every year. We remember being a little kid and getting up to ask the questions in front of everyone at the table. Parents and friends alike were so proud of you because you read all the questions correctly, but did you ever really take a chance to think about what it is that you're doing? Why do we continue to ask the same questions every year even though we know the answers? Why do we specifically use the question format as opposed to the rest of the *Haggadah* which is just reading the story of the Jews leaving Egypt? We will attempt to shed some light on these questions.

The first mention we see of the question-answer format is in the Torah itself:

וְהָיָה כִּי-יִשְׁאַלְךָ בְנֶךָ, מָחָר--לֵאמֹר מַה-זֹּאת וְאַמַּרְתָּ אֵלָיו--בְּחֹזֶק יָד הוֹצִיאָנוּ יְהוָה מִמִּצְרַיִם,  
מִבֵּית עֲבָדִים

“And when, in time to come, your son asks you, saying, ‘What does this mean?’ you shall say to him, ‘It was with a mighty hand that the Lord brought us out from Egypt, the house of bondage,’” (Exodus 13:14).

*Ma Nishtanah* itself, though with slightly different questions, appears in the *Mishnah* in *Pesachim* (10:4) While we have provided the source, we must still answer the more fundamental questions: why do we continue to ask these questions every year if we know the answers and why do we use the question-answer format at all?

We can suggest several answers. The simplest understanding is that we continue to ask these questions because there's something unique about a question. A question allows for a dialogue, piques people's interest, and helps to encourage interaction and involvement. Of course, the hope is that these four questions spur further questions and answers throughout the night. Second, even when you know the answer to the question, the style of question-

answer make it more enjoyable and more memorable than reading information off of a paper.

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik (*Festival of Freedom, Essays on Pesach and the Haggadah*) suggests a similar idea, noting that our goal on *Pesach* is not to tell, but to explore, a process which happens best through questions and answers: “The *Haggadah* refers to the commandment of recounting the Exodus as “*L’Sapper B’Yetziat Mitzraim*”. The transitive verb “*sippur*”, when linked with the accusative case, “*L’Sapper et Yetziat Mitzrayim*”, denotes narration of a story. Yet when it is linked with the ablative case, “*L’Sapper B’Yetziat Mitzraim*”, its meaning shifts: it denotes not just narration, but study and exploration.” Perhaps, while we ask the same questions yearly during *Ma Nishtanah*, we are continuously looking for new answers as there are always new explanations that can expand our understanding of the story of *Pesach*.

Rabbi Soloveitchik is actually channeling a basic *halachah* in *Shulchan Aruch* (*Orach Chaim* 481:2): “One must engage in study of the Passover laws and the exodus, and recount the miracles and wonders that God performed for our forefathers, until sleep overcomes him” It is important not just to repeat the same story, but rather to delve into it and analyze it anew each year to gain to gain a better understanding of it. That is the secret of the repetitive questions of *Ma Nishtanah*.



## הסדר בבני ברק – An Interesting Account

ר"ם – Rabbi Aryeh Sklar

The editors of the *Haggadah* chose to include a *Mishnah* in *Berachot* (1:5) that forces the reader to question nearly every aspect of it (and perhaps that is the point!). What is it doing here at the beginning of *Maggid*, or at the *Pesach Seder* at all? What is its relationship with the previous story of the rabbis in *Bnei Brak*, besides for the superficial connection of the reading of the *Shema*? And what do we learn from it for our lives?

Something else in the debate here strikes us as strange. *Ben Zoma*, and apparently *Rabbi Elazar* as well, believe that the *halacha* with regard to reading the *Shema* will change when the Messiah comes. We see that the Sages say that the *derasha* of “*kol*” is to include Messianic times, which implies that *Ben Zoma* disagrees. Indeed, the first comment in the *Talmud* after this *Mishnah* (*Berachot* 12b) is *Ben Zoma* arguing against the Sages by saying, “Will the Exodus from Egypt really be mentioned in Messianic times?”

This seems to go against the *Rambam*’s ninth principle of faith, where he states that Torah law, written and oral, will never change. No *mitzvot* will cease to be performed in the future. So how could *Ben Zoma* believe it will? Just read the *Rambam*’s strong words in *Hilchot Yesodei HaTorah* 9:1, where he says anyone who claims that the *halacha* is different in Messianic times than what Moses says should be put to death. So is *Ben Zoma* claiming that we will not say the third paragraph of *Shema* in the future, and is therefore worthy of death according to the *Rambam*?

To add even more to this, the *Rambam* himself apparently holds like *Ben Zoma* and *Rabbi Elazar* (*Hilchot Keriat Shema* 1:3) that one should say the third paragraph of *Shema* at *Ma’ariv*. But if *Ben Zoma*’s *derasha* is based on the principle that *halacha* changes in Messianic times, then the *Rambam* is contradicting his own ninth principle by holding like him.

Rabbi Yosef Kafach, in his commentary to the *Mishneh Torah* (*Hilchot Keriat Shema* 1:3), suggests that the *Rambam* actually holds like the Sages and not *Ben Zoma* and *Rabbi Elazar*.

According to this, says Rabbi Kafach, the Sages agree one must say it at night, but it is merely a *D'Rabbanan*. This is a creative approach, but most others don't see the *Rambam* this way.

It happens to be, not everyone agreed with the *Rambam* that *halacha* will remain the same in Messianic times. They base themselves off of Talmudic passages such as *Nidda* 61b: “*Rav Yosef* said: The commandments will be cancelled in the Time to Come.” Or *Kiddushin* 72b: “The Sages taught (Tosefta 5:5): *Mamzerim* and *Netinim* will be purified in the future; this is the statement of *Rabbi Yosei...*” *Vayikra Rabba* 9:7 also states: “All sacrifices will be voided in the Time to Come except for the Thanksgiving offering.” All of these have many possible interpretations. However, Rabbi Yosef Albo, in *Sefer HaIkkarim* 3:19-20, states that if a prophet were to be proven a true prophet, he could indeed make changes to the *halacha*, no matter the time. But this would still mean that according to the *Rambam*, all of these positions, including *Ben Zoma*'s, are heretical and those who believe them lose their portion in the World to Come.

Because of such debates, some even claim the *Rambam* never meant to include Messianic times in his ninth principle of faith. According to this, the *Rambam* agrees with *Ben Zoma* and all the rest that Messianic times could be different than today. This is difficult, as *Rambam* also writes in *Hilchot Milachim* 12:2 that there will be no difference between Messianic times and today except for political-national differences.

Another approach might be that it could fit into a broader framework of the *Rambam*'s understanding of the development of belief. Meaning to say, that the *Rambam* writes in several places (such as in the Guide for the Perplexed regarding sacrifices, or in his Letter on Resurrection regarding the fact the Torah never talks explicitly about resurrection) that sometimes earlier sages and people held beliefs that were meant to evolve over time. Unfortunately, we don't have the space here to explore this interesting possibility.

I came across a fascinating approach to this issue in *Sefer Petach Einaim* of the *Chida* on *Nidda* 61b. In *Nidda* 61b, as we quoted above, *Rav Yosef* seems to say that the *mitzvot* will cease in the Time to Come. All the major commentaries (see *Tosafot*, *Ritva*, *Rashba*, for example) try to explain this, some saying that this is referring to after one dies (that one is not obligated in *mitzvot* when they are dead), or that it refers to a short time period as a “*hora’at sha’a*” some time in the future, and many other kinds of answers.

The *Chida* quotes from a manuscript of the *Ritva* that *Rav Yosef* meant that in the future, we will not keep the *mitzvot* because God commanded them, but because we will recognize how good and perfect they are for us - an inner will instead of external command. As in, the “*mitzvah*” part will cease to matter, but we will still eat *Matzah* on *Pesach* and say the third paragraph of *Keriat Shema*, out of an inner understanding of the value of the commandments. No one has to convince us why we should eat food, or breathe, or go outside. We do those things because it’s a natural part of being human, that requires no further thought. Similarly, no one will need to command us or convince us to keep the *mitzvot*.

Perhaps this is what *Ben Zoma* means as well. He is not asking the Sages whether we will mention the Exodus, but rather whether they really think there needs to be a *derasha* obligating us to say it at that time. He is saying, what’s the point of such a *derasha* when we will clearly be saying it out of our own free will?

If the *Rambam* subscribes to such an approach is a big question. He says there is no difference between today and Messianic times, as we noted above. But some things will surely change regarding our relationship to God? It’s a natural consequence, not some miracle. The messiah will win our wars, regain the Temple Mount and build the Temple, and bring all of Israel together. Surely the *Rambam* agrees we will come to some new understandings because of that!

Indeed, it does fit with the overall vision of the prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Habakkuk, who prophesied that in Messianic times, everyone will know of God, and all will

recognize the greatness of God and the Jewish people. Just see Jeremiah 31's inspiring prophecy:

“I will place My law in their midst and I will inscribe it upon their hearts, and I will be their God and they shall be My people. And no longer shall one teach his neighbor or [shall] one [teach] his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they shall all know Me from their smallest to their greatest, says the Lord.”

Indeed, the *Malbim* writes on these verses that Jeremiah predicts a day when the Torah will be fulfilled because it will be so natural and make so much sense to us. And Rav Kook writes very similarly in his book “For the Perplexed of the Generation” (ch. 8). This is not one lone opinion of the *Chida*, or the *Ritva*.

We can use this approach to understanding *Ben Zoma's derasha* and its placement in our *Haggadah*. Through *Rabbi Elazar* and *Ben Zoma*, we declare that tonight, at the *Seder*, we can gain a bit of feeling of those Messianic days. By recounting the Exodus, we remember how great God was to us, we revel in His majesty, and we know that eating *Matzah* and drinking like free men is a natural reaction to the story. We are recreating the past, but representing our future when this will be just an act of the inner soul, of an inner recognition and love of God. Yes, we read *Shema* every day out of compulsion (where it emphasizes that if you don't keep them, God will punish you). But not at the *Seder*. The *Seder's mitzvot* are passionate, spontaneous, full of wonder and gratitude about the God who redeemed us and took us out of Egypt.

When the rabbis were feasting in *Bnei Brak*, they emphasized this as well. They got so caught up in talking of the Exodus that they made sure someone would remind them, “You have an obligation to read the *Shema!* You have an external obligation in this world, but one day there will be a time where that external obligation becomes an inner awareness.” The *Seder* ended, and they came back to an unredeemed world. That is, until next *Pesach*.

May it be that we come to greater understanding of Torah, as a very natural part of us, with the Messiah's arrival, speedily and in our days.



## ארבעת הבנים – Four Sons: Four Personalities

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Often, people think that the “Four Sons” refer to four-character types that exist in the world generally. However, it could be more specific – that each stands for a different kind of Jew in the land of Egypt. How so?

The wise son’s question is:

מָה הָעֲדוּת וְהַחֲקִים וְהַמְשָׁפְטִים אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ אֶתְכֶם

*"What are these testimonies, statutes and judgments that the Lord, our God, commanded you?"*

By asking about the laws and commandments, we see that the wise son stands in for those who were eager to leave Egypt, following Moshe to the Land of Israel and keeping all the laws that that would entail. They were thrilled by the prospect of serving God.

The wicked son challenges “מָה הָעֲבוּדָה הַזֹּאת לָכֶם-*What is this worship to you?*” This represents the Jews who were hesitant or flat out did not want to leave. *Rashi* (Exodus 10:22) cites a *Midrash* that illustrates the existence of such Jews. Commenting on the plague of Darkness, he writes: “*And why did He bring darkness upon them? Because there were wicked people amongst the Israelites of that generation who had no desire to leave Egypt, and these died during the three days of darkness so that the Egyptians might not see their destruction and say, ‘These, (the Israelites) too have been stricken as we have.’*” Thus, *Chazal* imagine a group who did not want, and indeed did not merit to, leave Egypt.

Of the simple son, we are told that he offers a simple question and receives a basic answer:

מה זאת? ואמרת אליו "בְּחֹזֶק יָד הוֹצִיאָנוּ ה' מִמִּצְרַיִם מִבֵּית עֲבָדִים

*“What is this?” And you will say to him, ‘With the strength of [His] hand did the Lord take us out from Egypt, from the house of slaves,’” (Exodus 13:14).*

The simple Jews were those who were unsure of how to react to the Exodus. They could have been scared of leaving, though obviously tired of slavery. The Torah describes this group in following *pasuk*:

וַיְדַבֵּר מֹשֶׁה בֶּן, אֶל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל; וְלֹא שָׁמְעוּ, אֶל-מֹשֶׁה, מִקֶּצֶר רוּחַ, וּמֵעֲבֹדָה קָשָׁה

*“But when Moses told this to the Israelites, they would not listen to Moses, their spirits crushed by cruel bondage,” (Exodus 6:9).*

They were too exhausted to process what was happening around them.

The final son is that one that does not know how to ask. Perhaps these are those who never experienced slavery – born before or after the period of slavery. To this child we tell the story as it happened, answering the questions he never thought to ask:

*“And you will speak to your son on that day saying, for the sake of this, did the Lord do [this] for me in my going out of Egypt,” (Exodus 13:8).*

Rather than see the Four Sons as examples of various children, we might actually be getting another glimpse into the Jews at the time of the Exodus.



## יכול מראש חודש – Was it Really Ever a Possibility?

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”והגדת לבנך, ביום ההוא לאמר בעבור זה, עשה יהוה לי, בצאתי, ממצרים.”

“And you shall tell your son on that day saying, ‘It is because of this [the Korban Pesach] that God did for me when I left Egypt,’” (Exodus 13:8).

Every culture has days dedicated to the commemoration of a historical event. America has Independence Day, France has Bastille Day and Israel has *Yom Ha’Atzmaut*. Judaism itself is chock full of such days as well, from *Tisha B’Av* and *Tzom Gedaliah* to *Chanukah* and *Purim*. What they all have in common is not just their function, namely, to remind the people of certain events on a yearly basis, but also the method they go about doing this. Each of these holidays is celebrated on the same date as the event it is commemorating. This is such an intuitive way of establishing a remembrance, we don’t even think about it. Any other date would be completely arbitrary, and wouldn’t induce a collective reliving of the victory, tragedy or miracle.

*Pesach* seems like it should follow the same principle, and indeed it does. Our awe inspiring, nation-birthing Exodus from *Mitzraim* occurred on the night of the 15th of *Nissan*, and so this should be when we retell the event.

However, strangely enough, the *Haggadah* tells that this conclusion was not a given and implies that it not something we would have concluded naturally. If the *pasuk* commanding us to discuss the *Pesach* story had only said “*V’Higgadetah L’Vincha*”, “Tell your son,” we would have thought the obligation of *sippur* (telling the story) starts on *Rosh Chodesh Nissan*. It’s only the words “*BaYom HaHu*,” “On that day,” which tell us to wait until the day itself to recount the miracle. As if this wasn’t strange enough, the *Haggadah* goes on to say if the *pasuk* hadn’t said the words “*Ba’avur Zeh*,” “Because of this,” we would’ve thought to start telling the story

on the 14th. But this is the day before the Exodus occurred! It seems like the *Haggadah* is working under the assumption that the date should be arbitrary, and the *pasuk* teaches a novel idea of events being celebrated on the day they actually happened!

To make sense of this section of the *Haggadah*, we must assume that *Rosh Chodesh* and the 14th of *Nissan* aren't random days, but are representative of different ideas which one does not get when we wait to begin *sippur* until the night of the 15th.

What happened on *Rosh Chodesh*? When Moshe is commanded to tell *Bnei Yisrael* about the *Korban Pesach*, God says “On the tenth of *this* month they shall take...” (Exodus 12:13) *Rashi* (ibid) quotes the *Mechilta*, which says this means Moshe was commanded to speak to *Bnei Yisrael* on *Rosh Chodesh*. This is supported by the previous *pasuk* that details the mitzvah of *Rosh Chodesh* itself. This idea of the *chiyuv* (obligation) of *Korban Pesach* coming into existence on *Rosh Chodesh* wasn't just true that first year in Egypt. Every month, the *Beit Din HaGadol*, the High Court, sanctified the new month, and without their decree, the month would not exist. *Chazal* (*Beitzah* 17a) say this is the meaning of the *Beracha* said on *Yom Tov* of “*HaMikadesh Yisrael V’Hazemanim*,” that God sanctifies *Yisrael* and *Yisrael* sanctifies the *zmanim*.

But why should this mean *sippur* begins then? For this, we must imagine what it was like as a slave to Pharaoh and hear this command from God. There must have been tremendous anticipation and joy. For months, the *Makkot* (plagues) pounded the Egyptians, but there was no end in sight. Now, the *Geulah* (redemption) was promised to happen in a specific timeframe, and there was something they could do to bring it about. They were no longer waiting helplessly for an indeterminate freedom. Before this time, they had no understanding of how God acted in the world. Miracles had been happening for some time, but they didn't seem to have any purpose or structure. When the command came, the first national *mitzvah*, *Bnei Yisrael* gained an insight into God's ways. They saw the outline of a system of *Sechar V’Onesh*, reward and punishment, whereby following God's word leads to salvation, and going against it leads to destruction. All the *Makkot* which happened before were suddenly illuminated as the just punishment of the wicked, and the plan of them being saved and protected was laid out in

front of them. If *Pesach* is an experience of reflecting on God's system of *Hashgachah* (Providence), and recognizing that *ma'asim tovim* (good actions) lead to beneficial results, then it makes a lot of sense why one would think to begin the relaying of *Yetziat Mitzraim* from the time *Bnei Yisrael* were first exposed to this understanding.

In light of this idea, the Torah specifies “*BaYom HaHu.*” Obviously, this means the *Seder* night, the night the *yeshu'ah* (salvation) manifested itself, right? But again, the *Haggadah* says we would've thought this meant the 14th. What was so important about this day, *'Erev Pesach*? This was the day the *Korban Pesach*, which was commanded fourteen days before, was actually brought. (The reason the *pasuk* quoted earlier says “On the tenth...” is because that first year in *Mitzraim Bnei Yisrael* held onto the lamb for four days in preparation for the mitzvah.) Whereas on *Rosh Chodesh*, the people gained theoretical insight into the workings of God, now they were personally involving themselves in the process. The action-reaction duality of *Sechar V'Onesh* became more real to them as they initiated the action, and waited for God's reaction. *Sippur* isn't just an abstract speculation of the justice inherent in the universe, but a recognition of one's own ability to take part and gain from that justice.

Where does this leave us now? The *Haggadah* seems to have built up a strong case for two alternate possibilities of the start-time for *sippur*; why do we begin when we do? *Leil HaSeder* was the night when every house in *Mitzraim* lost their firstborn, and *Bnei Yisrael* were protected. Our *pasuk* says “*Ba'avor Zeh*”, “Because of this,” referring to the *Korban Pesach*. On that night, the reaction of God to their action occurred, and following *Dvar HaShem* paid off. Not only did they have an abstract knowledge of man's role in *Hashgachah* as they received on *Rosh Chodesh*, nor only the experience of engaging in the system. Now, on the night of the 15th, the reality of God's hand acting in proportion with humanity's became undeniable. They saw with their own eyes, and not just in their minds, how *ma'asim tovim* lead to good results. Whereas *Bnei Yisrael* was already engaged in the process on the 14th, the 15th was the first point when their experiential knowledge was complete. Before, they could doubt whether the information they received second hand was true, but now doubts were impossible. Only then could the *sippur* begin, when they were absolutely sure of the truth of God's justice.

One can learn much from the bottom-line *Halacha*, but often the greatest insights come from analyzing what the *Chazal* would've thought before the *pasuk* tells them otherwise. With all these ideas in mind, our *sippur* on *Leil HaSeder* should be all the more meaningful and thought-provoking.



## עובדי עבודה זרה היו – A Directed Redemption

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After introducing *Avadim Hayinu*, the initial discussion of our slavery, we then mention that our ancestors were idolaters. What is the point of mentioning this, and why now? The source for this is the *Talmud's* (*Pesachim* 116b) mandate that we begin our narration with the negative and then continue with the praise. *Rav* and *Shemuel* are divided as to whether the negative is the slavery and the positive our redemption, or that the negative is our spiritual history - that “our fathers were idolaters” - and the positive that we were brought to serve God.

As children, we are taught the basic story of being saved from Egyptian slavery. Why does *Rav* argue that it is not this story that we are focusing on, but rather that of moving away from being idol worshippers?

According to *Rav*, to understand the framework of the Exodus, we must realize the fundamental purpose was to move us away from being a nation of idolaters. Part of becoming a nation was forging a community that would avoid sin, especially one as egregious as idolatry. The *Talmud* (*Shevu'ot* 39a) derives the principle of Jews being responsible for each other from a *pasuk* (Leviticus 26:37) that is in the middle of a discussion of the dangers of idolatry. This is not an accident. At the end of that chapter the *pasuk* says “These are the decrees, the laws and the regulations that the Lord established at Mount Sinai between himself and the Israelites through Moses.”

Jews are responsible for each other because of a singular oath taken at Mount Sinai. The fundamental expression of that oath is our communal acceptance of God. Therefore, more than any other sin, worshipping idolatry would be a breach of that commitment. Thus, while Jews may be responsible for each other for all *mitzvot*, *Kol Yisrael Areivim Zeh BaZeh*, the most intense of expression of that is our mutual responsibility to avoid idolatry.

*Rav* wants us to understand this as the Seder. Our national identity is to be directed towards spirituality, and on *Pesach* we don't only celebrate our freedom from hard labor. Rather, we celebrate being redeemed from a sinful national identity and granted a positive spiritual agenda. On *Pesach* our joy comes from remembering our national purpose.



## The First Enemy - ארמי עובד אבי

**Danny Goldberg, Shana Aleph, Antwerp, Belgium**

The *Haggadah* begins its story of the threats that faced the nation of Israel not with that of Pharaoh, but with that of Lavan:

צא ולמד, מה בקש לבן הארמי לעשות ליעקב אבינו--שפרעה הרשע, לא גזר אלא על הזכרים; ולבן בקש לעקר את הכל, שנאמר "ארמי אבד אבי, ויורד מצרימה, ויגר שם במתי מעט, ויהי שם לגוי גדול עצום רב.

*"Go out and learn what Lavan the Aramean sought to do to Ya'akov our father! Pharaoh the evil only decreed against the males, but Lavan sought to uproot everything, as it is written 'A wandering Aramean was my father. he went down into Egypt, and sojourned there,'" (Deuteronomy 26:5).*

Where are these words taken from? They are not from any text central to the Exodus narrative; rather, they are part of the statement that a farmer declares when he brings his *bikkurim*, first fruits, to the *Beit HaMikdash* in Jerusalem. It is that farmer who starts the tale with Lavan.

Let us turn to the *pesukim* that prove that Lavan indeed wanted to drive Ya'akov's family to extinction:

ויקח את-אחיו, עמו, ויודף אחריו, דרך שבעת ימים; וידיבק אתו, בהר הגלעד. ויבא אלקים אל-לבן הארמי, בחלם הלילה; ויאמר לו, השמר לך פן-תדבר עם-יעקב--מטוב עד-רע.

*"He took his brethren with him, and pursued after him seven days' journey; and he overtook him in the mountain of Gil'ad. And God came to Lavan the Aramean in a dream of the night, and said to him: 'Take heed to thyself that the shall not speak good or bad about Ya'akov,'" (Genesis 31:23-4).*

Assuming that the retrospective of *Arami Oved Avi* is not the sole proof text for Lavan's ill intent, it is clear that the above verses are the source. It seems that God was warning him against acting violently against Ya'akov, going so far as to forbid him from "speaking either good or bad". Clearly, however, God was restraining him from carrying out exactly such destructive actions.

Why did Lavan try to destroy everyone, both sons and daughters? After all, they are his family. One could suggest that he did not want to kill them – rather, he wanted to kill Ya'akov and take his family back. This, however, would have led to their spiritual destruction. He wanted to make them, as Lavan says to Ya'akov , “הַבָּנוֹת בְּנֹתַי וְהַבָּנִים בְּנֵי” – the sons are my sons and the daughters my daughters,” (Genesis 31:43).

While this would fit into the story we are telling, that of the development of the Jewish people as a nation with a spiritual goal, I think we can offer a simpler approach.

The *pasuk* seems to imply that Lavan's attempt to destroy Ya'akov's family was the proximate cause of their descent to Egypt. However, this is historically untrue. They ended up in Egypt due to the sale of Yosef and the dire financial state they found themselves in during the seven-year famine. How then do we blame Lavan for the Jews ending up in Egypt?

*Rashi* is troubled by this question in his commentary on the *Chumash* and offers two answers:

1. Lavan was not the cause of the Jewish people going to Egypt. He was the first to attempt to destroy *Am Yisrael*, and the *pasuk's* continuation details other historical attempts to accomplish this same goal.
2. Citing a *Gemara* (*Sotah* 11a), *Rashi* suggests that it is not Ya'akov who descended to Egypt, but rather Lavan himself who was known by another name – Bil'am. The *Midrash* suggests that he became one of Pharaoh's three advisors, and had been responsible for the policy that Pharaoh kill the Israelite boys.

According to this latter interpretation, it was indeed Lavan who was responsible for the near death of the entirety of the Jewish people in a physical sense. The *Haggadah* tells the story of both the physical and spiritual salvation of the Jewish people. From here we see that the story of *Arami Oved Avi* can add to our understanding of both.



## ויוצאנו ה' ממצרים – Not a Collaborative Effort: The Personal Exodus

Tzvi Heimowitz, Shana Aleph, New York, NY

”ויוצאנו ה' ממצרים. לא על־ידי מלאך, ולא על־ידי שָׂרָף, ולא על־ידי שְׁלִיחַ, אֲלָא הַקְדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא בְּכַבְדּוֹ וּבְעֶצְמוֹ. שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: וְעַבְרָתִי בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם בְּלֵילָה הַזֶּה, וְהִפִּיתִי כָּל־בְּכוֹר בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם מֵאָדָם וְעַד בְּהֵמָה, וּבְכָל אֱלֹהֵי מִצְרַיִם אֶעֱשֶׂה שְׁפָטִים. אֲנִי ה'! וְעַבְרָתִי בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם בְּלֵילָה הַזֶּה – אֲנִי וְלֹא מְלָאךְ; וְהִפִּיתִי כָּל בְּכוֹר בְּאֶרֶץ־מִצְרַיִם. אֲנִי וְלֹא שָׂרָף; וּבְכָל־אֱלֹהֵי מִצְרַיִם אֶעֱשֶׂה שְׁפָטִים. אֲנִי וְלֹא הַשְּׂלִיחַ; אֲנִי ה'! אֲנִי הוּא וְלֹא אַחֵר.”

The *Haggadah* dedicates an entire passage to emphasizing that the Exodus occurred through God, and God alone. Not through an angel, nor any other emissary.

The Torah does specify that it was God who passed through Egypt on the eve of *Makkat Bechorot* and carried out the plague. (What exactly it means that God did this without any go-between is a whole other question.)

However, *Makkat Bechorot* was just one part of our redemption. Looking at the rest of the story, it seems that God's plan *was* actualized through intermediaries. It was Aaron who lifted his staff over the waters over the Nile, bringing about the first two plagues. Moshe did the same thing at the *Yam Suf*, splitting its expansive waters. While the Torah makes clear God performed the Tenth Plague alone, how could the *Haggadah* say that the Exodus as a whole was performed without any שליח or intermediary?

An explanation may emerge by looking at the nature of שליחות in general. A standard שליח serves to complete the action put in motion by his משלח. Take the postal service as an example. Someone sends a letter and the post office - acting as a שליח - forwards it to its eventual destination. Both elements are necessary for the letter to arrive where it's supposed to. The original source of the action and the שליח each share some responsibility for the action's completion.

Such a שליחות is, by its very nature, impossible with God. Being the source of everything, God is fully responsible for everything He undertakes. A human cannot “help” God. In this sense, it was God alone who redeemed us from Egypt.

While there were other players in the story, they held no actual power in determining the course of events. We see this idea demonstrated in Exodus 7:3 with the hardening of Pharaoh's heart. God determined how the Exodus would play out, not Pharaoh.

I believe this is what ויציאו coming to express. Even that which appears to be in the dominion of man is dependent on God. While God's providence is most evidently seen in the miracles of יציאת מצרים, all power originates with Him. I hope this *Seder* night will only push us closer to recognizing this truth.



## דינו – No Torah?

### Chayim Zifkin, Shana Aleph, St. Louis, MO

“אלו קרבנו לפני הר סיני ולא נתן לנו את התורה-דינו”

The song of *Dayenu* is structured such that we list a series of events that had God not done for us on our way to *Eretz Yisrael*, we would have been satisfied or as the refrain goes, it would have been enough for us. One of the events mentioned is the giving of the Torah. We even add that had we been brought to Mount Sinai and not given the Torah, *Dayenu*, it would have been enough!

The obvious question arises: How could we have been okay without receiving the Torah? The Torah is the very backbone of Judaism! If not for the Torah, we would have no way of knowing what God wants us to do in this world!

One could parry the question by saying that all God does is beyond us, and therefore, if God hadn't given us the Torah, then we would believe that that was best for us.

However, I believe that there's a deeper answer that can impact our everyday lives

Rabbi Ashi Harow, *Mashgiach Ruchani* of Migdal HaTorah, proposed a parable to help answer this question. Imagine you're walking down the street in a random city in a blizzard. You're frozen to the bone with nowhere to go, when suddenly, a truck pulls up next to you, and the driver offers you a ride. Not only does the driver then take you to his house, but when he brings you in he offers you a warm blanket, places you next to the fireplace, and lights a fire. He continues by bringing you a hot tea and a steaming bowl of soup. When you're warm and ready to leave after the blizzard dies down, there are two ways you can go about thanking him. You could suffice with a catch all “thanks for everything”- or you could detail everything he did for you. “Thank you for the ride, thank you for bringing me to your house, etc.” By

emphasizing *all* the good things he did for you, it illustrates how much gratitude you feel toward the person.

So too with God. When we say, “if He would have brought us close to Mount Sinai and not given us the Torah- *Dayenu*,” we’re not saying that the Torah is not important; rather, we are evincing the extent of the gratitude we feel toward God for every stage of the process.

What was it that we gained at Mount Sinai before we received the Torah, that warrants our thanks? Even if the above explains many of the steps, this stage seems odd. What was the point of being brought to Mount Sinai outside of receiving the Torah?

The *Rambam* (*Yesodei HaTorah* 8:1) writes that everyone has doubts concerning the reality of God. Even the generation that went out of Egypt, having seen all the miracles of the Exodus, had a measure of doubt. However, the Revelation at Mount Sinai changed that. The unique experience provided certitude in a way no other miracle has or will. For the *Rambam*, it is for this reason that we draw our belief from our national remembrance of Mount Sinai. Even without the Torah, this experience would be worth thanking God for.

*Dayenu*, with its step by step thanks, should remind us not only to thank God for the big things that happen in our lives, but to appreciate every little thing along the way.



## קרבו פסח – A Non-Voluntary System

### Shimon Stroll, Shana Bet, Denver, CO

In *Parashat Bo* we read about the final three of the *Makkot*: locusts, darkness, and the death of the firstborns. In addition, *Bo* introduces the first laws given to the Jews as a people: we are given the first *mitzvah*, to establish a calendar based on the moon. We are commanded to bring the *Korban Pesach* for the first time. For all future years, we are commanded to observe the anniversary of the Exodus from Egypt by removing all *chametz* from our premises for seven days, eating *Matzah*, and telling the story of the redemption to our children. At the end of the *parasha*, we are also commanded to wear *tefillin* on the arm and head as, again, a reminder of the Exodus and our resultant commitment to God. A clear theme emerges from these *mitzvot* - they demand that we never forget the Exodus and the messages it teaches. God outlines this as the purpose of the *Makkot* as well: “so that you may relate in the ears of your son and son’s son that I have amused Myself with Egypt and My signs that I applied among them — that you may know that I am God,” (Exodus 10:2).

The *mitzvah* of *Korban Pesach* itself includes many detailed instructions of how the sacrifice must be brought. Among them is “you shall not break a bone in it,” (Exodus 12:46). The *Sefer HaChinuch* writes that this makes us more than remember the Exodus, it highlights the elevated status we were given when God took us out. As he says “it is not [fitting for] the honor of royalty and their advisors to scrape the bones and to break them, like dogs.” In other words, poor and hungry people break bones to get every last bit of food. However, as the esteemed people we are on the night of *Pesach*, this is beneath us. Thus, the *mitzvot* don’t only commemorate the Exodus - they contextualize it.

Why, though, do we need so many *mitzvot* to accomplish the same goal? The *Sefer HaChinuch* answers: “*Know that a man is influenced in accordance with his actions. His heart and all his thoughts are always [drawn] after his deeds in which he is occupied, whether [they are] good or bad...if he will arouse his spirit and set his striving and his occupation, with constancy, in the Torah and the mitzvot, even if not for the sake of heaven, he will veer at once toward the good, and with the power of his good deeds he will deaden his evil impulse,*” (*Sefer HaChinuch* 16). Having many *mitzvot* dedicated to the

commemoration of the Exodus, we hope that the performance of them will inspire us to act like the holy and important nation which we are.

The *Sefer HaChinuch's* principle should be a guide for everything we do in life. When it comes to performing the *mitzvot* in the Torah, especially the ones that seem archaic and hard to relate to, we may find ourselves feeling overwhelmed. There are so many *mitzvot*! Because of this, we may start to falter in our observance of them, and we may start to pick and choose the ones that seem to make more sense to us. This was not God's intention when he gave us the Torah. The *Sefer HaChinuch* offers us perspective. If at the times when we encounter *mitzvot* that we have trouble understanding we say to ourselves that "doing these *mitzvot* is going to have a positive impact on who I am" and we actually follow through and perform them, then we will be able to manifest the positive traits necessary to become the observant Jews we are all, hopefully, trying to be. By acting in such a manner for a long enough time, and going forth with a plan to perform as many *mitzvot* as possible - regardless of how we feel about them - our thoughts will become consistent with our actions and *Avodat HaShem* will no longer feel like an overwhelming burden but rather a natural expression of who we are, and who we are privileged to be.



## מצה – Hard or Soft?

**Abraham Veroba, Shana Aleph, Far Rockaway, NY**

One of the quintessential parts of the *Pesach Seder* is eating *Matzah*. *Ashkenazim* eat the “cracker-like” *Matzah* and Yemenites eat the soft “flatbread-like” version, but which is the “real” *Matzah*? Within the Torah there are few descriptions of *Matzah* or the baking process since everyone knew what it looked like at that time and everyone was able to bake their own *Matzot*. How can we figure out what *Matzah* should be in the modern day where the *mesorah* is more diversified? There are several proofs within the *Talmud* that can be used to decipher whether the cracker or the bread is the one true *Matzah*.

One such proof is the case of the moldy bread in *Pesachim* 7a. The *Gemara* talks about a moldy loaf that was found in a bread bin and one isn’t sure whether it’s *chametz* or *Matzah*. Now this sounds very odd to the *Ashkenazi*, since there is a clear difference between *Matzah* and bread. This must mean that in the times of the *Gemara*, *Matzah* looked similar to, if not the same as, bread. The *Gemara* then goes on to say that if several days had gone by, it could be assumed that *Matzah* was made daily and constantly being put into the bin, causing the *Matzot* at the bottom to grow mold. This couldn’t be describing the “cracker” *Matzah* because an old one won’t grow mold no matter how many new ones are put on top within a week.

Another proof is the concept of “*Matzah Hina*”, or not fully baked *Matzah*. The *Gemara* in *Pesachim* 37a asks how to determine whether the *Matzah* is baked fully so it doesn’t become *chametz*. The answer is, that when the *Matzah* is broken, strings of sticky dough won’t come out of the separated parts. The *Mishnah Berurah* mentions another sign not spoken of in the *Gemara*. It says that if you stick your finger in the *Matzah* and it comes out dry, it’s fully baked. It goes without saying that you’re not going to be able to poke an *Ashkenazi Matzah* without breaking it, nor will your finger have any chance of getting wet. Another point for soft *Matzah*!

The final proof is the *halachah* that a *Matzah* shouldn’t be thicker than a *tefach* (3- 4 inches). The *Rama* was concerned about *Matzah* reaching this limit so he advocated for thin

Matzahs, which people misunderstood hence the modern day cracker Matzahs. This was not meant to be the case. The *Be'er Heitiv* cites the *Beit Hillel* saying that we should make *Matzah* thinner than normal bread by making them an *etzbah* (finger, specifically a thumb) thick, which is still thicker than modern-day Matzah.

These points may prove that soft *Matzah* is the true *Matzah*, but can we move past the *minhagim* that our rabbis have created? The answer is: yes. Although Rabbi Shlomo Auerbach, Rabbi Asher Weiss, and Rabbi Sternbuch expressed their concerns that we may not be knowledgeable enough to make soft *Matzah*, Rabbi Hershel Schachter and the *Chazon Ish* say that due to modern innovations in the *Matzah* industry, soft *Matzah* doesn't pose a problem. So when buying *Matzah*, know that you don't need to settle for the cracker anymore.



## What Exactly is the *Mitzvah*? – מצה

### מנהל – Rabbi Shmuel Dovid Chait

The *Gemara* teaches that the obligation to eat *Matzah* is only on the first night of *Pesach*; after that it is discretionary. The *Gemara* derives this from a *גזרה שווה* (a textual comparison) from *Sukkot*. Both *Pesach* and *Sukkot* begin on the “15th day,” and thus *Chazal* conclude that in both cases, there is an obligation to eat *Matzah* or in a *sukkah* on the first night of these festivals, while for remainder of the holidays these acts are optional.

Based on this equation, the *Ba'al HaMaor* poses the following question: despite eating in the *Sukkah* being optional after the first night, one who does eat in the *Sukkah* at any point on the holiday recites the *berachah* of *לישב בסוכה*. Why on *Pesach* is this not the case – one makes no *berachah* when eating *Matzah* after the first night?

The *Ba'al HaMaor* answers that eating in the *Sukkah* is indeed necessary. Even though one is not commanded to eat per se, he cannot avoid entering the *Sukkah*. As he is obligated to live there, which includes sleeping he will not be able to go more than three days without sleep, thus requiring him to enter the *Sukkah*. With *Matzah*, however, one could eat other foods to sustain himself. Eating *Matzah* is not only non-obligatory, but actually not necessary.

Thus, by the fact that the *Mitzvah* of *Sukkah* is formulated in such a way that it is obligatory to use the *Sukkah* on *Sukkot*, there must be a fulfillment, a *kiyum HaMitzvah*, to be in the *Sukkah* throughout the *Chag*. This obligates the recitation of the *Berachah*. By *Pesach*, this is not the case. The Torah not only never demands us to eat *Matzah* over the rest of the week of *Pesach*, it allows us to easily live on other foods to satiate ourselves. Therefore, it must be that there is not a *Kiyum* in eating *Matzah* throughout the week of *Pesach*, thus negating the need for a *berachah*.

However, not all accepted this analysis. The *מעשה רב* cites the Vilna Gaon's position that there is a *mitzvah* to eat *Matzah* all throughout the entire holiday of *Pesach*. This opinion is

recorded by the *Mishna Berurah* as well. If that's the case, however, then we're back to square one. If there is a *mitzvah* to eat *Matzah*, then there must be a *kiyum* in eating it. If so, why doesn't one make a *berachah* of "*Achilat Matzah*" every time one eats *Matzah* over *Pesach*?

The *Chok Ya'akov* on the *Shulchan Aruch* cites the same question posed by the *Ba'al HaMaor* above, though in the name of the *Kol Bo*. The *Kol Bo* has a different approach to the question which may provide an answer to the question with the position of the Vilna Gaon. The *Kol Bo* suggests that the difference between *Sukkot* and *Pesach* is that when one eats *Matzah* on *Pesach* "he is only eating the *Matzah* because it is prohibited to eat *chametz*, just like one eats kosher meat because it is prohibited to eat non-kosher meat. That is why no special *berachah* is recited on the eating of kosher meat. His eating of the *Matzah* is just to satiate himself and not for the sake of the *Mitzvah*. However, when sitting in the *Sukkah*, even though sitting in the *Sukkah* over the rest of *Chag* is optional, when he does so he's not doing it for his own pleasure but rather for the *Mitzvah*." Eating Kosher meat doesn't require a *berachah* because the act does not demonstrate that it is being done as a *Mitzvah*. Rather, it is viewed as an act of satiation. So too, when eating *Matzah* over the week of *Pesach*, nothing about the act shows that you are attempting to fulfill a *Mitzvah*. It just looks like you are hungry and want to eat.

On the other hand, when it comes to the *Sukkah*, the very act of sitting in the *Sukkah* throughout *Sukkot* demonstrates that you're sitting there for the *Mitzvah*. One would rather sit in his house to eat where he can be comfortable, without the heat, cold, or bugs that may bother him in the *Sukkah*. Therefore, the very fact he's sitting in the *Sukkah* shows that he is doing it for the *Mitzvah*. Thus, he is obligated in a *berachah*

Using the approach of the *Kol Bo*, we can better comprehend the position of the Vilna Gaon. The Vilna Gaon rules that although there is a *mitzvah* to eat *Matzah* the entire week of *Pesach*, no *berachah* is necessary. The Vilna Gaon assumes that although there is a *kiyum HaMitzvah* in eating the *Matzah*, because it is not recognizable that the eating is for the sake of the *Mitzvah*, one cannot make a *beracha*. It is exclusively when an action clearly demonstrates that it is done as a *ma'aseh HaMitzvah* can one recite a *berachah*. Only by *Sukkah*, where the act of sitting in the

*Sukkah* demonstrates that it's for the sake of the *Mitzvah*, one can make a *berachah* each time you sit or eat there.



## Why Introduce Bitterness? – מרור

**Yehoshua Bass, Shana Aleph, Detroit, MI**

Without question, the most integral part of the entire holiday of *Pesach* is the *Seder*. We systematically break the *Seder* into the fourteen sections, following the text of the *Haggadah*. Although not everyone enjoys all sections equally, they are all crucial in their own way. A great example is the obligation to eat *Maror*, the bitter herbs we are commanded to eat during the *Seder*. Imagine if you were tasked with creating a holiday: would you have chosen to integrate negative aspects or have the entire holiday be positive? While most people, I assume, would have avoided negativity, the Torah, through including the bitter obligation of eating *Maror* on *Pesach*, did not. What is the logic for this commandment?

*Rabbi Abahu (Berachot 34b)* tells us that a *ba'al teshuvah*, someone who repents from his incorrect ways, is on a higher level than those who were always righteous. Why should this be the case? People who are born religious cannot fully appreciate every aspect of the religion because they have never known anything else. They only know what to do but cannot understand experientially the problem with abandoning Torah. However, people who choose to become religious and take upon themselves all the laws and customs can, in fact, appreciate all aspects of religion because they have seen the other side. They will always have a deeper understanding of the benefits the World of Torah offers.

This same concept applies to the *Mitzvah* of *Maror*. The function of *Maror* is to remind us of the bitterness of our enslavement, allowing us to understand just how bad the slavery was in Egypt. By doing so, we can appreciate the *Geulah* (Redemption) in a greater way by contrasting how bad it was for our ancestors and how good it is for our generation. In the case of a negative, there must be some concept of positive with which one can contrast.

If we only had “good” then it wouldn’t, in fact, be “good”, because we would have nothing “bad” with which to compare it. There would just be nothing to speak of. For example, if you lived in a world without darkness you could not fully understand light, as it

would be the norm, rather than a definable positive. It is precisely this reason why *Maror* is in fact, necessary. The negative taste allows us to appreciate the positives we celebrate on *Pesach*.



## A Peculiar Command – מרור

**Ephraim Weiderman, Shana Bet, Dallas, TX**

The *Mitzvah* of *Maror* is a particularly unusual *mitzvah*. In my family, the term מרור referred to a substance that occupied a small glass jar. It was the delight known as *chreyn*, pickled horseradish root.

Contrary to popular belief, it is not and has never been a *Mitzvah* on its own, but is actually an extension of the *Mitzvah* of the *Pesach* Sacrifice. There is a Biblical commandment on Passover to eat the *Pesach* Sacrifice, an aspect of which is eating the bitter herbs:

וְאָכְלוּ אֶת־הַבָּשָׂר בַּלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה צְלִי־אֵשׁ וּמַצּוֹת עַל־מַרְרִים יֹאכְלֶהוּ:

“And they shall eat the meat on that night roasted, and Matzot on “Marorim” they shall eat it,” (Exodus, 12:8).

However, the Torah does not define what exactly “Marorim” are. The *Mishnah* comes to fill in the blank. In *Mishnah Pesachim* 2:6, we are given a list of five plants through which one fulfills their Obligation of *Maror*:

וְאֵלוּ יִרְקוֹת שְׂאֲדָם יוֹצֵא בְּהֶן יְדֵי חוֹבְתוֹ בְּפֶסַח, בַּחֲזֵרֵת וּבַעֲלָשִׁין וּבַתְּמָכָה וּבַחֲרָחְבִּינָה וּבַמְרוֹר:

“And these are the vegetables that through which a person fulfills their obligation on *Pesach*: with lettuce, with endives, with wild carrot, and with eryngium, and with *marror*.”

In our post-Temple reality, *Maror* acts as a sort of halakhic pun, emblematic of two separate meanings. As is well known, Jews incorporate bitter herbs into our the *Pesach Seder* as a remembrance of the Egyptians, who made our lives bitter. “Why are the Egyptians likened to bitter herbs? Just as these bitter herbs are soft at first and harsh in the end (the older a plant

gets, the bitterer it becomes), so too, the Egyptians were soft at first, but were harsh in the end,” (*Talmud Bavli, Pesachim 39a*). However, if the Biblical *Mitzvah* of *Maror* is derived and dependent upon eating the *Pesach* Sacrifice, then, logically, shouldn't we abstain from eating bitter herbs, just as we abstain from lamb?

We continue to eat *Maror* on *Seder* Night because the Sages declared an enactment to obligate people in eating *Maror*, despite the loss of the Temple. However, they did not specify the reason why. Perhaps, it serves as a remembrance for itself. We have surrendered control of the Temple Mount, and are thus left with no *Pesach* Sacrifice. Jews incorporate bitter herbs into our *Seder* as a remembrance of the destruction of the Temple, the stripping away of our national sovereignty, elimination of most of our national institutions, and condemning us to two millennia of exile.

This year, some of us dwell in Jerusalem, some in the Diaspora. But may we be gathered next year in Jerusalem to make the authentic *Korban Pesach* in the Temple Courtyard, and eat it together with *Matzah* and *Maror*, together.



## מרור – A Puzzling Legal Structure

**Chaim Gersten, Shana Bet, Memphis, TN**

*Matzah* and *Maror* are often thought of as commandments of equal level, each conveying its own idea about the story of our freedom. However the *Gemara* (*Pesachim* 120a) says otherwise. It first presents several opinions, each of which conceptualizes the nature of these *Mitzvot* differently.

The *Gemara* first presents the opinion of *Rava*, who rules that without the *Beit HaMikdash* and *Korban Pesach*, *Matzah* is a Torah commandment but *Maror* is “merely” a rabbinic commandment. *Maror* lacks independent Biblical status because it is only mentioned in a *pasuk* which discusses the *Korban Pesach* (Numbers 9:11). Thus, in a time where no *Korban Pesach* can be brought, there is no Biblical obligation to eat *Maror*. Nevertheless, the Rabbis enacted an obligation to eat *Maror*.

*Matzah*, on the other hand, while mentioned along with the *Korban Pesach*, is also discussed in an independent *pasuk* (Exodus 12:18). Thus, it retains its Biblical status even when no *Korban Pesach* is offered.

According to *Rava*, *Matzah* is a commandment like the *Lulav* or the recitation of the *Shema*. One is obligated to eat *Matzah* as long as one can obtain it. In contrast, *Maror* is merely a component of the commandment of the *Korban Pesach*. In other words, if one wanted to eat a deli sandwich, while one could plausibly be said to be fulfilling part of his intent by eating deli meats without bread, the opposite would be meaningless. Bread without deli meats accomplishes nothing. So too, the *Korban Pesach* is enhanced by *Maror*, but stands alone. Eating *Maror* without *Korban Pesach*, on the other hand, is foolish. The only value to eating *Maror* is a remembrance of what our ancestors did in the times of the *Beit HaMikdash*.

*Rav Acha* disagrees and rules that both the obligation to eat *Matzah* and that to eat *Maror* are only rabbinic obligations when there is no *Korban Pesach*. What then does he do with the *pasuk* that talks exclusively about *Matzah*? Why doesn't it generate an independent

obligation to eat *Matzah*? The *Gemara* answers that *Rav Acha* uses this *pasuk* to teach us a different rule – that in a time when there is a *Beit HaMikdash*, even if one does not eat the *Korban Pesach*, he must eat *Matzah* and *Maror*.

Assuming that *Rava* agrees with this rule, this presents a challenge: from where does *Rava* derive the independent obligation of *Matzah*. *Rava* responds that he has another source for the rule of *Rav Acha*, leaving the original *pasuk* to derive the stand-alone Commandment of Eating *Matzah*. The other rule is derived from the *pasuk* (Exodus 12:48) that elaborates that an uncircumcised man may not eat the *Korban Pesach*. *Rava* finds an extra word in that *pasuk* to teach the law of *Rav Acha*.

In summary, everyone agrees that *Maror* is dependent on the *Korban Pesach*, and thus is nowadays only a rabbinic obligation. As for *Matzah*, *Rav* rules that it is an independent Torah obligation even today, while *Rav Acha* equates it with *Maror*. In the time of the *Beit HaMikdash*, all would agree that *Matzah* and *Maror* should be eaten even without the *Korban Pesach*.

The problem, thought, is that if *Maror* is dependent on the *Korban Pesach*, then why in the time of the *Beit HaMikdash* would one who does not make it to the *Beit HaMikdash* be obligated to eat *Matzah* and *Maror*? Either it is independent of the *Korban Pesach* or it is not; it is impossible that both can be simultaneously true.

It seems, therefore, that we must must abandon the notion that *Maror* is totally dependent on the *Korban Pesach*. My father, Rabbi Yonasan Gersten, proposes the following formulation: *Maror* is indeed its own obligation, similar to *Matzah*, and does not merely “serve” the *Korban Pesach*. However, the obligation of *Maror* exists through the institution of *Korban Pesach*. Therefore, if there is no institution of *Korban Pesach* then there is no obligation to eat *Maror*.

Consider the following parable. A school is required to give the four core classes of math, science, history and English. If the school was unable to offer these classes, the school would be forced to shut down. However, if a particular student was unable to attend the core

classes, he could still receive credit for taking the woodworking elective. The ability of a given student to take the woodworking elective is not dependent on him taking the core classes, but the school can only exist to offer the woodworking elective if it has the core classes.

*Maror* is like the woodworking elective. As long as the *Beit HaMikdash* exists and the *Korban Pesach* is being brought therein, eating *Maror* is meaningful. However, when the institution shuts down, *Maror* becomes irrelevant.

Why was *Maror* established in such a way? Why not establish it to exist even when the *Korban Pesach* is not brought, like the *Mitzvah* of *Matzah*? Rabbi Ashi Harrow, *Mashgiach Ruchani* of Migdal HaTorah, suggested as follows: *Maror* is meant to remind us of slavery in Egypt through its bitter taste. The *Korban Pesach*, in contrast, reminds us of how we gained our freedom. On *Pesach* we must tell the whole story not just one aspect of our redemption. If we only express our freedom we are lacking, and if we only express our slavery we are lacking. We need both the *Korban Pesach* and *Maror* to tell the whole story. Thus, the Torah legally connected them, requiring us to have both.



## גאל ישראל – From Redemption to Prayer

**Ya'akov Aryeh Lehman, Shana Aleph, Richmond, VA**

The *Rambam*, one of the earliest codifiers of Jewish law, writes in the *Mishnah Torah*, *Hilchot Tefillah* 1:1, that there is a positive Torah commandment to pray to God at least once a day. According to rabbinic Jewish law, we are obligated to pray three times a day: morning, afternoon, and evening. We find a striking similarity between formats of *Ma'ariv* (the evening prayer) and *Shacharit* (the morning prayer). Both require “*Semichat Geulah L'Tefillah*,” which is a structure that includes the recitation of a few paragraphs discussing the Exodus from Egypt. Immediately following these paragraphs, without interruption, comes the recitation of the pinnacle of prayer, the *Amidah*, in which we further praise God and ask him for our needs. We conclude the paragraphs that precede the *Amidah* with the words “*Blessed are you HaShem, who redeemed Israel.*” The practice of mentioning the Exodus immediately before reciting the *Amidah* is a practice that is highly praised by the Sages. The *Talmud Bavli* in *Berachot* (4b, 9b) poses the question:

“*Who is worthy of receiving a share in the world to come? One who is “Someich Geulah L'Tefillah...”*”

This refers to one who says the paragraphs regarding the Exodus from Egypt immediately before the recitation of the *Amidah*, without pause.

Why is this structure such an important part of our daily prayers? Many early sources provide explanations for this practice, but I would like to propose an alternate reason. When we discuss the ideas of the Exodus from Egypt, we are remembering the single greatest set of miracles that happened to the Jewish people. This puts us in the correct mindset for prayer. If we accept the fact that God redeemed us from Egypt, we can begin to relate to the idea that God runs the world, and as a result of this, we can truly believe that our prayers can be answered and become realities just as the Exodus was for our ancestors.

The *Seder* is not just about retelling the story of Egypt, but it is an attempt to “relive” it by practicing rituals such as eating bitter herbs to remind us of the bitterness of the slavery that our forefathers endured. The question is, during our *Pesach Seder*, can we find an example of combing the Exodus story and a prayer, similar to the structure of our daily prayers? I believe we can. We conclude *Maggid* (the section of the *Seder* in which we discuss the ideas of leaving Egypt) with a *berachah* (blessing) that opens with a praise of God for redeeming us from Egypt - yet in the very next sentence of the *berachah*, we pray for a future redemption to return to Israel. Why do we use the *berachah* as a means of praying for a future return to our land; why not simply thank God for the beneficence that he showed us in Egypt? I believe the reason is similar to why being “*Someich Geulah L’Tefillah*” is important. After discussing the *Pesach* story with our families during *Maggid*, we praise God for what he did for us; however, this is not enough. A major theme of remembering the Exodus during this *berachah* is to put us in the correct frame of mind to be able to believe in a future redemption. Similar to our daily prayers, if we accept during the *Seder* night that we were actually brought out from Egypt, we can truly believe that a future redemption will become a reality. On this night, we must not only remember our ancestors leaving Egypt, but think towards the future. Discussing the Exodus enables to accept the coming of *Mashiach* (Messiah) not as a foreign idea, but rather as a reality that is as true as the miracles we’ve experienced in the past.



## הלל – The Sounds of the Exodus

ר"ם – Rabbi Jonathan Ziring

Throughout the *Seder*, we tell the story not only through words, but through a multiplicity of senses and experiences. We sing, point, and eat. It is that immersive environment that creates the lasting memories of the *Seder*.

The first *Seder*, in Egypt itself, however, was accompanied by a sinister sound that punctured the religious ceremony taking place in the Jewish homes. Moshe warns Pharaoh that on that fateful night, God will force Pharaoh's hand by killing every Egyptian firstborn. The result would be an earth-shattering cry:

*“Moses said, ‘Thus says the Lord: Toward midnight I will go forth among the Egyptians, and every first-born in the land of Egypt shall die, from the first-born of Pharaoh who sits on his throne to the first-born of the slave girl who is behind the millstones; and all the first-born of the cattle. And there shall be a loud cry in all the land of Egypt, such as has never been or will ever be again; but not a dog shall snarl at any of the Israelites, at man or beast—in order that you may know that the Lord makes a distinction between Egypt and Israel,’”* (Exodus 11:5-7, JPS translation).

Moshe warns Pharaoh that Egypt would be filled with the sounds of mourning. In distinction, in order to show that God had chosen the Jewish people, the Jews would be spared even from the sounds of barking dogs, (Exodus 11:7).

However, while they may have avoided vicious sounds directed at them by the dogs, the Jews had to experience that first *Seder* with the wails of the Egyptians filling their ears.

How did that chilling background music shape their memory? Were they meant to derive that the defining moment of becoming Jewish should be that of keeping God's command while their enemies suffer?

The *Talmud Yerushalmi* (*Pesachim* 5:5) provides what seems to be an answer to this, by offering several other voices that filled the country that night:

“*Rabbi Yaakov bar Acha said in the name of Rabbi Yossi, ‘Power was given to Moshe’s voice and it went out throughout all of Egypt, for a distance of a forty day [walk]. What did he say? ‘From this place to that place – that is the one group [to sacrifice the Pesach], and from that place to that place that is another group [to sacrifice the Pesach]...’*”

*Rabbi Levi said, ‘Just as Moshe’s voice was given that power, so was that power given to Pharaoh’s voice. His voice went throughout all of Egypt, for a distance of a forty day [walk]. And what did it say? ‘Get up and leave from among my people,’ (Exodus 12:31). In the past you were the slaves of Pharaoh, and from now on you are the slaves of G-d. At that moment, they said ‘Halleluyah – praise, oh slaves of God’ – and not the slaves of Pharaoh.’”*

It seems that the *Talmud Yerushalmi* is trying to fill out the picture, and theologically explain the cries of the Egyptians. The *Talmud Yerushalmi* does not want us to think that the suffering of the Egyptians was an end in and of itself. Rather, the pain they suffered was an unfortunate consequence of Pharaoh’s and the Egyptians’ obstinance. However, had the other voices filled Egypt earlier and been heeded, they would have been able to help the Egyptians avoid such punishment. The ability to prevent those screams was in the hands of Pharaoh – announce that the Jews are free, and there would have been no need for more plagues.

But the *Talmud Yerushalmi* pushes further – why was it important for the Jews to be free? As the *Talmud Yerushalmi* imagines, it was so they could hear the call of God’s command, as they could hear Moshe commanding them to bring the *Korban Pesach*. However, as the *Talmud Yerushalmi* continues, that was not the final sound that needed to be heard. It was the sound of *Hallel* that was the telos of all that happened in Egypt. God wanted the Jews to understand that the ultimate purpose was that the Jews should recognize that freedom from Egypt was necessary so they could embrace servitude to God, something they did by breaking into song that celebrated their new status as *Avdei Hashem*.

The *Talmud Bavli* notes that it was this message heard from another voice that captured the essence of all the Jews, that of God at Mount Sinai. Commenting on why a Jewish slave who refuses to go free must have his ear pierced, the *Gemara* writes:

*“Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai would expound this verse as a type of decorative wreath [homer], i.e., as an allegory: Why is the ear different from all the other limbs in the body, as the ear alone is pierced? The Holy One, Blessed be He, said: This ear heard My voice on Mount Sinai when I said: “For to Me the children of Israel are slaves,” (Leviticus 25:55), which indicates: And they should not be slaves to slaves. And yet this man went and willingly acquired a master for himself. (Kiddushin 22b, Koren translation).*

Again, the *Gemara* focuses on the importance of hearing the correct sounds and messages. The cry of the Egyptians was an unfortunate necessity to ensure that Pharaoh would say what he was required to – the Jews are free. That freedom was necessary so the Jews could hear the commands of the Torah. Ultimately, that transformed them when they heard not just specific commands, but accepted God’s call to become his servants. And finally, the Jews needed to celebrate that new status with the song of *Hallel*. As we close the *Seder*, we sing those words that the *Talmud Yerushalmi* imagines capped off that night of cries, commands, and song – the words that indicate that the message sunk in.



## הלל הגדול – Take the Time to Respond

ראש הישיבה – Rabbi Dvir Ginsberg

When speaking to friends about one's *Seder*, there are highlights that are universal. The insanely bitter *Maror*, or the incredible hiding spot for the *afikoman*. Maybe some of the penetrating discussions throughout the *Maggid* section, or this year's cutest rendition of "*Ma Nishtanah*". Let's not forget the sumptuous meal, or the four cups of wine. This author is fairly certain that a topic not discussed during the post-*Seder* recap is the recitation of *Hallel HaGadol* (let alone *Hallel* itself). *Hallel* is sandwiched in between the blessings over the meal and the songs at the tail end of the *Seder*. There aren't reams of commentary in *Haggadot* concerning *Hallel HaGadol*. It is quite possible to read that small section and not be aware of its tremendous importance. Yet, we see that there are many rabbis who maintained that *Hallel HaGadol* is of such importance that it should be recited on a fifth cup of wine. The mission today is to bring *Hallel HaGadol* out of the shadows into its proper place as a critical part of the *Seder* experience.

*Hallel HaGadol* refers to the twenty-six verses that are recited after the "regular" *Hallel* on the *Seder* night, immediately prior to the paragraph of "*Nishmat Kol Cha*". We are familiar with its responsive format, where a praise or thanks is offered, followed by the rejoinder of "*Ki l'Olam Chasdo*". When we turn to the source for this specific *Hallel*, we find two applications (for this article, we will leave out the practice of reciting it during the introductory prayers of Shabbat, as it is a custom only). The first is during a time of drought. If the Jewish people fast, and it then rains, there is an obligation to recite *Hallel HaGadol*. It is critical to note that ideally, one recites this *Hallel* after being in a state of satiation – "*only when the appetite is satisfied and the stomach is full*," (*Ta'anit* 26a). The other time *Hallel HaGadol* is recited is during the *Seder*. Why are these the only two instances we recite this *Hallel*? What do they share in common?

The *Talmud* in *Pesachim* (118a) tells us why it is called *Hallel HaGadol*:

"And why is it called the great *Hallel*," said *Rabbi Yohanan*, "because the Holy One, blessed be He, sits in the heights of the universe and distributes food to all creatures."

The *Rashbam* explains that there is a great praise being offered here, noted in the second to last verse of *Hallel HaGadol* – “He gives bread to all creatures”.

Further along, the *Talmud* questions why we recite the “regular” *Hallel* if we are reciting *Hallel HaGadol*? The *Rashbam* deduces from the question that *Hallel HaGadol* is in fact a greater praise than the standard *Hallel* we recite. If indeed this is true, then why recite the “regular” *Hallel* at all? The *Talmud* answers that there are five themes discussed in the more familiar *Hallel*, including the Exodus and the Splitting of the Sea.

What does the concept of God providing sustenance to man have to do with the commandment of telling the story of the Exodus? Why is *Hallel HaGadol* such great praise? The *Talmud* discusses the origins of the prayer of *Hallel* in a different place (ibid 117a):

“*Rav Yehudah* said in *Shemuel's* name, ‘The Song in the Torah was uttered by Moses and Israel when they ascended from the [Red] Sea. And who recited this *Hallel*? The prophets among them ordained that Israel should recite it at every important epoch and at every misfortune — may it not come upon them! and when they are redeemed they recite [in gratitude] for their redemption.’”

There are two important concepts we can discern from the above statements. The first is the connection between the song recited by the Jews upon their exit from the Red Sea (commonly known as “*Az Yashir*”) and *Hallel*. The second is the decree for all Jews to recite after experiencing a redemption (the issue of it being tied to misfortune is a separate topic). The format of *Hallel* is as a prayer of response, rather than a prayer tied to a “normal” state. When the Jews were faced with annihilation at the Red Sea, a miracle occurred, and they were saved. The witnessing of this Divine Revelation, and the subsequent removal of the threat of extermination at the hands of the Egyptians, demanded a verbal reaction. Therefore, under the guidance of Moshe, the special song was composed. The ideas of a responsive praise and thanks became the defining features of *Hallel*. Therefore, the framework of *Hallel* became part of the nation’s arsenal of prayer. It wasn’t until the time of King David

that the prayer was objectified in Psalms, eventually becoming incorporated into our *sidurim*. All along, the idea of a responsive prayer has been the defining characteristic of this prayer.

This would explain the *Hallel* we recite on the three festivals, Chanukah, and **especially** the *Seder* Night. When we tell the story of the exodus, we are engaged in the account of the great miracles and wonders performed by God. If we truly internalize the trajectory of slavery-to-freedom, **this** recitation of *Hallel* will be the organic result. Why, then, would we recite *Hallel HaGadol*? What are we responding to with that prayer? When we look to the other instance when *Hallel HaGadol* is recited, its rationale is quite clear. During a famine, our very existence as a species is under threat. We fast and repent, hoping to merit some type of merciful response. When it rains, we celebrate, we eat, and we become satiated. In that state of satiation, we can now respond properly to what occurred. When we are in danger, and the danger is removed, we respond with *Hallel*. But the danger by the famine is more primal, and the state of satiation a greater quality of differentiation than “just” being saved. We went from the threat of death to a state of complete contentment and security. Our appreciation of God as being in complete and total control of the natural world, as expressed through His sustaining us, is clear to us. We thus recite *Hallel HaGadol*.

At least now we have some sense of the structure of *Hallel HaGadol*. As well, we know that we recite this prayer on the night of the *Seder* after our meal, in a state of satiation. But the mystery has not been solved. A clue lies in an interesting statement concerning the meal of the *Seder* by the *Rambam* (*Hilchos Chametz U'Matza* 8:9):

“After we continue with the meal and eat whatever he wants to eat and drinks whatever he wants to drink...”

Why does the *Rambam* describe this meal in this unrestricted manner?

The festive meal of the *Seder* Night has a different quality to it. It is the meal of **freedom**, infused with the wondrous ideas spoken of prior to this moment. An expression of

this autonomy is the ability to choose to eat what we want, rather than be dependent on a master for food, as in the time of slavery.

This could be the opening to understanding the recitation of *Hallel HaGadol* on the night of the *Seder*. The meal is an experience of freedom, another expression of contrast to the state of slavery. When we partake of the meal, followed by the feeling of satiation, we are now in a state of mind to offer a new type of responsive praise. The *Hallel* directed towards the miracles of the night focuses on one aspect of the Divine relationship with man. We see God solely through the prism of overt examples of breaches of natural law. This is critical to understanding the scope of the story of the exodus, and certainly is a vehicle to a greater understanding of God. However, this is an incomplete awareness of the concept of Divine Providence.

When we reflect on our meal of freedom, we see the most complete view of Divine Providence. God is not “just” the God of miracles; rather, His control of the world is absolute, from the fantastic breaches in natural law to the very creation of the natural laws themselves. As well, He acts in a manner of complete knowledge, apportioning sustenance to each person based on merit. This is as complete a description of Divine Providence one can have, and the verses in *Hallel HaGadol* bear this out. We can now understand why *Hallel HaGadol* is an appropriate response recited on the night of the *Seder*. When a person engages in reflecting upon and learning about God’s actions through miracles, he understands one facet of God’s relationship to man. However, once he partakes of this unique meal, he can appreciate to a greater degree the nature of this relationship. The first *Hallel* responds to the miracles of the night. The second *Hallel* responds to the meal of freedom, broadening the person’s perspective of God’s relationship to man. It is the pinnacle of praise and thanks of the entire *Seder* experience.

Yes, there will be *Maror* and “*Ma Nishtanah*”, eating and singing. But there is also *Hallel HaGadol*, a unique responsive prayer that elucidates deep concepts regarding the totality of the Divine Providence. When we all recap our *Seder* experience to friends and family, let’s

bring this prayer to the forefront of the conversation, and reflect on the tremendous kindness afforded to us by God.



## No Simple Song – חד גדיא

**Aryel Tucker, Shana Dalet, Seattle, WA**

After the *Seder* has concluded, many sing the popular song *Chad Gadya*. At first glance, *Chad Gadya* seems to be nothing more than a confounding tongue-twister. The fanciful way it explores the consequences of the purchase of one unfortunate goat seems to be straight out of a child's tale. However, the placement of the song at the finale of the *Seder* should indicate that its contents are full of profound, meaningful metaphors which speak directly to the themes of the evening.

The essence of *Pesach* is to perpetuate *Am Yisrael's* societal knowledge of the exodus from Egypt and God's deliverance of the nation to the Land of Israel. However, one does not merely fulfill his obligation by narrating the story in any way he sees fit. Instead, one must follow the formula prescribed by the *Mishnah* and, "begin the narrative with [the Jewish People's] disgrace and end with [their] glory," (*Pesachim* 116a.). There is a dispute in the *Talmud* as to precisely which "disgrace" the *Mishnah* is referring. *Rav* concluded that one must begin with an explanation of how, originally, the forefathers of *Am Yisrael* were idolaters. *Shmuel*, in contrast with *Rav*, only maintained one must begin with a recounting of the slavery in Egypt, not of the pre-Abrahamic idol worship. Both are clearly derivations of "disgrace", with *Rav* interpreting the term of referring to "spiritual disgrace", i.e., idolatry, and *Shmuel* understanding it to imply a strictly "physical disgrace" manifesting in the form of slavery. Having understood these foundations of the *Seder*, one is able to parse the depths of *Chad Gadya* and extract its ideational meaning.

The most prominent explanation of the *Chad Gadya* is that of the Vilna Gaon, Rabbi Eliyahu Kramer. He explains the entire piece as a metaphor for the history of *Am Yisrael*. The sequence of *Chad Gadya*, according to the Vilna Gaon, is as follows:

1. **One goat, one goat:** This is an illusion towards *Ya'akov* presenting *Yitzhak* with two goats in order to receive the birthright. **That Father bought for two zuz:** The fact

- the father bought a goat for for his son is a reference to how *Ya'akov* bequeathed the birthright to his favorite son, *Yosef*.
2. **And a cat came:** The cat, whose nature is naturally jealous, represents the sons of *Ya'akov* who were overwhelmed with jealousy towards *Yosef*. **And ate the goat:** The brothers' sale of *Yosef* to Ishmaelites is compared to a cat devouring the goat.
  3. **And a dog came:** The dog represents Pharaoh. **And bit the cat:** this is the enslavement of the brothers of *Yosef*.
  4. **And a stick came:** This is the staff of Moses, through which Moses performed the miracles. **And hit the dog:** Moses struck Pharaoh with the plagues that came about through his staff.
  5. **And a fire came:** Fire is symbolic of the inclination towards idolatry. **And burnt the stick:** This alludes to the fact that the idolatrous actions of *Am Yisrael* destroyed the merit of the staff of Moses, which resulted in the destruction of the First Temple.
  6. **And the water came:** The water alludes to the Men of the Great Assembly. **And extinguished the fire:** Through their prayers, the Men of the Great Assembly were able to largely remove the inclination towards idolatry from the heart of *Am Yisrael*.
  7. **And a bull came:** This is the nation of Edom. **And it drank the water:** The nation of Edom exiled *Am Yisrael* from its borders.
  8. **And a slaughterer came:** This is *Mashiach ben Yosef*. **And slaughtered the bull:** *Mashiach ben Yosef* is destined to destroy the nation of Edom, heralding the redemption of *Am Yisrael*.
  9. **And the Angel of Death came and slaughtered the slaughterer:** *Mashiach ben Yosef* is destined to perish in the war between *Gog* and *Magog*.
  10. **And the Holy One, Blessed is He, came and slaughtered the Angel of Death:** In the end, God will cause the full redemption to take place and restore to *Am Yisrael* all that had been lost throughout the generations.

Another prominent elucidation of *Chad Gadya* originates in the commentary of the *Be'er Miryam* and the *Haggadah* of Rabbi Tevly Bundy of Frankfurt. They explain that the poem is a fanciful way of mocking the idolatrous, false gods that within which many nations put their trust. Starting with the “god” of the Egyptians, the goat, and working through

various animals and entities of “power”, e.g., water, fire, and the Angel of Death, it is clearly demonstrated that none possess true and absolute power, save for God Himself. This interpretation of the song alludes to a *Midrash* in which King Nimrod asked *Avraham Avinu*, “Why do you not worship the fire?”. *Avraham* replied to the King, “You should worship the water which extinguishes the fire!” *Avraham* continued on, saying, “Similarly, you should instead worship the clouds which carry the water away!” *Avraham* continued this manner of reasoning until he arrived at the point in which there was nothing left to be said to worship except for the Holy One, Blessed is He. So too, in *Chad Gadya*, it is as if we ask the Egyptians, “Why do you worship the goat? Worship the cat instead,” and so on, until we arrive at the inevitable reality that nothing deserves praise outside of God Himself.

Both explanations of *Chad Gadya* relate directly to the aforementioned disagreement regarding the structure of the *Seder* Night. Instead of ruling in accordance with either *Rav* or *Shmuel*, both opinions are fulfilled. At the *Seder*, one declares “We were slaves in Egypt... and God took us out with a strong hand and outstretched arm,” as well as, “Originally our forefathers were idolaters... and now God has brought us close to His service.” The themes of physical and spiritual redemption are both emphasized. Likewise, through the various commentaries, we can see both themes expressed in *Chad Gadya*. The explanation of the Vilna Gaon paints *Chad Gadya* as a crash-course in Jewish history, beginning with our lowly state as slaves in Egypt and ultimately culminating in a glorious, messianic redemption. On the other hand, the explanations of the *Be'er Miryam* and the *Haggadah* of Rabbi Bundy of Frankfurt illuminate the theological aspect of *Chad Gadya*; it walks one through the basic foundations of monotheism, bringing one out of an idolatrous perspective to a knowledge of the True God. Both tracks, the historical and the spiritual, the physical and the philosophical, are uniquely emphasized on *Seder* night and *Chad Gadya* functions as the perfect denouement to reinforce and celebrate these vital notions.

