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*The Migdal HaTorah  
Haggadah Supplement*

על משקוף המגדל



## הקדמה – Introduction

### ראש הישיבה – Rabbi Dvir Ginsberg

One of the major themes of the seder is the contrast between states, highlighted by the progression from slavery to redemption. To a casual observer, the current lockdown belies the idea of the freedom celebrated Pesach night. Of course, it is tempting to simply say that we are “spiritually free”, and think nothing of it; and yet, it is hard to ignore the feeling of being trapped.

When studying the plagues, the awesome power of the Divine is on full display, as the Egyptian population suffers one tragedy after another. Throughout this process, one can also see the ideological standoff between Moshe and Pharaoh. Pharaoh saw himself as a demigod, with humanity the centerpiece of existence. Moshe sought to educate Pharaoh, and the plagues functioned to help undermine this philosophy and place humanity in its rightful place. The frailty of existence, evidenced in the natural world turning against the Egyptians, was a message difficult to ignore. In many ways, humanity is being reminded of this fundamental idea once again, with the virus spreading throughout the world. In some sense, we are living through the very repudiation of Pharaoh’s entire outlook, and this should create a certain frame of mind going into the seder.

There is another, subtler concept that can be drawn out of the seder and applied to this current Haggadah supplement. Often, the idea of slavery is presented through the prism of physical toil and suffering. However, being enslaved has a more insidious effect, namely the removal of the means of human creativity. The ability to inquire and investigate, to explore and develop, are never found in a population that is under the rule of someone else. Our redemption brought with it a newfound ability to engage in the highest level of thinking, bringing forth the greatest part of human capability. The very participation in the seder, dominated by discussion and discovery, is the truest expression of redemption we can ever imagine.

It is hard to imagine any student coming this year to Migdal able to predict current events. To some, the idea of writing an dvar Torah for a Haggadah supplement could be conceived of as an escape from thinking about the present situation. Yet, for the Migdal students, it has actually been a return to their normal state of existence. Rather than see this opportunity as a distraction, they have not allowed what is going on around them to “enslave” them in any way. It is commendable to see the tremendous work and creativity on display in this year’s Haggadah supplement.

## קדש - Kadesh

**Shua Bass, Shana Bet - Detroit, MI**

In one of the most famous parts of the seder, we emphasize the idea that on Pesach we do things differently than the rest of the year. However, Kadesh, the beginning of the seder, is very familiar to us because we say it every Shabbat and Yom Tov. Although both Pesach (Yom Tov) and Shabbat share this concept of Kiddush, there are important differences within the texts. Two examples stand out. First, on Friday night we say “and with love and favor, he gave us Shabbos as a heritage, a remembrance of the creation.” This is directly followed by the phrase “to a holy gathering, a memorial of the exodus from Egypt.” On Pesach, there is no mention of the creation of the universe. We also add “who has chosen us from every people, exalted us above every tongue, and sanctified us with His commandments.” Following this, we say the familiar phrase: “a holy gathering, a memorial of the exodus of Egypt.” The second difference is found at the end of Shabbos Kiddush, where we say the words “with love and favor”, whereas at the end of the Pesach Kaddish we say the words “in gladness and in joy”.

Why do we not reference the creation we in the Kiddush on Pesach? The reason is that the philosophical objective of Shabbos is not the same as Pesach. The goal of Shabbos is to make us reflect about God and the universe he created, and how at the end of the six days He rested, and in turn, we rest. On Pesach, there is no focus on creation; rather, we discuss God’s involvement in the world. It is, for this reason, we say that He chose us, and every time we mention the exodus we reinforce His involvement. Therefore, on Shabbos we mention the creation, while on Pesach we mention that God chose us, demonstrating an active role in our reality.

We should then ask why mention the exodus from Egypt on Shabbos? It could be that on Shabbos, in order to think about God and His creation, we must be in a potential mindset to do so (as explained by Rambam in Moreh Nevuchim 2:31). If we were all slaves, our ability to think about God and His creation would be nearly impossible. It is integral for us to realize the only reason we can think about these concepts today is because of the exodus from Egypt, which is why it is included in the Kiddush of Shabbos.

The second difference is the switch from “with love and favor” on Shabbos to “in gladness and in joy” on Pesach. These two phrases express two discreet but interacting ideas. On Shabbos, we reflect on the fact that everything is dependent on God’s “will” and through his “love” everything is sustained. On Pesach, we are cognitive of the fact that God is interacting with us. This produces a state of joy and gladness which cannot exist without man. It was on Shabbos that God expressed His will on the world but on Pesach God expresses His involvement with us as His nation. With these ideas in mind, we should approach the Seder with the appreciation of God’s involvement in our lives and next Shabbos we should be grateful that we are not still enslaved in Egypt.

## Beyond Hygiene – ורחץ

Nate Rosenberg, Shana Aleph - Cedarhurst, NY

As we know, the common practice is to wash our hands without a brachah before eating karpas. Why? As with many other things at the Seder, so the children should ask, as it is uncommon to bring a vegetable to eat at this point in a meal. We also know that it was more widely accepted to wash one's hands prior to eating wet fruits and vegetables, certainly in the times of the Beis Hamikdash. Simple enough, right? As with most things in Judaism, no, it's never that simple.

Before we look into this further, there is an important question to consider. This part of the Seder is called ורחץ which, translated literally, means “**and** wash”. Why is there a “ו”? Why don't we call it רחץ?

If you take a look at everyday Jewish life, you can see that washing our hands is a recurring theme. We wash our hands when we wake up in the morning, after a nap, before eating, after using the bathroom, before davening, etc. The question is, why is washing our hands so central to Jewish practice?

We find in the Mishna that R' Pinchas Ben Yair says: “Cleanliness leads to purity, purity leads to separation [from sin], separation leads to holiness (Sotah 9:15).” The cleanliness R' Pinchas Ben Yair is talking about is not the kind of cleanliness that's so critical today due to our present situation. Rather, he's talking about a more spiritual type cleansing. We find that in Judaism, when we wash our hands, it's usually more of a symbolic idea. We wash our hands to remind ourselves that we should rid ourselves of the spiritual dirt we accumulate and focus more on Jewish virtues and values.



With that said, we can now answer the question of why it's called ורחץ. Before Urchatz is Kadesh. Kadesh refers to holiness. Urchatz means “and” cleanliness. These two ideas are in fact dependent on each other. If you want holiness, you need to cleanse yourself.

We should have this idea in mind as we elevate the action of washing from something hygienic to something spiritual.

## Which Vegetable? – כרפס

Simcha Cohen, Shana Aleph - Manchester, England

Many people have many different minhagim as to what vegetable to use when doing the mitzvah of karpas. Some say it should be a spring vegetable to resemble the time of year, such as potatoes and celery, whereas others have the minhag to eat leafy greens, most commonly parsley.

There is relatively little written in the Mishnah and Gemara regarding karpas. However, the Mishnah found in Pesachim (second Mishnah on 114a) does tell us: "They brought before him, so that he dips chazeret before he reaches the course matzah". Rashbam interprets this to mean that the Mishnah is referring to karpas, as it is before the first course of the Seder, which is matzah. There appears to be some confusion as to when one eats chazeret: is it before the Matzah as the Mishnah describes, or is it after? It says in the Torah "on matzot and maror you should eat it", which means the order should matzah and **then** maror. The Rashbam says that the first round of chazeret in the Mishnah is to encourage children to ask questions about it, as it is unusual to eat vegetables before a meal; the second one is to fulfill the mitzvah of eating maror. Thus, to fulfill the reason of provoking the child's curiosity, the Rashbam says we may use any vegetable, as there is no specific vegetable that we eat before a meal that doesn't come across as strange. Therefore, any vegetable fulfills the mitzvah of karpas according to the Rashbam, and by definition every vegetable is one on which you would make the bracha of ha'adamah.

Tosfos has a different interpretation of the Mishnah when compared to the Rashbam. Tosfos disagrees with the Rashbam when trying to interpret what "dipping chazeret" really means. Tosafot argues that since the second phrase in this Mishnah uses the word chazeret specifically to mean lettuce/maror, it logically follows that the first time the Mishnah uses the exact same word it



must also be a reference to specifically lettuce and maror - not any vegetable as the Rashbam claimed.

This leads Tosafot to follow the opinion of Rabeinu Chananel, who says that the Mishna means that they brought a table consisting of both matzah **and** chazeret. This is a good explanation for why the Mishnah mentions two different items being brought. While Tosafot disagrees with Rashbam's explanation of the Mishnah, it is clear that Rabbeinu Tam still had the minhag to dip a vegetable into saltwater. It is also clear that whether or not the Mishnah is referring to karpas, it does not use the word karpas to describe the practice.

However, it is clear that at least some of what the Rashbam says resembles what we do today, such as the reason why we do it and what vegetable is permitted and so he can be considered the accepted opinion due to the clarification of this debate.

## Insights into Karpas - כרפס

### Rabbi Shmuel Dovid Chait - מנהל

The Mishna in Pesachim Daf 114a states ”הביאו לפניו מטבל בחזרת עד שמגיע לפרפרת הפת”. Most of the Rishonim learn this to mean that we bring out a vegetable for Karpas. The following questions have been raised regarding the Mitzvah of Karpas: What vegetable should one use for Karpas, why do we eat Karpas, and how much of the vegetable should be eaten.

#### What vegetable should be eaten for Karpas?

Although some Poskim hold that any vegetable can be used for Karpas, Rav Dovid Feinstein shlita, writes only specific vegetables have a status of vegetable for Karpas. First, it seems it should be a green vegetable. Yerek, a vegetable, also means green; as well, the word Karpas has the meaning of green. We just read in Megilat Esther where it describes the royal clothing of Achashveirosh, where it is described as חור כרפס ותכלת. Many Rishonim say it was some green royal clothing. Rav Dovid Feinstein shlita further more points out that it should be a vegetable that can be eaten raw. From the description of the Yerushalmi, and with the explanation of the Chayei Adam, it seems parsley should be used. From Rashi, as explained by the Chatam Sofer, the vegetable would be celery. Based on the above explanations, Rav Dovid Feinstein shlita holds it is wrong to use a potato for Karpas as many, including the Aruch Hashulchan, have the custom to do. He said that potatoes are not considered a vegetable for Karpas, as it doesn't fulfill any of the above-mentioned requirements. It's neither green and cannot be eaten raw. He holds the custom to eat potatoes came about in Russia where due to the cold climate only limited types of vegetables were available there.

## Why do we eat Karpas?

The Gemara asks about the reason for dipping two times. The Gemara answers that it is in order to encourage the children to ask why we are deviating from the normal practice of every other Friday night or Yom Tov meal. There is a debate as to what aspect of eating Karpas the children find unique. Some say it's the very eating of vegetables before the meal that is unusual, while others say it is the act of dipping the food which is unusual. However, all agree that the purpose of Karpas is to arouse the curiosity of the children and to encourage them to ask questions. There are actually many things we do throughout the Seder night to try to arouse the children to ask questions, pointing to "What is so different about this night from all other nights". Karpas is not the only difference that we make at the night of the seder to arouse the child's curiosity. Another example is placing the seder plate on the table and then removing it. It should be noted that in the times of the Gemara, each individual had his own recliner with his own table. Following Karpas, they would remove the small individual table from each person, which would then prompt the child to ask why are you doing this since we have not yet started to eat our meal. Today, our practice is to have one Seder plate that represents the small tables of early times.

There is a very interesting and important question Rav Soloveichick ZT"L raises. If both Karpas and removing the Seder plate are there to arouse the child's curiosity, why then does the Rambam in Hilchot Chametz U'Matzah make the following distinction between Karpas and the removal of the seder table? By Karpas, the Rambam says it is obligatory for each and every person to eat the required amount; but when it comes to removing the individual tables (in the times of the Gemara) it is only incumbent on the one leading the Seder? The Rav explained that, granted, the purpose of Karpas was to arouse the curiosity of the children and to encourage them to ask questions. However, Karpas was instituted by the Chachamim as a ma'aseh achilah, an act of eating, and an act of eating is incumbent on each and every individual at the seder table. The

removal of the seder table, however, was only instituted to arouse the curiosity of the children. The removal of the table of the one who is leading the seder is sufficient and there is no reason to remove every individual table. Karpas, though its purpose was to arouse the children to raise questions, it was in the form of a Ma'aseh Achilah, and a Ma'aseh Achilah at the night of the seder is incumbent on each and every individual.

### **How much is one required to eat?**

There is a debate amongst the Rishonim on how much Karpas does one need to eat. The Rambam maintains that you need to eat a Kezayit. Other Rishonim hold it can be less than a Kazayit. How do we understand this debate? We can understand very easily why the Rambam holds you need to eat a Kezayit. Since the Rambam holds that now that we formulated Karpas as a ma'aseh achilah, therefore not only does the mitzvah apply to everyone but as we hold in all other areas, eating less than a Kezayit is not defined as eating. If one doesn't eat a Kezayit, he hasn't halachically performed the ma'aseh achilah, and therefore hasn't fulfilled his aitzvah. The side that holds to eat less than a Kazayit would say since Karpas was only instituted to make a change in the Seder for children to ask questions, just eating even a nibble would cause them to ask why are we eating this vegetable now. The only question that remains, according to this opinion is, if Karpas is just to arouse the children and therefore even a small amount is sufficient to accomplish this, then why is it mandatory for everyone to eat Karpas? It should be no different than removing the table, where everyone agrees that we only remove the table from the one leading the Seder (in the times of the Gamara) in order for the children to ask a question; so too by Karpas, it should be sufficient to have only the one leading the Seder eat the Karpas. It's only if it is formulated into a ma'aseh hamizvah, then it is understandable why it is incumbent on every one to eat a Kazayit. However this custom that just the one leading the Seder eats the Karpas has not been practiced as an acceptable custom at the seder night.

## יחץ – Is it Broken?

**Joel Paley, Shana Aleph - East Brunswick, New Jersey**

The Torah says in Devarim 17:3, “You shall not eat anything leavened with it; for seven days thereafter you shall eat unleavened bread, bread of distress”. The gemara in Pesachim 115b learns out from **לחם עני** that, “just as it is the manner of a poor person to eat a piece of bread, so too here he should eat a piece.” While the gemara does not tell us explicitly to have yachatz, this source is generally considered the origin of the idea. However, for those who perform yachatz, why break the matzah at the seder itself? What would be the problem with bringing an already broken matzah?

This can be answered from an interesting point mentioned by the Netziv, in his sefer Meishiv Davar (1:21). He writes that on a Shabbos or Yom Tov, if a guest would come late to his father in law’s house, he would be given two slices of bread in order to fulfill lechem mishneh (having two whole loaves). Although these are slices of bread and not full loaves, nevertheless they’re considered to be two units of bread usable for lechem mishneh.

Let’s take this idea and bring it to the matzah at the seder. There are two ways to look at a piece of matzah. One could see the piece is a unit by itself, thereby making it a “full” piece. Or, one could argue the piece of matzah was once part of a full matzah, thereby making it a broken piece. If you bring a piece of matzah to the table, there is no action of breaking the matzah, giving it the same status as a full matzah. However, by breaking the matzah at the seder table, you now have a broken piece of matzah, qualifying the statement of the gemara in Pesachim 115b and expressing the idea of lechem oni mentioned in Devarim 17:3. We thus see two conceptual approaches as to how to view matzah, helping to shed light on this practice.

## הא לחמא עניא - Ha Lachma Anya

ראש הישיבה - Harav Chaim Ozer Chait

We begin the section of “Magid” with "הא לחמא עניא", an addition to the original Haggadah that was composed sometime after the cessation of the Korban Pesach. Its primary function is to serve as a short introduction to the Seder and it is composed of two parts. In a few words, it contains an open invitation to join us for the Seder, as well as a vision of hope to return to our homeland, the land of Israel. A variety of opinions have been offered by our commentators as to the main theme of "הא לחמא עניא". Rabbi Soloveitchik suggests that its purpose was to express an element of freedom that frequently goes unnoticed, i.e. the ability to invite friends and relatives to join us for a social gathering. A slave has no such privilege, as he cannot freely invite others to his place of residence; this is a privilege that only a free individual has.

The Korban Pesach accentuated this theme. The Korban Pesach could not be eaten alone; it must be consumed in a group setting that normally included family and friends. This emphasis is not only the privilege of being able to have a social life, but also stresses the concept that Torah can be disseminated in a social and relaxed atmosphere. Torah need not only be studied in school or in the Bais Medrash; but also with our family and friends in a leisurely setting. It is social friendship to invite over a friend to discuss Torah ideas, a Torah thought or Halacha. Torah comes part of our routine life. This is an important message that the Korban Pesach conveys, where during a meal with our children, family and friends, we can discuss profound Torah ideas and thoughts that are suitable for every member of the family. With the cessation of Korban Pesach this unique concept might have been lost. The recitation of "הא לחמא עניא" was introduced into the Haggadah format to reinforce this theme.

This year we are celebrating Pesach at a very difficult and trying time. We find ourselves in the midst of one of the worst pandemics that ever hit mankind. It may not be the worst in number of fatalities, but the magnitude and the speed that it spread throughout the world makes it one of the most severe. There is almost no country that is free from this plague. Besides its deadly path, it has changed the social nature of our times. Social distancing is now the norm. Keep your distance from your friends and neighbors. It literally separates the family. Grandparents and their grandchildren are instructed to keep their distance. This is a tremendous blow to the Seder night. It uproots such an important and basic theme of our Torah life. All over the world many grandparents will be left alone; families are to be reduced to the “core” family leaving out uncles, aunts and at times brothers and sisters.

The last section of "הא להמא עניא" is the message of hope. “This year we are here, next year may we be in the Land of Israel. This year, slaves, next year—free men.” Throughout the centuries this was recited at the Seder night and at times in some of the most difficult conditions, but it gave us strength and moral support to carry out the Seder in the most inspiring way. Today, Baruch Hashem, we have the Land of Israel to live in; we have the Har Habayit in our hands. Let us conduct our sederim once again in a most inspiring and enthusiastic manner and may we all be zocha to share in the Korban Pesach next year.



## הא לחמא עניא – Servants of God

**Shimon Stroll, Shana Gimmel - Denver, Colorado**

Immediately following the laws concerning slaves in Parshat Behar, the Torah commands “You shall not make idols for yourselves, or set up for yourselves carved images or pillars, or place figured stones in your land to worship upon, for I am HaShem your God. You shall keep My sabbaths and revere My sanctuary, I am HaShem.” (Vayikra 26:1-2) Rashi explains that these laws are repeated here as they are particularly relevant for Jews sold to non-Jews as slaves. Such a person is likely to say, “Since my master has illicit relations, I will also be like him! Since my master worships idols, I will also be like him! Since my master desecrates the Shabbos, I will also be like him!”

While slavery and all related forms of servitude are illegal in most societies, the message that Rashi develops continues to resonate for the form of servitude still present. We begin the Maggid section on Seder night with “Ha Lachma Anya”, discussing the Matzah. We close that paragraph with the words, “Now we are here, next year we will be in the land of Israel; this year we are slaves, next year we will be free people.” Slavery cannot merely mean “in exile”, as that is the former part of the sentence. The slavery must refer to something else. What, though, could it mean for those of us that seem to live free lives?

Perhaps both phrases do refer to the transition out of exile. However, there are two aspects to this. There is the physical aspect of the Galut - that the Jewish people as a whole are not in Eretz Yisrael. However, there is another aspect, a spiritual one. Since we live among the nations of the world, we are influenced negatively which holds back our growth towards the level needed to be redeemed. In Ha Lachma Anya, we pray that all the Jews still scattered around the world should

be gathered to Eretz Yisrael, and that we be freed from the spiritual slavery of the negatives desires, values, and influences that continue to ensnare us.

We may not be physical slaves, but too often we are enslaved to immorality and value systems contrary to those set out for us by Hashem. We are committed to attitudes such as “this Halacha is outdated” or “God will understand that this is too hard to do.” However, we must free ourselves of **this** slavery and commit to HaShem. Tonight, as we make our way through the seder, let us return to who we are and where we come from. Let us remember why HaShem brought us out of Egypt in the first place. Let us internalize that it is to HaShem alone that we owe our fealty.

## עבדים היינו - Avadim Hayinu

### משגיח רוחני - Rav Ashi Harow

The Seder night is the night we not only remember our exodus from the slavery in Egypt, but also try to relive this occurrence. This idea is expressed in the familiar words of the Rambam:

רמב"ם הלכות חמץ ומצה פרק ז הלכה ו

בכל דור ודור חייב אדם להראות את עצמו כאילו הוא בעצמו יצא ממצרים שנאמר 'ואותנו הוציא משם וגו'', ועל דבר זה צוה הקדוש ברוך הוא בתורה 'וזכרת כי עבד היית' כלומר כאילו אתה בעצמך היית עבד ויצאת לחירות ונפדית

It seems that there is a slight inconsistency in the Rambam's words in this halacha. At first, he emphasizes the obligation to act in a form that projects that I'm am being freed now from Egypt, this feeling of freedom brings with it happiness and exhilaration. However, at the end of this Halacha, the emphasis seems to shift over to trying to act and remember the suffering and slavery we experienced in Egypt, which seemingly negates the previous requirement of feeling free and happy.

I would like to offer two ideas which I think we can derive from the Rambam's words in this Halacha.

The first idea, though rather basic, is nonetheless very profound and found in the gemara. We learn of the obligation to "tell" must start from 'genut'- our negative status - at first, and only then work our way to 'shevach'. The idea is that one cannot experience the tremendous overflowing feeling of joy that comes with freedom without tasting the bitter taste of the slavery beforehand. The greater the feeling of the bitterness of slavery, the greater the feeling of

redemption will be. (This is reminiscent of the explanation given by many to the words of Chazal: 'kol hamitabal al Yerushalayim, zoche v'roe b'simchata', meaning only one who really realizes what we are missing by the destruction of Yerushalayim will really experience the overwhelming joy of the rebuilding of Yerushalayim).

I would like to introduce another idea that has ramifications in other Mitzvot, not only as part of our Mitzvot of the seder night.

The Torah emphasizes over and over one's obligation to act with mercy and love to certain groups of people in our society that are less fortunate, weak and prone to subjugation. The Torah states a total of thirty six times our obligation to act with sensitivity to the convert. This total is many more than the verses that speak upon the most important Mitzvot, such as Shabbat, kashrut and all others. The Torah states within its words the reasoning in which will enable us to complete this Mitzva in the most complete way:

שמות פרק כב (כ) וגר לא־תוֹנֶה וְלֹא תִלְחָצֶנּוּ כִּי־גֵרִים הָיִיתֶם בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם  
שמות פרק כג (ט) וגר לֹא תִלְחָצֶנּוּ וְאַתֶּם יָדַעְתֶּם אֶת־נֶפֶשׁ הַגֵּר כִּי־גֵרִים הָיִיתֶם בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם  
ויקרא פרק יט (לד) כְּאֶזְרַח מִכֶּם יִהְיֶה לָכֶם הַגֵּר אִתְּכֶם וְאַהֲבַתְּ לּוֹ כְּמֹדֶךָ כִּי־גֵרִים הָיִיתֶם בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם אֲנִי ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם  
דברים פרק י (יט) וְאַהֲבַתֶּם אֶת־הַגֵּר כִּי־גֵרִים הָיִיתֶם בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם

We can see how much the Torah emphasizes the need to act with sensitivity and care when it comes to converts and others who are in an uncomfortable, painful situation, focusing on how you will only be able to act according to this commandment when you try to place yourself in their mindset and try to feel their hardships. The Torah stresses over and over that you can feel the hardships of these peoples because you yourself experienced being a slave in a foreign land.

However, we can ask ourselves though this is perhaps true for the generation which took part in the slavery and exile in Egypt. Yet the Torah isn't only speaking to them; how does this relate to us? Perhaps this is an additional 'kiyum' being accomplished in our trying to relive our nation being slaves in a foreign land, by reliving the slavery and sufferings we are also achieving a 'Hechser Mitzva' in preparing ourselves to be able to feel the hardships and needs of the unfortunate.

If we are successful in internalizing these ideas, we will be sure to come to the Shevach and hopefully merit to see the 'Geula Hashliema' in our times!!!

## **מעשה ברבי אלעזר - The Story in Bnei Brak**

**Yosef Bluth, Shana Aleph - Hewlett, NY**

One of the first things mentioned in the Maggid section of the Haggadah is the story of the five rabbis: Rabbi Eliezer, Rabbi Yehoshua, Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya, Rabbi Akiva, and Rabbi Tarfon. The story points to their collective Seder, and how they discussed the ideas of Yetziyas Mizrayim the entire night. The discussions lasted all the way until morning, at which point their students came and told them it was the time for saying Shema.

This story seems to be incredibly simple, and to have an incredibly simple message. Just like how those great rabbis stayed up all night discussing the ideas of Yetziyas Mizrayim, so should we try to do at our own Sedarim. It's a great story to show how much we should try to discuss the ideas of Yetziyas Mizrayim as much as we can.

However, I want to look at a specific thing said in the story, or rather, something that is implied. We see based on the fact that the students had to come and inform their rabbis of the time that the rabbis weren't paying attention to the time themselves. From this, we can learn a lesson that is just as important as the first lesson; in fact, it is necessary to help us understand what the first lesson really is. This aspect of the story teaches us that it isn't the time aspect that is important. What is really important is the ideas that get shared. A person can spend hours at their Seder, but if he spent the whole time getting sidetracked, and discussing things like sports, politics, or current events, which aren't related to the ideas of Yetziyas Mizrayim, it is as if he only spent a few minutes on his Seder. A person should try to make sure that he is really discussing important ideas at his Seder, and not just try to drag it out for the sake of making his Seder longer.

People tend to look at superficial things, like how much time they spent on the Seder, and they miss out on the important aspects of the mitzvah. This story is a good reminder that while it is good to spend more time on your Seder, that is only if you spend that extra time on learning and discussing Yetziyas Mizrayim. If there is only the superficial aspect, then these things aren't important. But when you do it for the right reasons, and spend the night in discussion, then you should go for as long as you can, even if it takes you through the entire night, until the point where someone has to remind you that it is the time to say Shema at Shacharis.





look at the appearance”. Afterwards, he brings in the youngest son, דוד, and of course as we know רבן גמליאל becomes king. In the gemara (Berachot 27b), the rabbis look for a replacement for רבן גמליאל after he publicly embarrassed רבי יהושע. They first went to other rabbis to take over the position, eventually coming to רבי אלעזר בן עזריה. Upon being offered this position, he replied he would consult his wife before accepting. His wife said to him that he didn’t look the part of the position he was being offered. That night, he awoke with white hair with the appearance of a “70-year-old man”. Just like when שמואל judged based on appearances when he was selecting a new king, here his mistake is reversed, and he is anointed as the head of the rabbis despite his appearance and in the end fixing his appearance to fit the honor.

## כנגד ארבעה בנים - The Four in Focus

Daniel Ganopolsky, Shana Aleph - Brooklyn, NY

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

And you shall explain to your son on that day, ‘It is because of what the LORD did for me when I went free from Egypt’ (Exodus 13:8).

The well-known verse above is referring to the story of the Exodus. In fact, the requirement to tell the story of Yetziat Mitzrayim stems from this one verse in Shemot. The Malbim points out that this positive commandment only applies to the first night of Pesach, during the Seder. Being the very source of the mitzvah, it would seem logical that this pasuk would provide the basis for the Maggid part of the Haggadah. As expected, this pasuk is utilized as a response to the four sons, but only to address the Rasha and the Sheino Yodea L’ishol. Why do these two sons receive the same response? Why don’t we see this pasuk used in response to the question of the wise son? He is seemingly the wisest and most engaged of the group; shouldn’t we be more focused on addressing the Chacham, not the Rasha or the Sheino Yodea Lishol? What about the Tam - where does he fit into all of this?

Regarding the pasuk at hand, Rashi, citing the Mechilta, explains (Exodus 13:8) that the reply to the wicked son should be, “God did for me”. One should not say “what God did for us”, implying “not for him”, for if he had been there (in Egypt) he would not have been regarded as worthy of being redeemed. The Sifte Chachamim (ibid 10) asks why is the allusion to the response to the evil son found here, nestled within what is actually the response to the son who does not

know what to ask? He answers that the message alluded to the evil son also has relevance to the son who does not know to ask. Namely, Hashem performed the miracles only for the righteous who know the Torah. The ignorant people did not have the merit for these miracles. They were not worthy on their own to be redeemed; rather, only through the merit of the righteous did they attain salvation. While the Sheino Yodea L'ishol would not have been redeemed if not for the merit of the righteous, the specific exclusion of "me and not you" is directly focused on the Rasha. If he had been in Egypt he would not have been redeemed at all.

Perhaps we can find support for this approach from the comments of the Or Hachaim, who points out that redundancy of the words "לאמר" in addition to "והגדת" (both meaning "to say" or "to explain"). In one of his suggestions, he posits that the former word, "והגדת", addresses "your son", while the word "לאמר" is to include that anyone who does not have a child is still required to "say" the story even to himself. Who is this son the Or Hachaim speaks of?

One could suggest that it is referring to the Sheino Yodea Lishol, while the word "לאמר" is referring to the scenario of the Rasha. The Rasha, as we know, excludes himself from the picture, with the mantra of "you not me". By doing so, it is perhaps as if he is saying "I am not your son". Yet the Torah is telling us "say it anyway". In other words - the first half of the verse half is only referring to the Sheino Yodea Lishol (והגדת) while the second half is including the "non-son of a Rasha" (לאמר).

This reading is echoed in the text of the Haggadah. By the Rasha, we say "ואמר לו" which reminds one of the word "לאמר" in the pasuk. Furthermore, if one looks critically at the responses we give to each, one will notice that we quote the entire verse (starting from והגדת) when it comes to the response of the Sheino Yodea Lishol. In contrast, to the Rasha, we cite only the second half

of the verse: “...ואמר לו בעבור זה עשה ה' לי” emphasizing that while they have a shared response they are not quite the same.

Yet this distinction of “me vs you” is problematic when we compare the question of the Chacham to that of the Rasha. The Chacham asks: “what are the testimonies, decrees, and ordinances which Hashem has commanded for you?”. While it is clear that the wise son already knows the story of Pesach, and we don't have an obligation to tell him the story, why are we not railing against him just like we did to the Rasha?! The wise son also said “for you” in his question, implying he does not view himself as being commanded to do the mitzvot, seemingly excluding himself from the rest of Klal Yisroel.

The Divrei Negidim suggests that when the wise child says, “Which the Lord our God commanded you (etchem)”, he is not excluding himself at all from the community of faith, like the wicked child who says, “to you (lachem)”. It is just the opposite, he includes himself when he says, “The Lord our God.” When he uses the word “etchem” (commanded you) and not “otanu” (commanded us), he actually speaks intelligently. God gave the commandments to his (the sons) ancestors who went forth from Egypt, and they received the commandments for themselves and their offspring for all of time. Therefore, when he says, “commanded you,” the wise child is speaking to the adults at the table, since he as a minor is not yet commanded to do the mitzvot. In other words, we can make a distinction between the story question posed by the Rasha, (and not posed by the Sheino Yodea Lishol) where the “you” is problematic versus the halachic query of the Chacham where the “you” is not with malicious intent. (This is assuming that the children here are below the age of bar mitzvah)

Assuming the chacham's response is halachic in nature is clear from the answer we supply to him: "And you shall explain to him the laws of Pesach until one may not eat dessert, after the final taste of the Korban Pesach." The Vilna Gaon, in his commentary on the Haggadah, explains that "the laws" is to be interpreted as "כל הלכות הפסח", **all** the laws of Pesach, meaning until the last one - which is אין מפטירין. However, when one looks at the actual response given to this verse in Parshat Va'Etchanan, the response of the Torah is: "We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, And Hashem commanded us to perform all these decrees, to fear Hashem, our G-d, for our good, all the days...." It seems the Torah "responds" to the Chacham's question with a story response. Is that not contrary to the suggested approach?

Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik famously explains that the Baal Haggadah's interpretation of the pasuk teaches us that for the wise son, the קיום (fulfillment) of the Mitzvah of Sippur Yetzias Mitzrayim, the command to relate the story of the Exodus, is attained only by teaching him Halachot. This concept is evident from the section of מעשה ברבי אליעזר, which refers to a discussion of the הלכות הפסח that took place on the night of the seder. Evidently, for Rabbi Eliezer and his friends, clearly knowledgeable of the story, discussing the Halachot of Pesach was a fulfillment of the obligation of סיפור ביציאת מצרים. Thus, the Baal Haggadah "interprets" the Torah's response to fulfill sippur yetziat Mitzrayim via the Halachot of the seder.

The Tam asks a simple question: "what is this?" He too is asking about the story, unlike the Chacham. He has his own simple response where we tell him the basic story of "Hashem took us out of Egypt.". While he must be asking about the story, his situation is different from both the Rasha and the Sheino Yodea Lishol. Building upon the earlier point of the Sifte Chachamim, the Tam seemingly would have been redeemed in his own right since he was not included in the pasuk of "והגדת". The Torah "lists" the Tam a few pesukim later, both his question and the answer. Even

though he may not be sophisticated like the Chacham, he is not ignorant like the Sheino Yodea Lishol - he is aware that something is going on and wants to know about it. He is also not excluding himself as the Rasha does, evident from our response to him: “Hashem took us out”. What the Baal Haggadah is trying to point out is that both the Rasha and the Sheino Yodea Lishol would not have been redeemed from Egypt purely on their own merit. The Sheino Yodea Lishol, as well as the Rasha, has to piggyback off of others to get out. In contrast, the Chacham and Tam have good intentions and would have been redeemed. The Baal Haggadah uses specific language for each son, language that reflects each one’s merit.



## יכול מראש חודש - Yachol MeRosh Chodesh

ר"ם - Rabbi Aryeh Sklar

The paragraph of “Yachol Merosh Chodesh” is the last of what we might call “meta” topics regarding the obligation of Sippur Yetziat Mitzrayim. We started with a declaration of what the night is about, that everyone is obligated to tell about the Exodus, and that everyone should add as much as they can about it. Then we moved on to stories of very wise men nevertheless spending their Seder nights talking about the story, and even a story of a rabbi’s fight to speak about the Exodus every night in Shema. Then, we talked about how one must teach a person differently based on who they are and their levels of knowledge. Finally, we arrive at the present paragraph, the question as to when the obligation to tell the story begins.

There are two options the Haggadah (quoting the Midrash) considers. One is that the obligation begins two weeks prior to the Seder night - starting from Rosh Chodesh. It quickly rejects this by noting that when the Torah says you shall tell your son the story of the Exodus, it states that this story will be told will be “on that day” - i.e., Pesach. Thus, the obligation must be on the day of the Seder. But hey, says the Haggadah, couldn’t that mean the “day” of Pesach, which is the eve of Chag HaMatzot. This is the actual “Chag HaPesach”, when they offer the Paschal lamb, and not that night, at the Seder. To that it looks to the rest of the verse - that you will answer your son that “because of this” we were taken out of Egypt. There has to be something to point to if you are going to say the ambiguous “this”, and so, the Matza and the Maror have to be there, which is only necessarily true at the night of the Seder.

When we think and analyze this conclusion, something startling emerges about the mitzvot of the night of the Seder. Apparently, the obligation of Sippur Yetziat Mitzrayim is somehow

integrally tied to the mitzvot of eating the Matzah and the Maror, as we see that the Haggadah derives the very timing of the obligation of Sippur in the “zeh” of Matzah and Maror! How can we understand this relationship? What is the connection between the mitzvot of eating at the Seder, with the mitzvah of speaking at the Seder?

Rav Yitzchak Hutner, in Pachad Yitzchak (Pesach, Maamar 77), notes a very interesting phenomena in Chazal’s language regarding the mitzvah of elaborating on the story of the Exodus. One is found in the paragraph at the beginning of Maggid: “It is praiseworthy to elaborate in the telling of the story.” The second one is found in the Talmud (Pesachim 115b), when it asks why matzah is called “lechem oni” (literally, “poor man’s bread”), by punning on the word “oni” to mean “laanot”, to answer - “A bread that one answers upon it a lot.” Rav Hutner writes:

“The first form is the obligation to elaborate on the story of the Exodus itself, while the second is the elaboration in relation to that which is connected to the story of the Exodus - the eating of the matzah. In other words, the consumption of matzah through the mouth and throat in a sense opens the mouth and throat to cause words to come out. The throat receives, but also produces. It takes in the matzah, and brings out the elaborative words.”

What this means is that the matzah and maror that we eat actually causes - impels us - to speak about them, to discuss them. The sippur and the eating are so integral because without the reception, without the taking in of the matzah and the maror, the mouth would not produce the words necessary to tell the story. Truly, it is “because of this - zeh” that we speak the story and fulfil the mitzvah of Sippur Yetziat Mitzrayim.

This reflects a deep-seeded understanding of the relationship between the internal state of the Jewish body and the manifestation of Jewish belief and narrative in the world. The Torah itself commands its only blessing to God by saying, “You will eat, you will be satisfied, and you will bless” - Birkat HaMazon. Apparently, the biblical act of praise and expression occurs in the direct causation of eating. To paraphrase Rav Hutner, the mouth that had received, can now open to speak. A full mouth, paradoxically, can truly express its thoughts.

The idea hidden here is that one should not think that since the human species is unique insofar as it can build worlds of ideas, of contemplation and consciousness, therefore we should starve the animalistic, beastly side, through forbidding ourselves from eating, sleeping, of the comforts of the world. And even if we accept the necessity of these things, we shouldn't engage in them begrudgingly. The Torah's view, the literal cause for this uniqueness of the human species is not simply its capability for higher thought. Rather, it is the taking of the food and imbuing it with meaning, and to express this meaning to each other, to ourselves.

If we are correct, why does Maggid then come first, if the matzah and maror are its cause? The answer, I believe, is the emphasis that Yachol Merosh Chodesh has on the elaboration of the story. It's easy to say a story. But what could be said in thirty minutes can also be said over hours and hours. What helps us to continue to talk with passion and at length about the story, after the basics are dispensed with in Maggid? The foods we eat, culminating with a Pesach Seder meal, which allows us to continue the story well into the night.

## מתחילה עובדי - Who We Were

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It is written in the the Haggadah, “MiTechilah Ovdei Avodah Zarah Hayu Avoteinu,” which is often translated as “Originally our ancestors were idol worshipers.” It seems like an open and shut case, really-- the Jews in exile had assimilated to the point where they even adopted the Egyptian deities as their own. I’m sure you already guessed that it’s not quite so simple.

The Torah speaks of Yetziat Mitzrayim on a number of occasions, but not one of them mentions the Jews worshipping foreign deities. It says in Shemot (2:23-24) that Hashem delivered them from bondage when he heard them cry out in their hard labor. In Bamidbar (20:16) and Devarim (26:7-8)-- the famous recitation of Arami Oved Avi-- it specifies that they cried out to Hashem, who proceeded to hear their pain and save them. There is no evidence in the Torah whatsoever that the Jews were worshipping idols, which begs the question - where does this idea come from?

The source for this can be found in the work of the prophet Yechezkel. He says (20:7-9), quoting Hashem:

“And I said to them: Every man cast away the despicable idols from before his eyes, and pollute not yourselves with the idols of Egypt; I am the Lord your God. But they rebelled against Me and would not consent to hearken to Me; they did not cast away, every man, the despicable idols from before their eyes, neither did they forsake the idols of Egypt; and I said to pour out My wrath over them, to give My anger full rein over them, in the midst of the land of Egypt. But I

wrought for the sake of My Name so that it should not be desecrated before the eyes of the nations in whose midst they were, before whose eyes I made Myself known to them, to bring them out of the land of Egypt.”

To summarize the above: The Jews refused to give up Egyptian idols after Hashem reached out to them, and so he only took them out to avoid Chilul Hashem, the profaning of Hashem. But where does this come from? Again, we don't see anything about this in the Torah, and now we have conflicting sources. Were the Jews worshiping idols in Egypt or not? Almost every Midrash and commentator has something to offer, and they fall into three general categories: those that say they did worship idols, those that say they didn't, and those who seek to balance the two.

There are many Midrashim that take Yechezkel's message at face value and believe that the Jews did indeed worship idols. The Rambam, too, is highly critical of the Jews' religious state at the time of their enslavement. He writes in his Iggeret HaShmad that the vast majority of the Jews were uncircumcised, showing their disinterest in the commandment of Brit Milah, and hence inducing the prerequisite of circumcision in order to eat the Korban Pesach. He further explains in Hilchot Avodah Zarah (1:3) that the Jews, excluding the Tribe of Levi, worshiped the Egyptian idols. Levi and his children had been very particular about teaching their children all the religious laws, and perhaps the verses in the Torah in which the Jews cried out to Hashem were referring exclusively to the Leviim. The argument is compelling, but there are some questions. It seems odd that the Torah would leave out such a crucial detail as the Jews being idolaters through all the various iterations of the story. As for those who say that the Jews were entirely monotheistic and God-fearing, it seems difficult to understand with how the story is presented. The Seder Eliyahu Rabbah, for one, praises the Jews of Egypt at length for their dedication to God and their

persistence in practice and faith. He presents a series of dialogues between the Jews and Egyptians to demonstrate their religious zeal. For example, when the Jews circumcised their sons, the Egyptians said, “Why are you circumcising them, because very soon we are going to throw them in the river?”, to which the Jews replied, “So we’ll circumcise them, and afterwards do to them as you will.” The Ran (Bereishit 15:13), as well, writes that the Jews cried out to God consistently, were not drawn after the physical pleasures of Egyptian society, and were thus further prepared to love and fear God.

The question of Yechezkel, however, still stands: how could he say that the Jews worshipped and clung to Egyptian deities if they were also steadfast in their faith in Hashem? There are two possible ways to resolve this seeming contradiction. One way is to propose that there were a small minority of Jews who did indeed stray from the path of righteousness, whereas the vast majority remained loyal to Hashem. The second is to look at Yechezkel in his historical context. The Jews of his time were quite rebellious-- specifically with regard to Avodah Zarah--- and the prophet’s job was to make them feel regret and change their ways. He recounts over the course of the twentieth chapter every time the Jews strayed, beginning with their time in Egypt. It would not be such a stretch to believe that Yechezkel exaggerated this case, considering he does so on other occasions as well, sometimes inconsistent with the Torah’s recollection of that event. That being said, it does seem hard to believe that the Jews were all (or mostly) saintly, given the vast number of Midrashim that say otherwise, even though Yechezkel is not beholden to them.

Turning to the Midrashim, we see a consistent message where the Jews were redeemed in merit of four things: they didn’t change their names, nor their language, they did not speak Lashon Harah, and they also were not involved in licentious acts of debauchery. Each of the Midrashim also go on to prove that the Jews really did stick to these four virtues; yet it would seem that they

were meticulous in these four alone, ignoring all other religious principles, perhaps even Avodah Zarah. This would make sense not only in accordance with Yechezkel's account, but the Torah's as well. While they may not have been the most righteous, the Jews maintained some semblance of a religious identity, enough to know to cry out to God in their suffering under Egyptian rule.

The Abarbanel, however, takes a different approach, saying that they believed both in Hashem as well as Egyptian deities such as "Mazal HaTaleh"-- the luck of the lamb. This position makes it very easy to reconcile the difference between the accounts of the Torah and Yechezkel, as the Jews were both guilty of Avoda Zarah-- per Yechezkel's account-- and also cried out to Hashem, the God of their forefathers and another god they genuinely believed in.

With all the above approaches, it would appear the compromise approach is most reasonable, which says that they were neither righteous, nor did they lose their Jewish identity entirely. It helps clarify the message being delivered in this important part of the Haggadah.



## והיא שעמדה - Jewish History

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There are a multitude of Jews, me included, that on some level wish we still merited to see the great miracles of old, such as the splitting of the sea or the ten plagues. Wonders which are described as bending the laws of nature that God set into motion. For myself at least, witnessing what the Torah calls “The Hand of God” would instill the ultimate level of awe and *יראת שמים* that all Jews should have. These are vital traits, as we learn from *פרקי אבות*, that one must have fear of Heaven. The Talmud in *מסכת שבת* clarifies why that is. It draws the following comparison: a person who knows Torah but has no *יראת שמים* is like a palace treasurer who has a key to the innermost treasure chamber but not the one surrounding it. In other words, the key he has is useless, much like knowledge of the Torah without the proper fear of God.

However, it isn't so clear what exactly is meant by *יראת שמים*. The English translation for *ירא* actually has two meanings: to fear and to see. At first glance, these appear to be two distinctly different actions. By taking a closer look though (no pun intended), one can see a clear common denominator between them. Having fear is often taken as a negative, something unwanted. While this may be true, there are positives to it as well. For example, if someone is going for a stroll in the forest and a bear crosses his path, it is fear that gives him the adrenaline needed to get out of the situation. No fear means no boost of extra energy, leading to a much higher chance of being hurt. Ultimately, then, it is not so much the fear that gives you that boost; rather, it is the recognition that you are in a fearful environment. In other words, it is the seeing and comprehending that danger lay ahead which is crucial. Thus, seeing and fearing are connected.

Seeing spectacular events with our own eyes would without a doubt increase the level of fear of God within us. It would be insurmountably more profound to witness those events rather than hearing their testimonies from time to time. While this is the case, there is something that goes on in the world today that in some regard is even more miraculous: the continued existence of the Jews. The very fact that we're still around is something we need to constantly remind ourselves. The greatest and most powerful empires have come and gone, leaving mere traces on the tapestry of history. The Jewish nation has been around since the time of the Egyptians; the Greeks, Romans, Byzantines and countless others have risen and fallen since. We're still here. And every Pesach, we recite a familiar stanza commemorating that fact: "And it is this (Torah/Covenant) that has stood for our ancestors and for us. For not just one has risen against us to annihilate us but in every generation they rise up to destroy us."

One need not go far back in history to see evidence of this bitter truth; only 75 years ago perhaps the biggest massacre of all took place, wiping out more than half of European Jewry. But, as always is the case, "The Holy One, Blessed be He, saves us from their hands." These unfortunate events led to the first Jewish state in thousands of years, a haven after the brutal slaughter and a return home.

Our people have faced adversity everywhere they went. Even in our homeland Israel, we're surrounded by those who wish for nothing more than to wipe us off the map. Fighting to maintain its security is a battle which has already taken many lives. Across the globe, Jews face anti-Semitism wherever they go. But even in the darkest times, God is with us and He's on our side. He may show us in ways that are clear and ways that are not. No matter how obscure it appears, though, you can always choose to see it if you want to. We can either look back at our most trying times

and just thank God for helping us out. Or we can choose to really see just how powerful He is and appreciate that He's guiding us. Once you do this, the awe and **יראת שמים** will come naturally.

## צא ולמד - Go Out and Learn

Yitzchak Galimidi, Shana Aleph - Beit Shemesh, Israel

It is interesting that the introduction to סיפור יציאת מצרים is made with the words -Go out and learn. The whole story we're about to read and live through starts off with this word, צא. Why not use something like, "listen to the story"? Or, better yet, "come lets learn"?

We find the word צא is also used in פרשת נח when ה' instructs נח to "צא מן התיבה" after the מבול. Did נח actually need to be told to go out of the תיבה once he saw he was on dry land? Wasn't he desperate to get out and be in the fresh air again?

It seems that there is an important lesson for us to learn from the word צא. When the תיבה finally rested on dry land and נח processed what he had just experienced, the entire world destroyed, as a result of the corrupt generation, נח doubted whether it was worth trying to build the world again. Hashem had to push and instruct נח to go. "It will be fine, נח, but you need to go take that step". We find a similar theme in the Seder. We have just said "שלא אחד בלבד עמד עלינו לכלותינו". Not only did פרעה rise and attempt to destroy us, but in every single generation we deal with these types of enemies. Someone or something is always trying to destroy us. Knowing this can make us doubtful. We might think we don't stand a chance to survive. We might feel helpless. ה' is telling us to go and learn. We need to get up and investigate on our own, so that we understand the dangers that each generation faces and can strengthen ourselves with the help of ה'. It's not enough to just sit and learn about it; rather it is incumbent on each generation to actually go out and learn for ourselves. The story of יציאת מצרים needs to start with this strong verbiage. We can study the details and discuss it all night, and we should, but we must remember the importance of going out and

investigating on our own. If really want to learn, and to be firm in our faith, we must “go out and learn.” We must go out and experience life in order that it becomes part of us. The gematria of צא is 91. The same gematria of the word אמן, the root of אמונה. By going out and learning on our own, we strengthen our inner אמונה and thereby our relationship with הקב"ה.

## צא ולמד - Keep Your Pharaohs Close, But Your Lavans Closer

Zev Granik, Shana Bet - West Hempstead, New York

צא ולמד מה ביקש לבן הארמי לעשות ליעקוב אבינו—שפרעה הרשע, לא גזר אלא על הזכרים; ולבן ביקש לעקור את הכול, שנאמר "ארמי אוכד אבי, ויירד מצריימה, ויגר שם" (דברים כו,ה).

In the midst of retelling the story of Yetzias Mitzraim, the Haggadah describes a parallel which seems strange on the surface. We are told to “go out and learn,” that while Pharaoh, our four-hundred-year oppressor, only “decreed against the males,” Lavan sought to “uproot everything.” The message here isn’t exactly clear. Isn’t Seder night focused on the evil of Pharaoh, and his destruction at the word of God? Is he somehow not as bad because Lavan was worse? And since when do we compare evils?

The Mishna in Pesachim 116a, the source for this section of the Haggadah, is oddly silent regarding any sort of explanation. The Pesukim are equally unclear on Lavan’s evil. He was a trickster who slighted Yaakov a few times. Only when Yaakov tried to run away did Lavan try to catch him. On the surface, Pharaoh seems much worse.

If one looks at the story of Lavan’s pursuit in Yayeitzei, one is reminded of Pharaoh’s chasing of the Jews toward Yam Suf. Both happen after a “master” is told their “servants” have fled. Both pursue with their followers, as Rashi tells us, until the seventh day after the escape. But whereas one ends in the destruction of the pursuers, the other seems to end on good terms. Lavan and Yaakov set up a pillar, bless in the name of God, and go their separate ways.

But how exactly did Yaakov manage this, when Lavan wanted to kill him not long before? To answer this, we have to determine what motivated Lavan to give chase in the first place. When he catches up with Yaakov, Lavan says in 30:31, “And now, you have gone away, for you longed for your father's house, but why have you stolen my gods?” He doesn’t care about Yaakov’s sneaking away with his whole family, nor about losing his prized shepherd. What bothers him is the prospect of Yaakov taking his idols. He chased his son-in-law on a seven-day journey, possibly with intent to kill his entire progeny, because of a few figurines. Only when convinced Yaakov didn’t take them did he relent, and they went their separate ways.

Lavan was overcome by this lust for idolatry, and he had to root out anyone who stood in his way. He sought to wipe out Yaakov, who represented the antithesis of his worship of man-made gods. His goal was to imagine Yaakov’s God wasn’t any different than his own. He said “May the god of Avraham and the god of Nachor judge between us—the god of their father.” He conflated the two because he wanted to believe they were the same idolatrous type.

Still, how does one make sense of all this? Pharaoh also worshipped idolatry, and he enslaved Jews for hundreds of years. Lavan’s evil ways don’t seem to hold a candle to all this.

There is a Midrash, found in the tractate of Sotah (12a), which discusses this issue. Rav Yose Bar Rabbi Chaninah learns out from the verse in Shemos “And Pharaoh commanded his entire people...”, that the decree eventually ended up being targeted at the Egyptians themselves. This is even odder. What sort of king does this to his people, and how did they accept this?

The Gemara goes on to describe Amram hearing this decree and giving up hope. He divorces his wife, and all the Jews follow suit. Then Miriam, his daughter, says “Your decree is

worse than Pharaoh's!" She explains her claim from three angles. Whereas Pharaoh only killed the boys, Amram killed both the boys and the girls. Whereas Pharaoh took them out of this world, Amram took them out of this world and the next. Whereas Pharaoh's decree had the possibility to fail or succeed, Amram's was doomed to succeed. At this point, Amram gave in, and remarried Yocheved, followed by all the Jews.

Miriam's accusation of her father sounds a lot like the Haggadah's indictment of Lavan, most explicitly in the intended targets of the decree. Let's analyze that contrast. Why was Pharaoh content with killing just the boys, whereas Lavan was willing to go through with killing everyone?

An interesting answer can be found in Shemos Rabbah. The Egyptians were lustful, and wanted the Jewish women for themselves. Pharaoh didn't care about the Jews per se; what he was after was physical pleasure. This isn't inherently problematic, as the Yerushalmi in Kedushin says, "In the future, one will be brought to account for all his eyes saw and he didn't eat." However, in the case of Pharaoh, it took on such an important role in his decision-making that he even targeted his decree back at his own people to get what he wanted.

Where does this leave us? What we are presented with now are two ways one can go about living. One can believe what he wants to believe, regardless of the way things are. If he's committed to this lifestyle, as Lavan was, he can succeed. He will have to constantly push out the facts which whisper that what he's doing is silly, and this might cause tension, but he can manage this. This is the Sophist. He begins with a conclusion and is only settled when he has an answer for every question. The facts not only don't conflict with what he wants to believe but are substantiate the belief. He can have satisfaction if he figures out a way to interpret the facts to his liking, keeping a Matzeivah between him and the truth. As Lavan himself says, "This pillar shall be



a witness that I am not to cross to you past this mound, and that you are not to cross to me.” It’s not an internally contradictory lifestyle. In fact, his whole goal is to be self-consistent. It’s why he has to destroy any opposing fact, and why once it can be explained, he’s okay. But this satisfaction comes at the cost of him creating his own world, and walling himself off from the external factors. He no longer sees things for the way they are, but for how he wants them to be.

The second way of living is to try to get physical pleasure wherever one can. This can never work, because a person wants higher pleasures like honor and purpose. No matter how much he tries to obtain the physical, the emotional will always gnaw at him in the background. They will always be “decreed back on his own people,” causing his allies to loathe him. This is Hedonism. It isn’t internally consistent, because there will always be a net loss in pleasure, and so it is doubtful whether it can stand. At least he’s still subject to external factors, which lead to his downfall, but it also means he’s still operating in the real world. He still sees things for the way they are and wants to have the best life. He simply missed something in his cost-benefit analysis.

The emotional part of us functions in two ways. On the one hand it’s a pleasure just like the physical, and this should be engaged with and enjoyed. On the other hand, it affects one’s view of the world, and this should be avoided. Pharaoh held off from the pleasure, and Lavan allowed it to distort his worldview, both of which are wrong. The problem with Pharaoh is he ended up in a net loss in pleasure, and ended up dissatisfied, and ultimately destroyed. The problem with Lavan is he’s never secure and will go to crazy lengths in an attempt to get that security, ultimately willing to kill his own children. He needs to block a lot out to keep up his imagination, and this takes a toll on a person, including a loss of other emotional pleasures. It’s also antithetical to the Torah. At least Pharaoh wanted to live the best life; he just made a mistake on what that was. Lavan, on the other hand, wanted a particular way of life to be the best for him.

This is “oker es hakol,” because the Torah, first and foremost, is an extended claim about what is the best life. Pharaoh denied the particulars of that life, but Lavan denied the existence of an objectively best life to begin with. Without this foundation, Lavan becomes unable to be reasoned with, because he’s working with entirely different premises. It is critical to notice how Yaakov doesn’t try to tell him about God, whereas Moshe does for Pharaoh. Even Pharaoh was stuck in his ways when he came face to face with the truth. However, his conflict over the course of plagues shows he wanted to do the sensible thing; he just couldn’t help it. The only thing which stopped Lavan was a reaffirmation of what he already believed. There was no conflict whatsoever, as long as the facts could be suppressed.

When we read this part of the Haggadah this year, we should remember that no matter how bad Pharaoh's hedonism was, Lavan is more sinister in three ways. His method is more vicious, it precludes any search for the best life, and it is much harder to poke holes in and see the damage done. These were Miriam’s three critiques, but they hold true even today.

## ארמי אבד אבי - The Central Message

**Dovid Lichter, Shana Aleph - Far Rockaway, New York**

The night of the seder is the night of geula, emphasized in various parts of the haggadah, including the section of “arami oved avi”. The Rambam states in Hilchot Chametz Umatzah (7:4) that when telling the sippur, we are “matchil begnut umesayem beshevach”, “start with degradation and end with praise;” and that we learn (doresh) this parasha until we complete it. Yet we don’t read until the end of the parasha- we stop right before the passuk of “vehevatee”, that God brought us into Eretz Yisrael! Not only do we not discuss coming into the land in “arami oved avi”, but there are other instances in which one would think Eretz Yisrael would be mentioned. We don’t have a cup tonight for “vehevatee”, we don’t have any holiday celebrating coming into the land, and the story of Bnei Yisrael’s travels through the desert in the Torah in fact finishes before we enter the land.

It is clear that yetziat Mitzrayim is very important to us: it is the ikar of Chag Hapesach, it is mentioned many times in the Torah, and there are many mitzvot centered around it. If entering Eretz Yisrael is not the objective of yetziat Mitzrayim, what is? It would be very helpful to know that objective, in order to understand this cornerstone of our religion.

In taking us out of Mitzrayim, God took us out of our subjugation to the Mitzrim and our lives of slavery. This freedom was of greater importance to us than simply being freed from physical hardship; it enabled us to have free energies to think on our own, something man can’t do while subsumed under other burdens. Being free didn’t automatically make us better people, but it restored our freedom to think and make choices, both mental or physical, that had been crushed

while we were toiling under the Mitzrim. Once we were freed, we could actually exercise our free will again. With this new-found ability we could choose to acquire chachma and dedicate ourselves to lives of chachma.

This was our redemption from Egypt- we were taken out of a situation in which we couldn't exercise our bechira because of the subjugations and hardships of our slavery in Mitzrayim, and were brought into a situation where we were capable of thinking freely. Only now could we engage in our greater objective to pursue knowledge of Hashem.

In other words, a human being's objective in life is to acquire yediyat Hashem, and one of the missions of Bnei Yisrael is to spread yediyat Hashem to the rest of the world. Yitziat Mizrayim freed us from the burdens of slavery so that we could receive the Torah and embark on this mission.

It is therefore reasonable that we don't mention coming into Eretz Yisrael as part of "arami oved avi" or have a cup for "vehevatee": the essence of Chag Hapesach and yetziat Mitzrayim was not about coming into the land of Israel, rather our ability to serve Hashem freely. While our eventual destination of Eretz Yisrael helps us facilitate this goal, it is only a means to the greater good of pursuing yediyat Hashem.

Similarly, the reason the Rambam writes that we are doresh the parasha until its completion, yet we stop before "vehevatee" and coming into Eretz Yisrael, is that you can't stop in the middle of the shevach of the parasha as it pertains to the theme of the night. You discuss the whole parsha that is talking about geulah; but the next part regarding going into Israel is a new theme, not the theme of the haggadah, and therefore it is not included. The theme of the haggadah

is that God redeemed us from a situation that was too oppressive for us to exercise our free will to one which enabled us to exercise our free will and pursue yediat Hashem.

## ויהי שם - The Jewish Population

Yosef Soloveitchik, Shana Aleph - Silver Spring, Maryland

The Torah records that the Israelite population increased rapidly from the day they entered Egypt to the day they left, going from 70 to over 600,000 males over the age of 20 in a mere several centuries. This rapid growth creates a question about what the demographics of the Israelites looked like. Rashi gives us some clues, interpreting וישרצו in Shemot 1:7 to mean that the Jewish women had 6 children each time they gave birth.

While this may seem extremely high, it actually fits in quite nicely with the simple reading, specifically about the peshat of the Census of the Firstborn. In Bamidbar 3:43 we are told that there are 22,273 total non-Levite male firstborns in all of Israel. This is in contrast to the total number of non-Levite males over the age of 20, which is 600,000. Even assuming that there were no firstborns under the age of 20, when dividing 20+ males by total male firstborns, one gets a ratio of 1 firstborn for about every 27 non firstborns, and this isn't even taking into account the non-firstborns under the age of 20. This results in a birth rate of about 27. A birth rate this high would put the Jews well over the 600,000 males counted in the census (this conclusion was reached by comparing it to Niger's birth rate of 7 and their population growth). Even more puzzling is how this explosive population growth became a population contraction over the 40 years in the Midbar.

One possible answer is that the firstborns counted were only those born after Yitziat Mitzrayim. It is only during Yitziat Mitzraim in Shemot 13:1-2 that the firstborns are given the duty of serving Hashem in the Mishkan. (קִדְש־לִי כָּל־בְּכוֹר פֶּטֶר כָּל־יָרֵחַם בְּבִגְיִי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּאֶדָם וּבְהֶמְלָה לִי הוּא). Since the command to serve in the temple was only given to the firstborns during Yetziat Mitzraim, it would

only apply to those who became firstborns during or after the Yitziat Mitzraim. A precedent of sorts can be drawn for this in that when Aharon and his sons were made Kohanim, it was only Aharon and his sons, but not any other of Aharon's current descendants; only his and his son's future descendants. This is why Pinchas had to be made a Kohen even though he was Aharon's descendent, as he was born before God had made Aharon a Kohen and therefore did not inherit priestly status.

Even with this explanation, though, the Jewish Birthrate would be high, but probably not as high as 27.

Another answer could be that the Israelite birthrate was, in reality, this high. The reason that the Israelite population wouldn't be in the tens of millions would be that the birthrate only lasted for a short period of time. This would explain why when the Torah lists the genealogies of people in this era we find them having nowhere near 27 children. The fertility boom also seemingly ended at least 20 years before Yetziat Mitzriam, a way to explain why about a third of Levites are between the ages of 30 and 50, and not a small fraction of them.

Another possibility is that situations, such as Yocheved's, of giving birth at ages over 100, were not uncommon. This could explain the Levites' weirdly normal population demographic, as well as the Israelites' lack of growth in the Midbar.

While the true answer to what the demographics of the Israelites looked like during Yitziat Mitzriam will probably never be found, thinking about it and coming up with suggestions can give a deeper understanding of how our ancestors lived during our sojourn in Egypt.

## עשר מכות – Educating With Plagues

Aharon Dardik, Shana Bet - Neve Daniel, Israel

The story of the ten plagues, or Makkot, is well known. Powerful imagery of rivers turning into blood, mass swarms of locusts descending on the land, and total darkness as the sun is blotted out of the sky are ubiquitous in our minds. Yet, these plagues are largely sui generis, never again used by HaShem to punish man. No matter how many times the Hebrews fail to uphold HaShem's commandments, they are never stricken with frogs emerging from the Jordan, the Jewish firstborns never killed en masse, and fiery hailstones never rain on Jerusalem. Nor is this mercy by HaShem for his chosen people; over sixty thousand Hebrews die in the desert directly by HaShem's hand. So what was the goal of these specific Makkot? Why such specific and, for the most part, merely uncomfortable retribution?

Based on his reading of the Abarbanel, the Kletzker Ilui (Rav Shimon Romm zt"l) provides an insightful explanation. He draws attention to the imagery of HaShem's finger, as mentioned by Pharaoh's charlatans upon their inability to duplicate the Makkah of Kinnim, (Shmot 8:15) and, in the footsteps of the Haggadah, compares this to HaShem's hand at the Splitting of the Sea (Shmot 15:9). However, rather than try and work out something mathematical, the Kletzker Ilui draws upon the significance of the imagery of each gesture. A hand, he argues, is a disciplinary tool, used to hit and punish. A finger, however, is used to teach. What, then, was HaShem teaching at the time of the Ten Plagues? His answer ties our two questions together.



The ten Makkot are not, like the collapsing of the sea, a punishment with an outstretched hand. Instead, they were educational demonstrations against Pharaoh's primary rebuttal to Moshe's plea that they leave, "וַיֹּאמֶר פְּרַעֲהֹ--מִי יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר אֲשַׁמֶּע בְּקִלּוֹ, לְשַׁלַּח אֶת-יִשְׂרָאֵל: לֹא יָדַעְתִּי אֶת-יְהוָה, וְגַם אֶת-יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא אָשַׁלַּח" (Shmot 5:2), where he rejects HaShem's dominion over the universe. In an ancient pagan society like Egypt, one can understand the preference for the pantheon of Egyptian gods over the single Hebrew one, but this must be remedied. Thus, the reeducation process begins by HaShem turning the Nile River to blood, a stark symbol of death, a rebuttal to the first of the Egyptian gods, Hapi, god of the Nile and new life. The goddess of fertility and the flooding of the Nile, Heqet, was represented by a frog, and HaShem struck the Egyptians with incredibly fertile frogs flooding from the Nile. And so the list continues, all the way up to the penultimate plague, when HaShem blots out the sun and casts total darkness on the Egyptians for three days. Ra, king of the Egyptian deities, was famously the god of the sun as well. The only position more sacred was that of Horus, god and ancestor of the Pharaohs and firstborn son of Osiris. With each plague, HaShem teaches the Hebrews and Egyptians who is and is not god. With the instructive finger of the teacher, HaShem points to each member of the nature oriented Egyptian gods, and says, "No, the Nile is not god, neither are frogs, nor the sun, nor even the royalty. Only HaShem has power over nature, only Hashem is true."

Nowadays, we know that the ten plagues as teaching moments were overwhelmingly successful. With the vast majority of the world believing in one god, we no longer worry about our institutions worshipping rivers and stars. However, this does not mean we are cured of false ideas. As you read the Haggadah's descriptions of the ten plagues, ask yourself: What misconceptions do we have in today's world, what would our instructive, teaching plagues be deconstructing and disproving? What is stopping us from seeing HaShem, the truth, clearly?

## עשר מכות – Natural Miracles

Uri Garfunkel, Shana Aleph - Fair Lawn, New Jersey

The exodus from Egypt—one of the cornerstones of Jewish faith—can be explained entirely by natural means without detracting from the manifestation of Divine Providence.

As one might imagine, Jews are very quick to reject this idea; religion founded in natural events and cycles brought about strictly by nature itself suggests a Deity entirely removed from involvement with our Universe. So were the plagues really miracles? What would actually qualify as a miracle? Let's take a step back and examine the scientific explanation of the ten plagues.

One overarching theory offered is that the plagues were a chain of natural phenomena triggered by precise alterations in the climate:

This chain reaction begins with a red algae (dinoflagellates) bloom that we refer to as Dam. This algae kills all of the aquatic predators of frogs while simultaneously forcing the frogs from their homes and onto dry land. The contaminated water eventually kills the frogs, causing a pileup of frog corpses, bringing about a wave of lice and flies (some argue Arov consisted of cataclysmic swarms of biting flies). These insects brought with them numerous animal diseases, and the bites of these fly swarms caused widespread outbreaks of boils.

Meanwhile, a volcano erupts on the Greek island of Santorini, setting off a second environmental domino effect. A mix of volcanic ash and thunderstorms above Egypt causes a cinematic hailstorm unlike any other. The volcanic ash also increases precipitation in the area, leading to a higher humidity, welcoming a vast population of locusts. Additionally, light from the

sun is unable to penetrate the increasingly thick clouds of ash, casting the country into complete darkness. Lastly, the algae bloom from earlier in the story has been releasing mycotoxins the entire time, and now makes its way into the country's grain supply; the firstborns were likely first to pick the grain and were, therefore, the ones to be killed by the contaminant.

(<https://www.livescience.com/58638-science-of-the-10-plagues.html>)

As an aside, some even explain the splitting of the Yam Suf as a natural occurrence:

A northwesterly wind of 20 m/s blowing for 10-14 hours is sufficient to cause a sea level drop of about 2.5m," which would be enough to expose an underwater ridge for pedestrian crossing. (Doron Nof, Florida State oceanographer)

These theories may appear to be a bit of a stretch, and that is exactly the point. Regardless of the feasibility that these plagues were bound by the laws of nature, all would agree that the ten plagues were highly unusual occurrences: events confined strictly to Egypt, each beginning only after Moshe's public predictions, and ending only after Moshe's acceptance of Pharaoh's pleas for mercy. Rambam explains that miracles are not miraculous due to their contradiction of natural laws; rather, the central idea of a miracle lies in the exactitude of an event's timing. He explicitly cites the splitting of the Yam Suf to demonstrate that all miracles were predetermined by God and factored into the laws of nature at the beginning of time (רמב"ם על משנה מסכת אבות פרק ה משנה ו): "כי ביום...that on the second day, at the time of the division of the waters, it was placed into the nature [of the waters] that the Yam Suf would divide for Moshe." Rambam suggests that it is by way of the elegant law system of our Universe that God interacts with us, not by flagrantly disregarding the laws of nature.

There is a newfound appreciation of the Universe's Divine complexity in knowing that, from the time of its creation, there exists within it the capacity to execute all the events of history—both past and future—without later requiring periodic alterations.

## דצ"ך עד"ש באח"ב – Rabbi Yehudah's Famous Acronym

ראש הישיבה – Rabbi Dvir Ginsberg

One of the culminating moments in the seder night involves the recitation of the ten plagues. There is an almost climactic aspect to it, as it is positioned towards the end of magid, serving to demonstrate G-d's complete control over nature, as well as reminding us of the pivotal role played by the plagues in our exodus from Egypt. Upon completing this, we recite, almost as an afterthought, the following:

“דצ"ך עד"ש באח"ב: Rabbi Yehudah gave them simanim:

Is it really that important that the ten plagues be placed in the form of an acronym? It turns out that there is a debate amongst the Rishonim as to the intent of this acronym, revealing how this teaching of R' Yehudah helps us gain a greater understanding of the seder experience.

The one initial question raised by nearly all of the commentators on the Haggadah about this contraction is quite simple: it does not take a rocket scientist (assuming that analogy still applies in the 21st century) to take the first letters of the plagues and create this acronym. We know R' Yehudah was a tremendous talmid chacham, and yet one of his most famous contributions to the Haggadah is this???

The most common interpretation of the acronym involves looking at the plagues beyond their individual identities, seeing them as distinct groups where each reflects a particular theme.

However, there are two other lesser known opinions that shed new light on this seemingly unsophisticated acronym.

This first is brought in the name of Rashi by the Ritvah. Rashi reinforces the above question, commenting that an elementary school student could come up with this formulation. He then explains that without this acronym, one might come to say that there is no chronological order to the Torah – “ein mukdam umeuchar ba'Torah.” This is due to another recounting of the plagues, in Perek 105 of Tehilim, where Dovid HaMelech offers an analysis of these miraculous events. When writing about the different plagues, Dovid did not follow the historical order found in the Torah. For example, he first writes about the plague of choshech, then dam, and then tzferdeah –clearly not the order found in the Torah. Rashi therefore is emphasizing that the order of plagues found in the Haggadah, as codified by the acronym serves to differentiate from the order (or lack thereof) posited by Dovid HaMelech. What is odd about this opinion is that Rashi throughout his commentary on the Torah writes that there is no chronological order to the Torah. How do we understand this contradiction? And how does his explanation resolve his initial question?

Let's take the other opinion before answering Rashi. The Rashbatz writes that using simanim, or acronyms, was a common practice of R' Yehudah, in order that his students not make an error. He does the same in Menachos (96a), where he uses an acronym to prevent errors in the area of measurements of the two loaves used in the Beit Hamikdash. He emphasizes (somewhat like Rashi) the importance of this specific order of the plagues being clear, versus the order espoused by Dovid HaMelech. He concludes by writing that it is important, via this technique of acronyms and their value for students, to emphasize this exact order of plagues as found in the Torah. What is the main idea being presented by the Rashbatz?

Both agree about the acronym's main purpose— it is a fulfillment in the re-telling of the events of our exodus from Egypt (sipur yetziat mitzrayim), the primary mitzvah of the seder night. As the Rambam writes in the Mishneh Torah (7:1), it is a mitzvah on the night of the fifteenth to tell the story (mesaper) of the miracles and wonders that were done for our forefathers in Egypt. This acronym serves as an enhancement in the performance of this mitzvah.

According to Rashi, the reason for the acronym is to stress the importance of the chronological order of the plagues. In general, one would not be primarily concerned with the order, and would instead focus on each individual plague as an area of study. That is not to say there is no idea in the order itself. However, the necessity of following the timeline would be secondary, at best. Therefore, Rashi is telling us at that the acronym emphasizes the need to focus on the plagues in the order they occurred. This makes sense in the context of re-telling events – following the chronological order is critical in transmitting historical records. So, when reciting this acronym, we are emphasizing the necessity of following the historical order, and how it fits into the theme of re-telling the events.

According to the Rashbatz, there is a different aspect of the sippur that is being brought to light with this acronym. As he points out, R' Yehudah used acronyms to teach students not to err, and therefore these were used as a method of memorizing. In the case of the seder night, as we all know, there is a pivotal concept involving teaching our children what took place in Egypt. From the very first inquiry via karpas, through the different ideas found in magid, the entire seder night takes on the framework of a back and forth between parent and child. As the theme of education plays such a crucial role, R' Yehuda's use of this acronym becomes much clearer. It is a simple acronym, but it reflects the importance of the seder in the education of our children. It helps emphasize the prominence of not just studying the plagues for our own benefit, but to ensure we are teaching our children as well.

## קרבן פסח – Korban Pesach

Noah Balkany, Shana Aleph - Seattle, Washington

While instructing Moshe in the final plague of makkot bechorot, Hashem issues the command for the korban pesach (Shemot 12:3-7). He then instructs Moshe, that after the offering, “you shall take the blood from the offering”, by dipping a branch of hyssop into the collected blood of the korban, then “add to your doorposts” (ibid 13, 22-23). In the times of the Beit Hamikdash, we would consume the korban pesach. Today, in remembrance of that period of time, we have a shank bone on our seder plate. However, the remembering seems to not include putting blood on our doorposts. That seems like a direct challenge to the directive in the Torah, as we are instructed to keep these commandments “for all time..” (ibid 24).

Additionally, the Torah is not very explicit as to which commandments we are specifically supposed to keep. So how do we know the limitation to the consumption of the pesach offering and to not paint our doorposts with blood?

Many commentators are perplexed by these questions. The simplest interpretation is that the blood should be viewed as an exceptional event. Ramban explains the pesukim to mean, “the pesach that you are keeping is the korban itself and not the blood on the door frame, which was a one-time thing.” The Orech HaChayim notes that one could read the commandments to include for your children to both slaughter the animal and paint door posts, just like it was done in Egypt. He answers that question by stating, “the reason it specifies also to your sons, is to tell you there is a difference between what they were doing then. And what the future korban would be.” In other words, the Torah is very specific about aspects of the korban itself but leaves out details



concerning the blood on doorposts.

One other possibility is understanding the function of each aspect of the commandments. The korban was the first unifying act to be done by the Jewish people, a method of worship that was both known to them and common in idolatrous societies. It was an act of religious worship, and therefore had the ingredients to be repeated in future generation. However, the placing of the blood on doorposts reflected a true belief in God, but was not in and of itself an act of worship. Therefore, it could be seen as its own discrete action, rather than as a component of the korban.

## קרבן פסח – Korban Pesach

Yaakov Lehman, Shana Bet - Richmond, Virginia

The Rambam, in his commentary on the Mishnah (Avot 2:1), explains that based upon the severity of a punishment for a given transgression, we are able to understand the gravity of that sin. Similarly, we can discern the importance of each positive Mitzvah based on the punishment given for neglecting to do that Mitzvah. The Rambam compares the Mitzvot of the Sacrificial Paschal Lamb, known as the "Korban Pesach," as well as circumcision, known as "Bris Milah," by explaining that one who fails to do these two Mitzvot is subject to the punishment of "Kares," which literally translates to being "cut off," although it is not clear exactly what this means. Regardless, Kares is a punishment for severe transgressions in the Torah regarding family purity and eating Chametz on Pesach, and because neglecting to eat the Korban Pesach carries such a serious punishment, we can understand the importance of this Mitzvah.

We have already established a connection between Korban Pesach and Bris Milah by the fact that they carry the same punishment for failing to perform them, yet there is another similarity between the two, which the Rambam records (Hil. Korban Pesach 7:8): that one who is uncircumcised is forbidden to eat from the Korban Pesach. This requirement to be circumcised is not found in the conditions for any other sacrifice, and we even allow non-Jews to offer certain sacrifices in the Temple (Hil. Act of Korbanot 3:3), even if they are uncircumcised. Furthermore, even in cases when non-Jews are forbidden to offer sacrifices, the reason given is because of a concern for idol worship or an improper belief structure about God, rather than their lack of circumcision. It is clear, however, that Korban Pesach and Bris Milah share an unbreakable bond, being that the very bringing of the Pesach offering is contingent upon being circumcised! What is

behind this connection between these two Mitzvot?

In order to understand this, we must delve into the Prophets. God says to the Jews in Ezekiel 16:6, "and I (God) said to you, in your blood you shall live, in your blood you shall live." Targum Yonatan, which is an official translation of the Prophets as endorsed by the Talmud (Megillah 3A), translates the verse as follows: "and I said to you, with the blood of circumcision I will have pity on you, and I said to you with the blood of the Paschal offering I will redeem you." As a result, many early commentaries understand the double-repetition in this verse to be referring to two Mitzvot: Korban Pesach and Bris Milah (Moreh Nevuchim 3:46 and Rashi on this verse). Both Mitzvot require drawing some form of blood, and the Torah even tells us in Exodus 12:22 that the Jews had to spread the blood of the Korban Pesach on their gates and houses. Through the lens of Rashi's and the Rambam's explanation, we can understand that the verse shows that the Jews' relationship with God would continue on through these two Mitzvot. In other words, these are two separate actions that the Jew does in order to demonstrate his ultimate service to God, otherwise known as Avodat Hashem—or, in the words of Ezekiel, we will continue to live through them.

Rabbi Chaim Ozer Chait wanted to offer the following approach. In Parashat Mishpatim, we learn that a slave who desires to remain with his master even after he is set free, is pierced in his ear and enslaved forever to his master. Thus, a dedicated servant can show eternal service through a physical mark. Bris Milah is just that mark which shows our unbreakable dedication to Hashem. However, the mark of Bris Milah on our bodies only shows a positive belief structure in God as our master, and this represents only half of the puzzle in becoming servants of God. The other half of being a true servant is expressed through taking an action that shows the complete negation and denial of any master other than your own, so that the servant can be dedicated exclusively to his master. This idea is reflected through the Korban Pesach. The Rambam explains that when the

Jews left Egypt, it was common practice to worship lambs. Even in countries where they slaughtered certain animals and were not vegetarian, the lamb was still revered as powerful (Moreh Nevuchim 3: 46). Being that the Jews were steeped in a society that attributed meta-phsyical power to the lamb, they were commanded as they left Egyptian society to deny any power other than their own master, Hashem, by slaughtering the animal which their society worshipped. In order to recreate this idea of denial of all masters other than Hashem, we are still commanded to slaughter a lamb on Pesach to completely reject all other gods, just like the Jews did when they left Egypt.

We can now understand why the Korban Pesach and Bris Milah have such a strong connection. Bris Milah, like in the case of a servant piercing his ear to demonstrate eternal servitude, is a physical mark that we carry to prove our subservience to God. Once we, as servants of God, demonstrate this, we denounce all other gods through slaughtering the Pesach offering. It is now understood why these two Mitzvot share such a strong connection—because, without them, we lack the very actions that allow us to be called servants of God! I hope when we recall the Pesach offering during this year's Seder, we understand the unique idea of "Avodat Hashem" that is expressed through it. May we be speedily be allowed to offer the Korban Pesach soon, so that we can be called servants of God.

## הלל – The Structure of Hallel

**Darius Gross, Shana Aleph - Englewood, New Jersey**

The Maggid experience of the Exodus is capped off with the first two psalms of Hallel. Though the first two pesuqim of the psalm are relevant to the seder, the rest of the content can seem all over the place. It introduces God's redemption of the Jewish people, then describes how natural phenomena behave in reaction to God's might. The psalmist addresses the hills and rivers: Why do you behave this way? He answers: Because of the Jewish God, who can turn stone to water. What is this poem's message?

First, poetic structure can guide our approach to dividing the psalm. The chiasm highlights the middle four verses about the waters and mountains fleeing. The outer verses frame this behavior, providing its context and purpose.

The psalm starts with an historical introduction: “When Israel went forth from Egypt, the house of Jacob from a people of strange speech—then Judah became His sanctuary; Israel, His dominion.” It is possible that the forefather Jacob was dubbed “Israel” upon finding favor with God. Similarly, Malbim notes the distinction between Israel and the house of Jacob in this verse: Israel refers to the already-chosen elders and Levites, while Jacob refers to the hamon, the masses. The House of Jacob was mixed in with the Egyptians, a people of strange speech, but was sifted out by God.

According to Rashi, this wasn't a painless process. We find in Exodus 13:28 that the Jews left Egypt “chamushim,” midrashically understood by Rashi as “one-fifth.” That is, during the

plague of darkness, eighty percent of Jews were deemed unworthy and struck down by God. Hence, only the worthiest fifth were selected to leave. So the “house of Jacob” to which the psalmist refers, according to Malbim, must be this remaining fifth.

The psalm continues, “The sea saw them and fled, the Jordan ran backward; mountains skipped like rams, hills like sheep.” All commentators seemingly understand this as referring to the splitting of the Reed Sea and the Jordan upon entering Israel. Malbim also sees the mountains as referencing Sinai and Mount Hor. Addressing the Jews who were fit to leave Egypt, the psalmist describes the various miracles they witnessed in the desert.

The psalmist then asks what alarmed nature so greatly. It answers, “Tremble, O earth, before the Lord, before the God of Jacob!” This rendering of the pasuq doesn’t seem very compelling; it doesn’t fit the rest of the psalm, where each verse addresses two distinct but related characters or events. Furthermore, why call God by two names? “God of Jacob” isn’t a particularly terror-inspiring title, not as much as simply “Master” or “God.” However, if the Hebrew is read with a brief pause before the word “Ya’aqov,” a different meaning emerges. With this rendering, the verse reads “Tremble before the Lord, O world! [Tremble] before God, O Jacob!” In this form, the relevance of the middle four verses is far clearer: they provide an impetus for Jacob to tremble. If the natural world is so sensitive to God’s providence, all the more so, God’s chosen ones should be!

Finally, the psalmist again references God's power. Tremble before He “who turned the rock into a pool of water, the flint into a fountain.” This likely refers to the episodes at Massah Umrivah (Ex. 17:1–7) and Qadesh (Num. 20:1–13), when the Jews complained for water, doubting God's ability to provide it. Despite everything they had seen in the desert, the land and sea obeying

divine command, the people still didn't follow God and questioned whether He could perform this miracle.

With this reading, guidance from the Radak and Malbim indicates that the psalm has a dual function. On a basic, peshat level, it serves as shevach, praise of God, illustrating His might. But veiled behind its format and references lies another layer of tokhachah, rebuke of the Jewish people.

Let us revisit the psalm with this lens. Jacob's beginnings was as a Hebrew underclass mixed in with Egyptians—an underclass so sinful that most of it had to be wiped out in the dark. Nevertheless, God gave some of them a chance to prove their worth. And what did they do? They split into two: Judah, the site of the qodesh, the Temple—and Israel as a separate people. (This interpretation of the second pasuq as referencing division and the stratification of the two societies is corroborated by Sotah 37a.) The rhetorical question in verse five posed towards the natural world can also be seen as a sardonic rebuke of Jacob's refusal to fear God, followed in verse seven by a corrective: Jacob should shake violently!

Thematically, the psalmist subtly contrasts Jacob's obedience to God to how the natural world bends to Divine will. The psalm can be reinterpreted as such:

- 1        When the elite were selected at Egypt, the faithful Jews refined from the common assimilated dross, they were to become God's very own—
- 2        Then they rebelled and divided: Judah became God's sanctuary and Israel its own kingdom.
- 3        They had bore witness to the miracles of the Reed Sea and the Jordan,
- 4        how the mountains shook at Sinai.

- 5 Oh, the very oceans and rivers flee;  
6 the hills and mountains skip like animals, at God's behest—  
7 the whole world trembles before God—and Jacob stubbornly refuses!  
8 Despite Jacob's doubt, God twice turned the rock to water for him. (Yet Jacob remains how he was then, refusing to heed the Lord.)

As the Maggid retelling of the Exodus is finished, we are tempted to think of ourselves as the chosen nation, favored unconditionally by God, redeemed by His great miracles. Yet the nuance of this psalm is a slap in the face. True, we were chosen at the time of the Exodus, but only by our own merits. Yes, we experienced great miracles, yet we continued to rebel against God. Entering the next phase of the festival, we must recall our wayward tendencies. We are a people chosen not for our own sake, but to bear certain obligations. It is only with this outlook can we truly go from *avdus* to *cherus*—from a people lost and subjected to the whims of the world, to a people with a defined role and a clear path forward.



## Matzah – מצה

Chayim Zifkin, Shana Bet - Detroit, Michigan

### Why do we eat Matzah, and why can't we eat Chametz?

Many pesukim focusing on our final days in Egypt point to the commandment of not eating chametz, and instead eating matzah, to be a remembrance of the Exodus. The pasuk says “They baked the dough into unleavened cakes...for they could not delay”(Exodus 12:39). The Sefer HaChinuch writes that we too bake our bread into unleavened matzot as a way to remember the haste with which God took us out of our lives of slavery. If this is the entire reason to eat matzah, why were the Jewish people on the first Seder night, before the Exodus, commanded to eat matzah?

We begin Magid, the main part of the Seder, by declaring that this matzah is “the bread of affliction which our forefathers ate in the land of Egypt”. We only call it “matzah” after we’ve “gone thru the Exodus” at our tables. Seemingly, matzah has two separate shemot, or qualities, one before the Exodus, and one after we left Egypt. One idea is that we call it “lechem oni” or the “bread of affliction” when we were eating it in Egypt as slaves. Once we left, however, not only were we not slaves; on the contrary, we were rich! Therefore, we can call the food by its proper name, matzah. Another possibility could be that since we were already eating matzah in Egypt, God just gave the commandment to eat the Korban Pesach with whatever bread they were eating. The very first time matzah is mentioned is when we are given the commandment to eat it with the Korban Pesach, “they shall eat it’s flesh roasted with matzah and maror”( Exodus 12:8). Therefore, we today eat matzah as a remembrance.

This is all fine for a possible reason to eat matzah; however, why does the Torah almost loathe the idea of chametz on Pesach? It goes to great lengths to tell us about getting rid of/not having or owning any chametz over Pesach. Why?

We can say that chametz, or bread, is a staple for us to survive physically. You could even say it epitomizes our physical needs because it's so important to us. We even see this in this system of Birchot Nehenin, where bread is the first in the order of berachot because of this importance. In fact, bread is what we use as the foundation of every meal. Therefore, on a night like Pesach, where we relied completely on God to take care of us, we forgo the physicality of bread, and instead focus on the miracles God performed to take us out of Egypt and the house of slavery.

## Maror – מרור

**Calev Koppel, Shana Aleph - Teaneck, New Jersey**

The requirement of eating Maror is only mentioned once in the Torah, and it is introduced as a topping on the Korban Pesach. Therefore, it is brought down in the Gemara (Pesachim 120a) that the requirement of Maror (on a Torah level) only takes effect when we bring Korbanot. However, in a time without Mikdash, it has no significance. How is one Mitzvah dependent upon the other? Why make Maror only possible with the Korban?

Our experience at the Seder is meant to remind us and make us feel as though we are in our ancestors' shoes, leaving Egypt. The text we recite after Maror is mentioned in the haggadah says: "Every generation man must view himself as though he is leaving Egypt".

Therefore, we eat the Matzah, we drink four cups of wine to express freedom, and we also need Maror to remind us of the bitterness we had before leaving. A sudden burst of luxury without any precedence won't induce a sufficient feeling of freedom in a person. However, once someone is put in an uncomfortable state and has no feeling of contentment, then he will appreciate the satisfaction of redemption.

Yet there is another problem: How can Chazal take what was only supposed to be paired with the Korban, and make it its own new obligation? Chazal themselves are the ones who say the Maror is only a Mitzvah with the Pesach!

It must be that the obligation of Maror never disappeared. The Korban is gone, but the idea of the night is utilizing physical reminders to bring us back to the exodus experience. The Maror has to therefore serve as the shackles, granting us the contrast between slavery and freedom. Along with losing Korban Pesach, we lost Maror too, but Chazal wanted to maintain a parallel between what we're experiencing and what we're thinking about. Therefore, even though we don't have the combination of the Maror and the Korban Pesach, Chazal instituted Maror on its own to keep the parallel between the state of the mind and the state of the body.

## כורך – Korech

**Motty Stern, Shana Aleph - Woodmere, New York**

Much of the seder involves the performance of the various mitzvot of the night. It is interesting that we seemingly perform the mitzvah of marror and matzah twice; once each by Matzah and Maror, and then together by Korech right after. We find a discussion of this very issue in Gemara Pesachim 115a, where the focus is on the concern of eating matzah and maror together today, without the korban pesach.

Our Gemara first mentions that since maror is only rabbinical today and matzah retains its biblical origins, the worry is that the rabbinical mitzvah will disrupt the performance of the biblical one. The reasoning behind it seems to be that to fulfill the mitzvah of matzah one has to eat it; and an integral part of eating something is to taste what one is eating. The problem then brought up by combining the maror with the matzah is that it is disrupting the taste of the matzah. The reason this is an issue is that once both mitzvot are performed together (through eating), a relationship is created between the two items. This wouldn't be an issue if the two said things were compatible, such as two biblical or two rabbinical obligations. However, when they are incompatible, like a rabbinic and biblical mitzvah, the stage is set for the rabbinical one to disrupt the biblical one through interference with the taste.

The Gemara then states that even according to the opinion that mitzvot don't disrupt each other, he is only referring to two mitzvot that are similar, such as two biblical or or two rabbinical ones. But even he would agree that a rabbinical mitzvah being performed together with a biblical mitzvah wouldn't work. This is because two similar mitzvot are compatible, which creates a

relationship between them, and thus allowing both to be performed together (just in a different way). However, regarding two dissimilar mitzvot, there is no relationship to speak of in the first place, and because of this, the rabbinical and biblical mitzvot would not be able to be done together.

The Gemara then brings the opinion, based on a pasuk (Numbers 9:11), that says that maror and matzah are eaten together without nullifying each other. The Gemara cites a Beraisa that says it was Hillel who ate the matzah and maror wrapped together.

The Rishonim offer a variety of explanations regarding this apparent debate between Hillel and the Sages. The Rashbam's first explanation is pretty clear cut: the reason being that the tastes of the matzah and that of the maror will affect each other (as mentioned above). According to this explanation, one could say that according to Hillel the reason one needs to eat them wrapped is because when the items are together they create new entity of "korech," as opposed to the Chachamim who say that the matzah and maror keep their individual identities, even when wrapped. The Rashbam also explains this mahklokes a different way: according to Hillel, one must still wrap them, while the Sages maintain that you could either wrap or eat them separately. At the same time, both Hillel and the Rabanan agree that the tastes do not nullify each other. A way to explain this understanding by the Rashbam of the Chachamim is through two viewpoints, a culinary one and a halachic one. If one looks at this from a culinary point of view, it would be hard to say they retain their individual identities because they do taste different; but from a halachic point of view they still are two separate things. Tosfos adds that the Chachamim hold that ideally one should really wrap them together but if that was forgotten, it would be ok to eat them separately. According to this, there is a halachic benefit to eating the two together; however, it does not affect the identity of either the matzah or the maror, thus allowing them to still be eaten

separately.

The Gemara concludes that "the halacha has not been stated like Hillel or the Rabanan " and therefore states that we do the actions that are written in the haggadah today: first Matzah, then Maror, followed by both of them together in Korech. While the conclusion is well known, understanding the evolution of this process enhances our performance of this part of the Seder.

## צפון – The Purpose of Afikoman

Avi Klar, Shana Aleph - Bergenfield, New Jersey

For many families, the Afikoman is about finding something hidden and receiving a gift for locating it. Of course, while these customs are nice, the idea of the Afikoman is an extremely important one in halacha and merits an analysis. The Afikoman resembles the Korban Pesach that we used to have when we had a Beit Hamikdash and when we consume it, we should remember what our ancestors did centuries ago.

We find the source for the Afikoman in the Mishna and Gemara in Pesachim (119b). The discussion centers on why the Afikoman should be the last thing a person eats at the seder and why that taste should remain in a person's mouth the whole night. There is a Torah prohibition of eating the korban in two different places. Rav and Shmuel disagree on the reasoning of why the korban should be the last thing a person eats, as Rav says that a person cannot break the connection he has to his group and to his korban, where getting up and leaving the meal to eat something else after the Afikoman would sever that connection. Shmuel, on the other hand, says that there is a positive idea of maintaining the connection and actively thinking about the korban for the whole night, and by eating something after the Afikoman, it would prevent a person from maintaining that connection.

Within Shmuel's understanding of the Afikoman, there are numerous Rishonim that expand this idea and elucidate the connection that the Afikoman has to the individual. The Ba'al Hameor explains that Hallel is part of Sipur Yitziot Mitzraim and ending the meal does not connote the end of the mitzvah, as the end of meals usually signify the end of the event (in this context, the seder). Therefore, the taste of the korban is to ensure that people do not think the



mitzvah of sipur yitziot mitzraim is over after the Afikoman and to ensure that people remember that there is still a mitzvah to say Hallel after the meal. The Kol Bo expands this idea and suggests that the Sipur is all night and tasting the taste of the korban will remind the individual that he has a chiyuv of Sipur all night.

The Raavad says that the reason is to ensure that he finishes the korban and does not violate the issur or Nosar (leaving over the unfinished korban to the next day). So, by having the taste of the Korban in his mouth, it would remind him that he needs to finish his korban to avoid the issur of Nosar. Tosafot uses the fact that the taste needs to stay in a person's mouth all night as a support that it should be eaten at the end of the night, when a person is full. There is an issur of breaking the bones of the korban, and when a person is ravenous, he is more likely to break the bones. However, if the person is satiated, he would be less likely to break the bones and would avoid that issur. The Meiri claims that the afikomen is a kiyum of freedom and its purpose is to demonstrate the freedom that we now have. Slaves eat whenever they can since they don't know when their next meal is, however, free people do not eat even after they finish their meal and are full. Therefore, to demonstrate our freedom, we do not eat anything after we finish our meal, which concludes with the afikoman.

While we do not have the Korban Pesach today, we still are able to fulfill the commandment by not eating anything after the final matzah of the meal. Of course, we want to return to the time when we will have the Beit Hamikdash and will not need to use a piece of matzah as a remembrance for the korban. However, seeing as we do not have the korban, I hope that this will now allow us to fully appreciate the true meaning of the Afikoman when we eat it at our upcoming seder and future sedurim to come.

## הלל - Why Hallel

**Shaun Slamowitz, Shana Aleph - Denver, Colorado**

When reading through the section of Hallel in the Haggadah, one can't help but become perplexed by its placement as well as its structure. If we already say Hallel during the day, then why would Chazal implement the reading of Hallel at night in the Haggada? In fact, many halachic authorities note the lack of precedent for the recitation of Hallel during the night as well as its broken-up nature between Magid and Hallel within the seder.

When looking at the list in Arakhin 10b that denotes the times in which one recites Hallel, the question of why we recite Hallel becomes even more intriguing. The obligation to read Hallel during the seder is strangely missing!

"For R. Yochanan said in the name of R. Shimon b. Yehotzadak: There are eighteen days on which an individual completes the Hallel: the eight days of the Feast [of Sukkot], the eight days of Chanuka, the first festival day of Pesach, and the festival day of Shavu'ot. In the exile, [an individual completes the Hallel] on twenty-one days..."

While this absence is strange in its own right, it only becomes further confounding, as a list in Massekhtet Sofrim (20:9) states,

"For R. Shimon b. Yehotzadak taught: There are eighteen days and one night on which an individual completes the Hallel: the eight days of the Feast [of Sukkot], the eight days of Chanuka, the festival day of Shavu'ot, and the first festival day of Pesach, and its night."

This absence of Hallel on the night of Pesach bothers the Ramban, and he offers a fascinating explanation. He suggests that the Gemara in Arakhin fails to mention the Hallel during the seder because the Talmud in Arakhin is only referring to recitations of Hallel that are expressed from the mechaiv, or obligation, of the day. The mechaiv for Hallel during the seder, he suggests, emerges from the completion of a mitzvah. Pesachim 95a records that Hallel was required during the shechita of both the Pesach Rishon as well as the Pesach Sheni, as well as during the consumption of the first Pesach offering. Essentially, in order for one to fully fulfill their obligation of remembering the exodus, one would need to express the simcha that would go along with freedom and redemption through the recitation of Hallel in connection to the Korban Pesach.

The Brisker Rav, in his commentary on Hilkhos Chanuka 3:6, further echoes the Ramban's sentiments. He explains that there are two forms of Hallel: one that is dependent on a day, namely yamim tovim, and the second one is a Hallel of shira. The Hallel of yamim tovim is derabanan in nature, and therefore requires a bracha and as well as completeness. On the other hand, Hallel of shira is one that is said in response to an event, and therefore does not need to be complete or have a bracha, as it is a natural expression of gratitude. The Brisker Rav then continues to argue that while the offering of the Korban Pesach was during a set date, it was the event of offering the Korban Pesach and not the time that created the obligation. Therefore, he says it is acceptable to say a portion of Hallel in Magid and then the rest of it in the Hallel section.

With this idea, we can now finally understand why Chazal saw the inclusion of Hallel as crucial to the structure of the Haggadah. Even though the Korban Pesach no longer existed, Chazal recognized the essential component that Hallel was to the Korban Pesach. That is why Hallel is juxtaposed after the meal, which is supposed to symbolize the eating of the Korban Pesach. In order for us to fully recreate the experience of our forefathers we must express the

same gratitude towards God that they did, and hopefully, someday it will no longer be a recreation; rather, we will be able to experience it ourselves with the coming of Mashiach.

## חסל סדור פסח - Bringing the Seder to a Close

מנהל חנוכי - Rabbi Jonathan Ziring

“Completed is the Seder of Pesach according to its law, according to all its judgement and statute. Just as we have merited to arrange it, so too, may we merit to do [its sacrifice]. Pure One who dwells in the habitation, raise up the congregation of the community, which whom can count. Bring close, lead the plantings of the sapling, redeemed, to Zion in joy. Next year in Jerusalem!”

We end our Seder with this strange summation – that we have kept the laws of the Seder. However, the origin of this text is from a radically different context. Rabbi Yosef ben Shemuel Bonfils, also known as Rabbi Yosef Tov Elem, a French Tosafist, composed a poetic educational text to be read on Shabbat HaGadol to prepare people for Pesach. [This poem was beloved by the Rishonim, many of whom expounded on it, using this as a creative way to engage people in Torah. Rabbi Yitzchak of Vienna records the commentary of Rabbi Shemuel of Falaise to this poem in his work, Or Zarua, Pesachim 256. This commitment to finding creative ways to teach Torah so inspired me that one of our sons was named in part for this Rabbi Shemuel.] After detailing the laws of Pesach, from the destruction of Chametz through the end of Seder night, he ends with this paragraph. In context, the meaning is that the reader has now completed studying for Pesach and thus he prays that he be able to actualize his learning in the coming days. Why, then, do we borrow this text for the end of our Seder? What is left to pray for – we have finished?

It seems that the misappropriation of this text is precisely the point. True, when we complete the Seder, we should be able to celebrate our accomplishment. However, in a sense, what we feel is lack, and that the true Seder is yet to come. Specifically, we have eaten Matzah and

Maror, but without the Beit HaMikdash, the key element of the Seder, the Korban Pesach is missing. Thus, Maror is only rabbinic. We mimic the sandwich of the Korban Pesach with Korech, which we accompany with a depressing statement that this is merely a reminder of that which Hillel did when the Temple stood. Thus, though we are at the end of the Seder, we are like the reader of Rabbi Yosef Tov Elem's poem – waiting to truly implement the laws of the Seder. (See Haggada of Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon citing Dr. Avi Schmidman, and the Haggada of Rabbi Yonasan Sacks, Chazon LeYamim)

Rabbi Yonasan Sacks and Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon note that this theme begins our Seder as well. We begin Maggid with “this year we are here, next year we are in Israel”, “this year we are slaves, next year we will be free.” The Shibbolei HaLeket (Pesach 218) explains that while we recognize that our Pesach is currently incomplete, we start our Seder by declaring our conviction that God will one day allow us have a Seder in the Temple, with the Korban Pesach that most commemorates the original Exodus.

Rabbi Rimon adds that it is specifically after we have spent the night learning, as that is part of the Seder (as we told the wise son), that we truly understand what we are missing. The more laws we learned about the ideal Seder, the more we will feel that despite our having completed our Seder, there is more. Thus, in a sense we are in the same place as the student studying this poem on Shabbat HaGadol, slowly learning, awaiting the opportunity to instantiate the theory into reality. Yet, while that student's hopes were to be fulfilled within a few short days, our hopes have yet to become reality.

The line “next Year in Jerusalem”, however is not original to the poem. However, Rabbi Rimon notes that thematically it fits. After learned about what a Seder could be, we hope for the

ideal one. Furthermore, some positions in Chazal (Rosh HaShana 10b) assert that just as Nissan was the month of redemption in the past, so to will it be in the future. Thus, it is a time when we can hope that our dreams be fulfilled.

This year, while we enjoy our Sedarim, we should remember that there is so much more that we can do, and each Seder is also a preparation for the future. In a year when many of us are without our friends or family, and our Sedarim may be palpably diminished, the message of this misappropriated text seems most relevant.

## לשנה הבאה - A Timely Request

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We end our Seder with the famous words of “L'Shana Haba'ah B'Yerushalayim”, "Next year in Jerusalem", a seemingly joyous conclusion to the evening. It is interesting that the common minhag is to recite this as well at the end of the Ne'ila service on Yom Kippur. “L'Shana Haba'ah” evokes a common theme in Judaism of a desire to return to a rebuilt Jerusalem, and commentators have suggested that it serves as a reminder of the experience of living in exile. While this may be the case, we can ask why specifically Yom Kippur and Pesach? Why not recite this at the end of every holiday? There might be an underlying idea present in both of these chagim, a universal experience that ties the two together. The experience of Pesach, exemplified by the national participation in the Korban Pesach, stands apart in its vast exposure. And, of course, with Yom Kippur, the entire nation joins together, crying out to God for atonement for our sins.

However, there is another approach to this issue, and found in Shemoneh Esreh. The structure of this prayer begins with praising God (shevach), followed by requests (bakashot), and concluding with gratitude (hoda'a). The last of the requests is “Shema koleinu”; one would think that requesting from God ends at this point. Yet, this section is immediately followed by “Ritzeh”. If indeed “Shema koleinu” is the final request, how and why are we asking Hashem to return the Temple Service to the Beis Hamikdash right after? Isn't that clearly a bakasha?

Of course, the answer is that this is a request. The reason we must make this appeal is to recognize that without the Beis Hamikdash, all of our requests are being performed in a less than ideal manner. The system of bakashot were and are built into the Temple Service itself. With the



request of Ritze and asking Hashem to return the Temple Service to the Beis Hamikdash right after the completion of our requests, we come to recognize that our requests will consistently be lacking something until we have a Beis Hamikdash again.

Imagine a long seder, filled with wonderful learning and exploration of the greatness Hashem did for us in taking us out of Mitzraim. It would be tempting to leave our seder and reflect on it as though it was complete, as though we fulfilled our obligation to really experience yitzias mitzrayim. This fits the Rambam's formulation:

"In every generation, one must show himself as if he personally had come out from the subjugation of Egypt; as it is stated (Deuteronomy 6:23), "And He took us out from there, etc." And regarding this, the Holy One, blessed be He, commanded in the Torah (Deut. 5:15, 15:15, 24:22), "Remember that you were a slave" - meaning to say, as if you yourself had been a slave, came out to freedom, and were redeemed."

There are reminders throughout the seder that we do not have the korban Pesach. But the bulk of the seder is not focused on this, and therefore the centrality of the Beis Hamikdash takes a back seat. On Yom Kippur, we do reference the unique Temple service of the Kohen Gadol, recognizing our loss. However, the dominant theme of the day is repentance and atonement, and after an exhausting but meaningful day, one might see the experience as being complete. Now we see why we stop before exiting, reflecting on how the entire day was always missing a critical component, asking Hashem to return us to the ideal state. This could be the reason that we say L'Shana Haba'ah B'Yerushalayim on both of these days and why we say it at the end of both of these services. We must always remind ourselves of the fact that we will continue to remain incomplete in our service to Hashem and fulfillment of his commandments until the return of the

Beis Hamikdash. We must internalize this idea and remember the Korban Pesach, specifically the lack of it in our seder and the bigger picture of the lack of our Beis Hamikdash, which provides us with the ideal system in which we should lead our lives and hope that next year we will be able to experience the seder in the way it was meant to be experienced, with a korban Pesach.

## ויהי בחצי הלילה - What Time is Midnight?

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As we begin winding down our Seder on Pesach, many have the custom to add a pizmon, “ובכן ויהי בחצי הלילה,” about the glory and power of Makkat Bechorot. As it says in Parshat Bo, at midnight, Hashem was going to deliver the straw that broke the camel’s back to Egypt with the last plague. The question arises, why specifically midnight, especially if they weren’t going to leave until the next day?

There is no pure moment of midnight; there can’t be, as every moment in the night falls either before or after midnight, either in the first or second half of the night. Only God can know the exact moment of midnight, the exact moment at which point the Jews would be freed into the holy service of God. Yet, when Moshe relayed God’s message of exactly midnight, he altered it to say around midnight. Rashi explains that this was to protect against the astrologers of Pharaoh calculating incorrectly and using that as a proof against God.

There’s a Midrash that comments on this interesting phenomenon. There are essentially two ways to look at the midnight issue. Either Hashem B’Atzmo divided the night into two halves, thereby rendering the moment/s at which the plague occurred a break in existence; this is the opinion of Rabbi Yishmael. The other way to view this issue is that Hashem, being omniscient and therefore the sole knower of the true times, pinpointed the exact moment of midnight, which is the opinion of Rabbi Yehuda Ben Beteira.

The RadBaz, an early 15th century Spanish Acharon, elaborates on what these opinions mean. According to the Radbaz, Rabbi Yishmael's opinion is quite simple. Hashem, being the Creator of all things which includes day and night, split the night into two halves, thereby creating time without "time", an endless moment in which God both smote the firstborns and solidified the freedom of the Jewish people from the rule of Pharaoh. The Radbaz continues and explains Rabbi Yehuda Ben Beteira in a more practical and simplistic sense. God is and will always be omniscient, and therefore was able to time the actions of the tenth and final Makkah to align perfectly with the exact moment of splitting the first half of the night - when the Jews were still slaves - from the second half of the night - once the Jews have finally been freed.

How can we understand the difference between these two opinions? It seems as though they have opposite perspectives. Looking at the bigger picture, the difference seems quite simple. Rabbi Yishmael views **יציאת מצרים** as an incredible miracle, wherein Hashem defied the laws of nature and physics alike, stopping time, establish his dominance over the Egyptians, and took the Jews out to serve him. According to that view midnight isn't a point in time, but rather a quasi-construct, through which Hashem freed the Jews. Rabbi Yehuda Ben Beteira, on the other hand, sees the story of **יציאת מצרים** in a more naturalistic manner, seeing miracles through the natural laws of the world. Granted, in order for some of the details of this Makka in particular, there needed to be some form of Divine Providence, but midnight is the point in time through which we can begin to learn about Hashem's true power.

In the pizmon of "**ויהי בחצי הלילה**," we are given many other examples of times where Hashem intervened in the world at midnight or roughly midnight. How Hashem helped Avraham (**גר צדק**) achieve victory in the battle of the four kings against the five kings. Hashem showed Himself to both Avimelech and Lavan in dreams, to save Sarah and Ya'akov respectively. Hashem

intervened in the battles against Ashur and Sancheriv, against Mida'an, giving them into the hands of Gidon, and against Sisrah, helping Dvorah and Boaz. Throughout Jewish history, Hashem has interceded at the perfect time, splitting the night in half and saving the Jews.

There is an idea in Kabbalah that the first part of the night is connected to God's attribute of Gvurah (Justice/Strength), and the second half is connected to his attribute of Chessed (Kindness/Benevolence). Midnight is the instant in which Hashem's seemingly opposite attributes collide and create a certain power. חצי הלילה, literally at the split of the night, is when Hashem's Divine Providence can break through the laws of nature and physics and cause the most change. This upcoming Pesach, as we all sit in our Sedarim, remember that midnight will come, and Hashem will always be there to free us.

## ואמרתם זבח פסח - More than a Song

מנהל חיי התלמידים - Rabbi Aryeh Wasserman

This often glossed over song composed by the great poet Rav Eliezer Hakalir (6th century) is found at the end of the Seder, during the Nirtzah section. It is chanted after many have grown tired, after those that stayed awake just for the food have drifted to bed, and in the shadow of the classics “who knows one?” and “chad gadya”. Additionally, it is written in challenging hebrew poetic prose and there are very few commentaries that actually discuss it which adds to its obscurity. For even the select few that know of its existence, many of them simply recite it for the sake of “being yotzei what is printed in the standard Haggadah.” What’s more is that there is not even a catchy tune (at least that I am aware of) to make the song palatable. What this all points to is that we are faced with the opportunity to delve into the unknown with fresh eyes and uncover the hidden pearls of wisdom contained within on our own.

The poem is modeled in structure after the previous piece, “Vayehi Bachazti Halayla” written by Yannai, a teacher of Rav Eliezer Hakalir. It is written in the standard alphabetical order, and it highlights various historical events that took place on the first day of Pesach and concludes with a plea to G-d that Hashem will once again redeem us on this auspicious day as in the past. With that in mind, “veamartem zevah pesach” - “and you said slaughter the pesach,” is a peculiar choice of title for the song. Why might that be?

One stanza in particular warrants analysis: “Haddassah gathered the congregation for the fast of three on Pesach, You crushed the head from an evil house - on the fifty (ama) high tree - on

Pesach.” Haddassah, refers to Esther as it states in Megillat Esther “Vayehi Omen Et Haddassah – Hi Esther” (2:7). The “fast of three” must refer to the three day fast which Esther instructed Mordechai to impose on the Jewish people in preparation of her storming the inner sanctum of Achashverosh without being summoned. (Esther 4:16) Although the Megillah does not give a date for the “third day” upon which she enters the chamber to face Achashverosh (5:1), we can deduce the date from the fact that earlier it states that Achashverosh agree to Haman’s plan to wipe out the Jews and the messengers went out to deliver the decree on the thirteenth of the first month (3:12). The first month is Nissan, which means that event took place right before Pesach. The Megillah then tells us the series of events that Mordechai heard and the back and forth with Esther about her responsibility to act without giving any other date in the interim. Thus, we can conclude that when the verse says she entered on the third day, it must have been the 15th of Nissan, on Pesach.

The gemara in Pesachim (68b) cites an argument regarding whether there is a chiyuv of simchat yom tov through eating or not. The Shulchan Aruch (OC 529:1) follows the opinion of Rabbi Yehoshua who argues that “half for you and half for Hashem” which means that eating on Yom Tov is a mitzvah. Therefore it is forbidden to fast on holidays past chatzot hayom (Mishna Berura OC 529:1). How then could Mordechai and Esther instruct the Jews to fast on Pesach? Furthermore the night of Pesach contains the requirement to eat Matzah and one who does not do so intentionally can be chayav Karet! How could it be that this fast took precedence over this essential mitzvah?

The Ibn Ezra (Esther 4:16) explains that the three days must mean “until the third day”. His reasoning is that since the verse states “layla vayom” immediately after “shloshet yamim” which indicates that they were fasting through the night not just during the day, it is impossible

that Esther expected them to fast for three full twenty four hour days. This being the case one could argue that they fasted until the fifteenth. While this would resolve our query, as they never intended them to fast on Pesach, it doesn't seem like Rav Eliezer Hakalir agrees with this interpretation. Additionally, the Torah Temimah quotes the Midrash Rabah which specifically states the three days were the 13th, 14th and 15th of Nissan, implying that they did indeed fast on Pesach. He furthermore points to the gemara in Masechet Yevamot (121b) which references the fast in passing which seems to indicate it was a consecutive three day fast which seems to exclude the possibility of arguing that they didn't fast during the nights and fulfilled the mitzvah of Matzah on the night of the 15th.

The aforementioned Midrash explains the exchange between Esther and Mordechai in the following light: "He sent to her (Esther) 'isn't one of those days Pesach?' She sent to him, '(Zaken) Elder of Israel, why does one need Pesach?' Immediately Mordechai heard and agreed to her words." The Torah Temimah in his biurim elaborates: "In other words, it seems that Mordechai had our very question - one can't fast on Pesach! Esther responds to him with two points: first of all, if I should fail and the Jews are destroyed due to this decree - there won't be a Pesach! Furthermore, you are the zaken - the leader of the generation - and you have the authority to instruct the Jews to not fulfill a positive mitzvah in a time of need (shev v'al taaseh)- and there is no greater time of need than this one." It seems that Esther gave both a rational argument and a halachic argument for her cause not relying solely on her rational argument but pointing out that this was indeed the correct Halachic move. Mordechai accepted her decision - it is unclear though if he agreed with both of her arguments. Was her rational argument enough to warrant a third day of fasting? If not was she correct about her halachic one?



Perhaps we can delve deeper into the exchange between the two as described by the Torah Temimah, by turning to Masechet Taanit (11b) where there is a discussion regarding the laws of public fasts ordained in response to lack of rain. Rabbi Yirmiyah Bar Abba states: “there are no public fasts (for rain) in Bavel, with the exception of Tisha B’av.” There are several opinions in the rishonim as to why this is the case. Tosafot, (ibid) explains because Bavel simply has a significant amount of rain. In contrast, the Rosh (Taanit 1:1) quotes the Raavya, who based on the Yerushalmi Taanit claims that this is because the rabbanim of the Diaspora do not have the authority to proclaim a public fast since they have no Nasi outside of Israel. This approach is expanded upon by the Ramban and the Ritva, (ibid) who point out that in addition to having no Nasi, the Yerushalmi version of the text requires an Av Beit Din which also is only in Israel. Taking this machloket at face value it would seem that if one were to accept the explanation of Tosafot, then the statement of the Gemara only limits the ability to establish a fast in response to lack of rain in Bavel, but a fast in response to any other calamity would be warranted. However according to the Ramban and Ritva, one could argue that the gemara is limiting the proclamation of any fast whatsoever outside of Israel. We could suggest that Esther, who put forth the fast, even though it meant not fulfilling the mitzvot of Pesach, assumed like Tosafot. Mordechai responded to her “what about Pesach ” - meaning he assumed like the Ramban and Ritva, who claim that he doesn’t have the authority to establish a public fast and thus the fast she is suggesting can not happen. Furthermore perhaps he is arguing that since he doesn’t have the authority of a nasi or av beit din, the people won’t do it. But what of Esther’s response?

The first Mishna in the second perek of Masechet Taanit describes the process of the public fast: “...And they also place ashes on the head of the Nasi, and on the head of the deputy Nasi, and each and every member of the community likewise places ashes upon his head. The zaken among them says to the congregation statements of reproof...” Perhaps in this light we can

understand Esther's response; the people should recognize that there won't be a Pesach without the fast and thus they should all be willing to accept upon themselves a taanit yachid. In addition, Esther points to Mordechai and says, "you are the zaken!" You are qualified and are viewed as a nasi figure despite your current location outside of Israel.

In fact the Meiri, explains the aforementioned discrepancy between the Bavli and the Yerushalmi regarding the position of nasi described in the Bavli and the Av Beit Din mentioned by the Yerushalmi by claiming that the Mishna does not require an actual Av Beit Din and actual Nasi but rather these are terms that mean an expert in Halacha (Av Beit Din) and a Nasi (a musmach). The gemara (Megillah 13b) tells us that Mordechai returned to Israel with Ezra and was appointed to the Anshei Knesset Hagedolah. Additionally, the Netziv in his commentary to the Sheiltot (siman 158) writes, "that which a Nasi is required - is only with regards to other calamities.... Because of this when they agree to decree the strictness of a public fast, just like Mordechai and Esther, they are bound by the decision of the Nasi...." We see that the Netziv refers to Mordechai as having the status of Nasi - despite his location outside of Israel. It would seem then that Mordechai fit both criteria, and thus Esther tells Mordechai that he indeed does have the authority even outside of Israel to proclaim the necessary public fast, even on Pesach. Mordechai accepted her analysis and told the people to fast and so they did both through his authority and through their own desire to take control of their own destiny.

As we conclude the seder we sing this song and the previous song of "vayehi bachatzi halayla." In the previous song, as the title suggests, the highlight is how Hashem, who alone knows the precise moment of midnight, saved us and performed his wonders. At the end of the day though Hashem's miracles will only come to fruition if we do our part hence the title "veamartem zevach pesach" - "and you will say this is a pesach sacrifice". If one looks through the rest of the

stanzas you will notice this theme is indeed highlighted. Throughout history once individuals took those first steps, as big or small as they may be - that is when Hashem's salvation occurs.