



SEVEN PERSPECTIVES ON THE HAGGADA

Did You Learn Anything New This Year?

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When I was a student in Midreshet Moriah, I was very fortunate to spend a year and a half learning with Rav Yitzchak Mirsky. During that time, Rav Mirsky published a Haggadah with his own commentary. One d'var Torah he shared with us left an everlasting impression on me. I saw it as a personal challenge to follow through on year after year.

Rav Mirsky asks, “why do we call the Haggadah by the name Haggadah”? He answers that it simply comes from the word *lehagid*, to tell. We might then ask, perhaps the Haggadah

could have been named something more descriptive, like *sipur yetziat Mitzrayim*, recounting the story of the Exodus. After all, we know *hamarbeh harei zeh meshubach*, the more one talks about it, the better it is. The Baal Haggadah could have used that as the title of the Haggadah but chose not to.

To understand why the title “Haggadah” was chosen, it is helpful to look at where the word comes from: the root is *hey, gimmel, daled*. In Parshat Bo in 13:8 we have the passuk in which the directive to recount the story of Hashem taking Bnei Yisrael out of Egypt is given. The passuk reads:

וְהִגַּדְתָּ לְבִנְךָ בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא לֵאמֹר בְּעִבּוֹר זֶה עָשָׂה ה' לִי בְצֵאתִי מִמִּצְרָיִם.

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.”

Why did the Torah use this word

וְהִגַּדְתָּ, explain? It is one thing for the Baal Hagaddah to use this word, but the Torah had many other options. There could have been a more specific directive given, for example, tell your son, recount for your son, but instead the word explain is used. To better understand this word choice, we must dig a bit further and look at the first time we see the word in the Torah. The first time we see the word *hagid* is when Hashem speaks to Adam in Bereishit 2:11. This is just after Adam and Chava had eaten from the forbidden fruits in Gan Eden, their eyes were “opened,” and they realized they were not clothed.

וַיֹּאמֶר מִי הִגִּיד לְךָ כִּי עִירַם אֶתָּה הַמֶּן הָעֵץ אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתִיךָ לִבְלֹתִי אֶכֶל מִמֶּנּוּ אֶכְלָתָּ.

Hashem asks, “Who told you that you were naked? Did you eat of the tree from which I had forbidden you to eat?”

Hashem’s choice of words is

interesting, since there was no one else in Gan Eden to have made Adam and Chava aware of their nakedness. Rav Mirsky points out that in this example, the meaning of *hagid* is to teach something new to someone that they did not know before that moment. Hashem was implying that someone made Adam and Chava aware of the concept of their not being clothed.

Another place in which the word *hagid* is used with a similar meaning is in the story of Yosef telling his brothers to return to their father, Yakov, to share that Yosef was in fact still alive. Bereishit 45:13 reads:

וְהַגַּדְתָּם לְאָבִי אֵת כָּל כְּבוֹדִי בְּמִצְרַיִם וְאֵת כָּל
אֲשֶׁר רָאִיתֶם וּמַהֲרֶתֶם וְהוֹרַדְתֶּם אֶת אָבִי הַנֶּה.
And you must tell my father everything about my high station in Egypt and all that you have seen; and bring my father here with all speed.

This was new information to Yakov, similar to the previous example in which Hashem asked Adam who had told him about his nakedness. The brothers were being told to tell Yakov about this new information about Yosef being alive.

This is precisely the challenge Rav Mirsky posed to each one of us. Teaching the Haggadah each year can be a hard task. On one hand, the information must be taught to a variety of levels depending on who is sitting at your Seder table. It must be engaging and encourage the asking of questions. Children have the opportunity to see the story of *yetziat Mitzrayim* through their eyes as they grow. Their perspectives and thoughts change with their maturation. Simultaneously, a parent has the responsibility to think about the messages being imparted to the children each year. What new ideas

are being taught to our children, ourselves, our guests?

The challenge to teach something new each year is real. How can we do that? The story has not changed; we know how it ends. There are no new discoveries about *yetziat Mitzrayim*, the exodus from Egypt. This is, in fact, the challenge the Baal Haggadah was posing to each of us when choosing the name Haggadah — that each year we must learn something new.

It is quite amazing to see that each year, new Haggadot come out, that each year new perspectives on the Seder and Haggadah are shared. We are, in fact, able to learn new ideas each year. This is perhaps a far larger message for life in general: we may at times feel stagnant, that life looks the same from year to year, when in fact it is our responsibility to try and view every scenario from a new perspective. To learn something new, to grow in a new way. Since this Pesach may again look different from past years shared with family and friends, it is my hope that we are all safe and that whomever we share the Seder with, we are able to share new Torah and old Torah in a way that enriches each of our experiences.

Avadim Hayinu: Framing the Seder Experience

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Following the Ma Nishtana, the four questions that launch the Maggid section of the Haggadah, the Haggadah responds with Avadim Hayinu. Commentators raise many

textual questions on this short paragraph.

1) We declare that we were slaves in Mitzrayim and Hashem took us out. How does that answer the four questions concerning the mitzvos of the evening posed in the Ma Nishtana?

2) The Haggadah first states we were *avadim*, slaves, to Paroh in Egypt and then later says, if Hashem hadn't taken us out, we would still be *meshubadim*, beholden, to Paroh. Why the change in language from עבד to משעבד?

3) How can the Haggadah state unequivocally that had Hashem not taken us out at that time we would still be slaves in Egypt until this very day? We know from major historical trends that many factors throughout history could have led to our freedom. Powers rise and fall, cultures change, political attitudes shift, and at any given point we may have left Egypt through so-called natural forces.

The commentators grapple with these questions and offer different answers. A look at two of these approaches reveals a couple of larger themes that frame our Seder night experience.

The *Maaseh Nissim* by Rabbi Yaakov from Lisa, 1760–1832, explains that the author of the Haggadah is not trying to directly answer the four questions. Instead, he is positing a fundamental belief. We, the Jewish people, were slaves in Egypt and we served Paroh. As slaves, we did not have the luxury of questioning our duties or negotiating our terms. We obeyed without understanding or comprehending the purpose of our jobs or the relevance of the tasks. Such is the life of a slave; he faithfully carries out his duties to his master and such was our life under Paroh's rule.

But as the Jewish people transition into freedom, we have questions about the meaning of our jobs, the mitzvos and their import. We are even encouraged to ask questions and as such, we begin the Haggadah with the four questions. But before the Haggadah begins to explore the depth of the mitzvos, thereby giving the commandments more richness, the author of the Haggadah pauses to teach a critical lesson: Even though we are transitioning to freedom, we accept that we are committed servants of Hashem. Just as we served Paroh without question, so too our service of Hashem is not predicated upon understanding the mitzvos. We begin our Pesach Seder with Avadim Hayinu to fundamentally frame our relationship with Hashem as humble, grateful servants who recognize Hashem's goodness and we submit unconditionally to His will. Only after firmly establishing this belief do we then begin to uncover more meaning behind the mitzvos. What emerges from the *Maaseh Nissim* is that our first experience of the Seder night is to recognize that through the process of *yetzias Mitzrayim* and reenacting that event, we reaffirm our total, unequivocal loyalty to Hashem.

Rav Yitzchak Hutner, in a beautiful piece in *Pachad Yitzchak* (Pesach Maamar 42), elaborates on this point. Rav Hutner explains that every action a Jew does to serve Hashem constitutes *avodas Hashem*. This includes explicit mitzvos from the Torah, as well as seemingly mundane actions that are performed with the intention of being better able to serve Hashem. For example, the explicit mitzvah of keeping Shabbos is clearly part of our *avodas Hashem*. But it is also true that eating a healthy diet so that we have energy to serve

Hashem better is also fulfilling our *avodas Hashem* (Rambam, *Hilchos Deios* 3:2–3). Since this is the case, the Torah avoids the term *avodah* when describing mitzvos in favor of labeling mitzvos individually. The one exception to the rule is Pesach night. The mitzvos of Pesach night — matzah, karbon Pesach, etc. — are referred to broadly as *ve'avadeta es ha'avodah hazos* (Shemos 13:5). Why use the broad terminology of *avodah* to describe the mitzvos of the night? Rav Hutner bases his answer on a halacha regarding becoming an *eved*, a servant. When a master acquires an *eved*, he commands the servant to perform an act of servitude for the master. By responding to that command, the servant cements his relationship with his master as an *eved*. What emerges from this halacha is that while a person who is already an *eved* may perform the very same service as the person who is just becoming an *eved*, the function of that service is fundamentally different. In the former, the servant is fulfilling the responsibilities of his position, while in the latter, the service functions as *kinyan avdus*, concretizing the servant master-relationship. On Pesach night, reenacting *yetzias Mitzrayim*, we enter into a bond and relationship with Hashem as faithful servants to our master. The significance of the mitzvos of the night are not individual commandments that we practice because we are servants of Hashem. Rather, these mitzvos represent, in a broader way, the cementing of our relationship to Hashem. Hashem commands us this night to eat matzah and a korban Pesach, and we react not out of prior loyalty to serve Hashem but as a response to Hashem beckoning us to enter into a sacred relationship of *eved* to *Adon* (Master).

As such, the Torah uses the broad term *avodah* to describe the night's activities, because the individual mitzvos unite under one umbrella of entering into our relationship with Hashem. This is one dominant theme of the Seder night: our total commitment to serving Hashem who freed us from bondage, becoming *avdei Hashem*.

The *Maaseh Hashem*, Rabbi Eliezer Ashkenazi, takes a different approach to answer our initial questions. Avadim Hayinu, he says, is picking up on the last of the four questions, which is: Why do we lean at the Seder, which symbolizes and demonstrates our complete freedom from bondage? The answer is that Hashem alone, through the might of His hand, took us out of Egypt and freed us from Paroh. The significance of that statement cannot be underestimated, explains the *Maaseh Hashem*. Hashem had many means at His disposal to free us from Paroh. He could simply have planted the thought in Paroh's mind to let the Jewish people go. However, had the Jewish people exited Egypt through more natural means, had Paroh simply let us go out of the goodness of his heart, the Jewish people would have been indebted forever to Paroh for their freedom. The message conveyed by the words "Hashem took us out of Egypt with a strong outstretched hand" is that we owe thanks and allegiance only to Hashem and to no one else, not Paroh and not Egypt. This further explains why the author of the Haggadah uses the language of *meshubad*, beholden. Had Hashem, Himself, not taken us out of Mitzrayim, the Jewish people would still be *meshubad*, beholden, to Paroh even if we were no longer slaves. We would forever owe *hakaras hatov* to Paroh or whoever

ultimately provided our freedom. Hence, we lean on the Seder night to demonstrate our complete freedom from all peoples, and Avadim Hayinu articulates our *hakaras hatov* to Hashem for personally taking us out of Mitzrayim.

We see from the *Maaseh Hashem* that *hakaras hatov* is understood as a real *shibud*, almost like a contractual obligation upon a Jew to return the favor to one who has helped him. Rav Hershel Schachter in *B'ikvei Hatzon* 16:7) quotes Rav Soloveitchik's *peshat* on the following pasuk:

כִּי לֹא יִחַדֵּל אֲבִיוֹן מִקְרֹב הָאָרֶץ עַל פְּנֵי אֲנָכִי
מִצְדָּה לְאֹמֵר פֶּתַח תִּפְתַּח אֶת יָדְךָ לְאֹחִיךָ לְעֲנִי
וּלְאֲבִינְךָ בְּאֶרֶץ

For there will never cease to be needy ones in your land, which is why I command you: open your hand to the poor and needy kinsman in your land.

Devarim 15:11

Poverty always exists and it is a moving target. Sometimes a person is in the position to give and other times that very same person may need to receive. As such, the Torah understands that giving tzedakah is an obligation and the recipient is beholden or has a *shibud* to pay back that kindness. We may all find ourselves on different sides of that coin at some point in our lives.

At the Seder night, this powerful theme of *hakaras hatov* emerges. The Rambam in *Sefer HaMitzvos* (mitzvah 157) states that an integral part of the mitzvah to tell over the story of *yetzias Mitzrayim* is to give thanksgiving to Hashem for all his kindness that He bestowed upon us.

As we begin our journey on the Seder night, we reinforce these two salient themes that inform the Pesach experience in particular, as well as our

broader Jewish identity. We affirm our fidelity to Hashem whom we serve with complete faith, and we express our unbridled *hakaras hatov* to Hashem. Furthermore, by realizing *hakaras hatov* is a *shibud*, we commit to inculcating that middah into our very beings so that we are always expressing thanksgiving to all those who show us kindness.

Mitzvas Matzah: How We Choose to Tell a Story

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On first blush, the mitzvah of *achilas matzah* seems straightforward. *Al shum mah?* This matzah that we point to and consume, what is its significance? The Hagaddah proffers the well-known answer that it represents the bread that did not have a chance to rise upon our narrow escape from the servitude in Mitzrayim. However, as in life itself, the issue is far from simple. For while we understand the matzah's historical resonance, the Torah deepens the significance of this mitzvah by referring to the bread as *lechem oni*.

The Gemara, in *Pesachim* 115b, provides two different explanations as to why matzah is given this designation. According to one opinion it refers to *aniyus* — remembering our days of poverty and servitude. According to a second opinion, it refers to the redemption — *lechem she'onim alav devarim harbeh*, bread that is used as the fulcrum in the telling of the story of freedom and redemption. The meforshim are puzzled as to why the same object is utilized for two opposite emotions

and experiences — poverty and freedom; surely the Torah could have thought of a different expression for either servitude or freedom?

Perhaps the point is that we are given a choice as to which perspective we want to adopt when thinking about our national narrative. We could choose to focus on the poverty, the backbreaking labor and the humiliation, or we could choose to sing a *shira chadasha*, a new song that celebrated the ultimate joyous conclusion despite the existence of the initial dark chapters.

This might be the answer to the well-known question posed by many Rishonim as to why the first mitzvah given after *yetzias Mitzrayim* is that of *kiddush hachodesh*, sanctification of the new moon. The ba'alei machshava highlight the exceptional nature of this mitzvah in that *kiddush hachodesh* reflects man's ability to sanctify the moon, which in turn determines when bread becomes chametz, on which day we are subject to *kares* for not fasting on Yom Kippur, and a whole host of other critical halachos. According to the Kedushas Levi, the verse (Shemos 12:2) "*rishon hu lachem*" — it is a first for you — is essentially saying that Hashem, the "Rishon," is given over to Bnei Yisroel through their ability to sanctify the moon. What a transformative mitzvah to begin the Jew's sojourn through the desert! Bnei Yisroel had the choice to view themselves as slaves still dealing with the reverberations of hundreds of years of slavery, or they could view themselves as regal *bnei melachim* and as an *am segulah*, a treasured nation. Beginning the journey with the mitzvah of *kiddush hachodesh*, and all that it implies about the grandeur of man, and specifically am Yisroel as

a *mamleches kohanim*, allowed Bnei Yisroel to frame their experiences in a psychologically healthy and productive fashion. We are given a choice how to view *yetzias Mitzrayim* specifically, and Jewish history in its entirety. Do we experience our life through the prism of the downtrodden *aniyus* or through the perspective of *geulah*?

In a real sense, many of us are enslaved by the narrative of our lives — how we look back on a difficult childhood, how we deal with suffering and with setbacks — and we frame our lives through the prism of that negative narrative. To some degree there is a certain spirit of *cheirus* that comes with choosing to write a positive script of our life. The goal is to be able to acknowledge and give voice to frustrations and even pain, and at the same time to genuinely feel that we have the capacity to transform every incident that has befallen or will befall us into opportunities for real growth and meaning. That is also a freedom of sorts. The matzah in its duality and complexity speaks of the entire process of national and personal redemption, and challenges us in our perception of our own life's journey.

Three Reasons We Were Slaves in Egypt

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Many nations begin with wars, infighting and challenges between themselves and those people around them. But why did Hashem decree that the Jewish people should begin its role in history as slaves? Wasn't there

a better method that God could have chosen to start the Am HaNivchar, the Chosen People of world history, who one day would be receiving the Torah on Mount Sinai and fulfill the mitzvot therein?

Our sages describe three reasons we needed to begin our role on the world stage with a 210-year sojourn in Mitzrayim, many years of which we were slaves to Pharaoh and Egypt.

1. To strengthen the Jews' trust in God.
2. To develop a close relationship with God.
3. To show the Jews the consequences of an over-zealous pursuit of materialism.

The Torah in Bereishit (15:7-8) describes how Avraham was told that his descendants would be slaves in Egypt:

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהֵי אַבְרָם ה' אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאֹרֶץ כְּשָׂדִים לָתֶת לְךָ אֶת הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת לְרִשְׁתָּהּ. וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֱלֹהִים בְּמָה אֲדַע כִּי אִירָשְׁנָהּ.

He said to him [Avraham]: "I am God Who brought you out of Ur Kasdim to give you this land to inherit it." He said, "My Lord, how will I know that I will inherit it?"

The Gemara in *Nedarim* (32a) explains that Avraham's question had in it a lack of emunah that would somehow remain with his descendants, and which required the Egyptian exile to help remove it from their souls.

אמר רבי אבהו אמר רבי אלעזר מפני מה נענש אברהם אבינו ונשתעבדו בניו למצרים מאתים ועשר שנים ... שמואל אמר מפני שהפריז על מדותיו של הקדוש ברוך הוא שנאמר במה אדע כי אירשנה

Rabbi Abahu said in the name of Rabbi Eliezer, "Why was Avraham punished by having his descendants enslaved for

210 years in Egypt?" Shmuel answered, "Because Avraham doubted God's [credibility in fulfilling His promise – Rashi]. This is reflected in the verse: 'How will I know that I will inherit the Land?'"

Egypt was, as the Torah (Devarim 4:2) describes, a *kur habarzel*, an iron crucible, which has the power, explains Rashi, to purify gold and remove all dross that is found in it. So too, the Jewish people are like gold that needed a fiery cleansing to prepare them to receive the Torah. As Rabbi Yaakov Tzvi Mecklenburg explains in *HaKtav V'HaKabbalah*, God's true purpose behind the Egyptian slavery was to purify the Jewish people [of their baser characteristics], just as gold is purified in a crucible. He wanted to remove the base metals so that only pure gold would remain. To this end, many of those Jews who were unworthy died in the plague of darkness, and only those who remained were chosen to receive the Torah.

How would being a slave help purify us? What does being a slave and then being redeemed by God do for our emunah and the emunah of future generations? The *Sfat Emet*, Shemot, Parshat Va'eira, 5634, explains that the purpose of the Exodus from Egypt was that we should know that God brought us out from there:

כי כשאדם שוכח ומתגאה לומר כחי ועוצם ידי כו' אז צריכין להביאו במיצא ושיראה כי הכל מה' יתברך ויציאת מצרים היה הכנה לדורות.

For when a person forgets this and grows proud, saying, "My strength and abilities created all this success for me" (Devarim 8:17) he must be brought to a state of helplessness to show him that everything is from God." The entire exile was a preparation for future generations.

Sometimes you have to go to the

lowest low before you can reach and appreciate the highest high, explains, Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler, *Michtav M'Eliyahu*, Vol. I, p. 158:

וכן בכל פעם שהיה צורך לתת אפשרות לצדיק להתעלות במדרגה גדולה עליונה מאד, נזרק הצדיק אל סביבת השפלים היותר גרועים למען ילמד מהם את פחיתות הרע ויתאמץ בטוב עד מרום קצו.

Every time there is a need to give a righteous person the possibility of rising to a very high level, he is thrown into the worst environment so that he should learn that evil is futile, and thus strive to reach the highest limits.

Similarly, when Israel needed to prepare to accept the Torah, God did not send them to the Heavenly Yeshivah from where Moshe took the Torah, but the opposite: He sent them into bondage in Egypt, to be slaves to people who had sunk to the forty-ninth level of impurity, which is the most depraved and Godless level of physical existence.

This slavery brought the Jews to a state where “they cried out to God (to return to Him)” (Shemot 2:23). This teshuva, a return to God, which began at the polar extreme of physical enslavement and frustration, was the cause of their astonishing ascent to the spiritual level of receiving the Torah, which is comparable to the forty-ninth level of spiritual purity.

The third reason for the slavery comes from the Ba’alei HaTosfot (*Tosfot Shalem*, Shemot, Va’eira, p. 22). The purpose of slavery was to remove from the souls of the Jewish people any extreme desire for money and material success. At the outset, the Jews were offered payment for every brick they made, and because of their desire for money they made more than necessary. After this, the

Egyptians forced them to continue making bricks at the same rate as when they were being paid. This experience would remain with the Jewish people for generations to come. Whenever we become hyper focused on material success and make that our *raison d’être*, we remind ourselves of the futility of pursuing money for its own sake, and instead realize that only spiritual goals last into the next world.

In conclusion, Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler, *Michtav M'Eliyahu*, Vol. II, pp. 17–18, reminds us that everything that occurs to the Jewish people has an inner aspect to it. The exile in Egypt appears to a normal person as a physical slavery. But a spiritually-oriented person sees that it was a slavery of the soul, and that this was the real cause for physical slavery. In short, we were slaves to the yetzer harah, the evil inclination.

The Torah calls Egypt “Mitzrayim,” from the root *meitzar*, which means “constriction” and “distress.” It also signifies a boundary. The title of Egyptian kings — Pharaoh in Hebrew — is also significant. Its root meaning is “to lay open or untie,” implying that the goal of Egyptian impurity was to break down the defenses of our personality and lay it wide open to the inroads of the yetzer harah.

May this Pesach allow us as individuals and as a nation to build our emunah and free ourselves from all the parts of our personality that are keeping us in a slave mentality. In the merit of this, may we bring the final redemption of Mashiach and return to our rightful homeland Israel with the third and final Beit Hamikdash. Amen.



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Matzah – The Jewish Brand

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The idea of “brand identification” has become embedded in our culture and economy. A brand is a collection of experiences and associations connected with a particular company or entity. Whether it is the Nike swoosh, the Starbucks siren, or Disney’s silhouette of Mickey Mouse, effective branding involves the ability to create a simple yet profound association with a company’s products.

In 1916, one of the most successful matzah manufacturers was the Pacific Coast Biscuit Co. in Portland, Oregon. Each spring, the Jewish Tribune of Portland would carry the following advertisement:

“This trademark stands for supreme quality.” Resting just above that headline was a large, conspicuous swastika.

The advertisement continued: “Whenever you see the famous swastika sign just remember its significance to the fathers and its present meaning. Then, it meant brightness and prosperity — today it is the symbol of purity and quality. When buying matzahs, the swastika is your surety of purity.”

For five years the Pacific Coast Biscuit Co. sold matzahs sealed in a carton branded with a swastika.

Until Hitler unfurled his new red banner in 1921, the swastika was merely a symbol of good luck. Yet to our modern eye, the swastikas on matzah is an affront; as contradictory as a *hashgochah* on pork!

Ironically, it could be argued that the entire Pesach Seder is a study of contradictions:

- The four cups of wine we drink symbolize redemption, yet it is customary to use red wine and we spill out some of our wine when recalling the plagues inflicted on the Egyptians (*Divrei Yirmiyahu, derashot*) thereby diminishing our joy despite the fact

the punishment was justified.

- Maror recalls the bitterness of our suffering but serves as a condiment for the *korbon Pesach* (nowadays commemorated by koreich) celebrating our redemption.
- We dip our karpas and maror as a sign of aristocracy, but the karpas is dipped in salt water to evoke the tears shed by our enslaved ancestors. In contrast, the bitter maror is dipped in the sweet charoset.
- The apples in charoset recall the fertility of the Israelite women and the Divine protection afforded to their babies. Its texture reminds us of the mortar the Israelite slaves had to produce for bricks.
- Many have the custom of eating a hard-boiled egg at the Seder, representing both the *korbon chagigah*/Festival Offering and *aveilut*/mourning.
- We recline for matzah (redemption); sit up straight for maror (servitude); and then recline when we eat matzah and maror together (“*Zecher l’mikdash*,”



K'Hillel"), symbolic of redemption.

• After Birkat Hamazon, before we begin saying the second part of Hallel, the Shulchan Aruch (*Orach Chaim* no. 480) cites a custom to open a house door that leads outside as an expression of faith that tonight is the *leil shimurim* — a night of protection and ultimate redemption. Yet, at the same time, the Magen Avraham comments that if it is dangerous outside, then don't open the door since we shouldn't rely on a miracle!

And of course, there is matzah. Above anything else, matzah is the brand identity for Pesach. The Torah's name for Pesach is "*Chag HaMatzot*."

There are two passages in the Haggadah that deal explicitly with the reason for matzah.

The first is "*Ha Lachma Anya*," which identifies matzah as "the bread of affliction."

The second is "Rabban Gamliel...," who explains that "the dough of our fathers did not have time to become leavened" before they were redeemed; "for they had been driven out of Egypt and could not delay..."

These two references also reflect the contradictory themes of slavery and freedom.

The entire seder simultaneously commemorates both our exile and our redemption. How do we reconcile these opposites?

The answer, according to Rabbi, Dr. Abraham Twersky, ZT"l is that we do not need to reconcile all conflicts.

So much of modern psychology is focused on the resolution of contention. This, explains Rabbi Twersky, has resulted in people eschewing all conflicts. Living with ongoing stress has become

unthinkable. Rabbi Twersky argues that the loss of tolerance for conflict has had a profound impact on interpersonal relationships as well as on the intrapersonal psyche. For so many people, addictions, lack of job stability, the unprecedented divorce rate is, to a great measure, due to the inability to withstand conflict, and the desire to seek immediate relief from all frustrating situations.

The Pesach Seder is characterized by the coexistence of conflicting ideas. The concept of freedom espoused in Torah is quite distinct from our modern culture's, where the ultimate aim of freedom is the absence of all discord. *Cheirut* — the Torah's definition of freedom — includes the capacity to live meaningfully despite stress and the ability to grow in the face of conflict.

The *cheirut* of the Torah means the freedom and ability to live with stress and conflict, to eat the pesach, the matzah, and the maror. Without such conflict — *lo yatza yedei chovato* — we cannot fulfill our obligations of the Pesach Seder.

Rachel Yehudah, a leading authority on PTSD and resilience, studied a group of Holocaust survivors to determine how they handled life after barely escaping genocide. She found that resilience is not a constant, steady state. Despite the common belief that people are either resilient or vulnerable, strong or weak, healthy or sick, Yehudah maintains that people can experience these states simultaneously.

The Seder emphasizes an essential aspect of spirituality: the ability to live with conflict. Perhaps it is this very ability is essential to our continuity.

The swastika as a brand can come

and go. Indeed, Hitler's predicted "thousand-year Reich," with all of its hubris and devastation, lasted only 12 years and four months, yet the Jew and his humble matzah is at two millennia and counting!

The last Seder in the Warsaw ghetto occurred in April 1943. There, a young boy named Mordechai was sitting with his family around their table. The Seder was bereft of matzah, wine, or anything resembling a Yom Tov meal. They had no maror per se, but bitterness surrounded them. The ghetto was burning, the sound of marching soldiers, gunshots and bombs drowned out the cries of the resistance fighters trying bravely to withstand the Nazi onslaught. Mordechai, who had just finished reciting the *Mah Nishtanah*, said: "*Tati*, I have asked you the four questions but I still have one more question: *Tati*, will I be here tomorrow?"

Tears streamed down the father's face as he turned to his young son and answered: "My dearest Mottele. I cannot promise you that I will be here tomorrow or that you will be here tomorrow. But I swear to you that there will always be Jewish children who will ask the *Mah Nishtanah* and who will continue that which is holy to Klal Yisrael."

Matzah is paradigmatic of the Jewish experience as it transcends specific times and locales. Perhaps that is why it remains the most consistent brand in Jewish history. During the darkest and most foreboding times of Jewish history, matzah inspires us with a message of hope. Exhorting us to remember our humble origins, transcend our present fears and anticipate a glorious future.

So the Children will Ask: Karpas

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In framing the Pesach Seder, the Torah seems to try to capitalize on children's natural curiosity. On this night we want to transmit much to the children, and the Chumash lays out the method by structuring the education around questions and answers: "When your child asks..." Chazal expand on this in several ways at the Seder, prescribing that we do some activities that promote the child's curiosity in the first place. One example of this is the mitzva of karpas.

בִּי הֵיכִי דְלִיְהוּי הַיְכִירָא לְתִינוּקוֹת.

In order to be noticed by the children (to provoke them to ask about it).

Pesachim 114b

Although this is intended to get the children engaged in the proceedings, in some homes it has an opposite effect: the child might ask about karpas but get unsatisfying answers. The humorous response (and often the only answer that the parent has) is, "so that you should ask!" I suspect that this circular non-answer is the best parents can provide because over the years karpas has lost its original meaning, or has accumulated a *mélange* of contradictory meanings, and it is now covered in a fog of confusion and mystery.

Actually, it doesn't take much to unravel the mystery, to reveal a very understandable practice that in the past was not given much explanation because little explanation was required. However, let us see what karpas has turned into first.

The *Magen Avraham* writes¹ that the term "כרפס" is an anagram of "ס' פרך"

meaning (60 [myriad] laboring), which presumably suggests that the karpas is intended to represent the enslavement of the Jewish People in Mitzrayim. Since elementary school teachers love wordplay to enrich students' connections to unfamiliar terms, many teachers emphasize this comment of *Magen Avraham*, thus permanently associating slavery with the procedure.

Additionally, more sophisticated, creative explanations of the term karpas have been connected to the clothing of Yosef Hatzadik, which his brothers stripped from him when they plotted to kill him; this suggests that this step of the Seder is intended to acknowledge the roots of the subsequent enslavement.²

Many have the practice of dipping the karpas into saltwater.³ Saltwater has no apparent significance, so it would seem that if we combine the image presented by *Magen Avraham* with saltwater we can explain the saltwater as referring to the salty tears of the enslaved Jews.

We are told to be very careful to eat only a tiny quantity — one small bite only. Clearly this would seem to confirm the imagery of enslavement — lowest class, financial distress, insufficient food. The mystery of karpas seems to be now all consistent — it looks like we are dramatizing the terrible suffering of the Bnei Yisrael in Mitzrayim, from which Hashem saved us! This makes karpas almost the same as maror, which is explicitly described in the Hagada as having that meaning. For many, this is what karpas is all about.

The main difficulty is that there's nothing about eating a bit of tasty food that conveys the image of slavery; so if Chazal were trying to evoke that image, they chose a poor method of

doing so.⁴

We can see an alternative understanding of what Chazal intended in the practice of karpas by looking at it differently.

Although we refer to this procedure as karpas, the Talmud does not give it that name. It is not actually given any name. It is known simply as the "first dipping" (the second dipping is maror). The Talmud is clear that it involves vegetables and that we recite the appropriate bracha "Pri Ha'adama" on them. If no vegetables are available apart from maror, then use maror for this too. The word karpas makes its way into the hagadas during the Middle Ages, and the Maharil seems to be the first to refer to "כרפס" as the vegetable of choice.⁵ In Farsi (then as now) this is simply celery when pronounced "karafs." (Check this yourself on Google Translate if you can read Farsi script.) This has nothing to do with the word "karpas" found in Megillat Esther, which refers to a kind of cloth or fabric. Clearly, whatever Chazal intended for this step did not have anything to do with the word "karpas."

Since this procedure is called a "dipping" in the Talmud, we would expect that it would be clear what dip we are using. However, the Talmud does not specify. Some Rishonim infer that since no specific dip is prescribed, then the only option is the one used for the "second dipping" — namely, charoset (which is what we dip maror into).⁶ Others infer that since no specific dip is prescribed, then any convenient liquidy sauce is intended, such as vinegar.⁷ This second opinion is the common practice, although the range of suggestions is broadened to include saltwater as another option. Presumably, saltwater can function as vinegar for these purposes. As much

as tears seem to be salty, we are not expected to eat our vegetables in tears or with tears. The karpas is clearly intended to be a dip, but since Chazal didn't specify whether there is anything significant about what we dip into, and as mentioned above, our practice is not to use charoset for karpas, we should be able to choose whatever we please. Since we are talking about celery or similar green vegetable or vegetables, like a salad, what would we choose to dip the salad in? In our world, we use salad dressing — which is some variant of vinegar, oil, salt, or other spice. In other words, when the Rishonim suggested vinegar or salt water, they were suggesting simple dressing, not because the dressing had some ritual significance, but exactly the reverse — because it didn't have to be charoset, which does have ritual significance, so it could even be anything mundane, like vinegar (or even saltwater).

Why would Chazal prescribe eating a tiny quantity of vegetable? What does tininess represent? Unfortunately, this is a misunderstanding. Chazal never prescribed limiting the karpas at all. They intended that we eat as much as we want or as little as we want.⁸ If we eat the salad then Chazal expected that we would eat a sizeable amount; after all, it is an appetizer. Then why do we insist on eating no more than a tiny bit? This is because over the years a disagreement arose over the correct conclusion of karpas — must we recite a bracha achrona or not? On one hand, since we finished this course, then a bracha achrona is warranted. On the other hand, perhaps we need to keep the bracha rishona over karpas active until after eating maror,

which will not get its own bracha rishona.⁹ Chazal intended one or the other of these practices, so they intended a full course for karpas and either we would recite the bracha achrona or we wouldn't, depending on whom you ask. However, some Rishonim came to realize that by eating less than a kzayis we can bypass the question altogether and make everyone happy (except the participants at the Seder of course), because eating such a small quantity never necessitates reciting a bracha achrona but keeps the bracha rishona active.¹⁰ Keeping in mind that Chazal never intended to limit the karpas helps us acknowledge that perhaps we are intended to enjoy it.

It becomes clear that the karpas procedure is simply the appetizer course — the salad — and it is unusual because we normally wouldn't serve the appetizer right away, or before the matza, or as a separate course — depending on the prevailing practices. So why are we doing it now? Because it emphasizes the luxurious results of the geula. It is the same type of practice as reclining. Because whether we indulge in this luxury the rest of the year or not, tonight we do because tonight we put on a show of rising to extreme heights of status — as a stark contrast to the conditions of slavery where we began our peoplehood.

A practical consequence of reframing the karpas as a display of freedom, rather than enslavement, is whether to recline while eating karpas. The intention of Chazal is that we recline for the foods that refer to our freedom (such as matza and wine), but not for those that refer to our enslavement (such as maror). Which of these is karpas? According



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to this understanding, this is like the first course of the meal, or even more demonstrative of freedom than the regular food of the meal, so reclining would be warranted.¹¹

When a child asks about the karpas, the answer should be informative and especially relevant to the beginning of the Seder. Since there are two overarching themes we highlight during the Seder — slavery and freedom — our answer will reflect one of those. If we take the position that karpas is like maror, then the answer is something like we were slaves in Mitzrayim,¹² but it isn't so clear why eating celery or vegetables represents that. However, if karpas is to express freedom, then we might say one of the few answers that the Bach provides.¹³ Perhaps we say: we have a first course just like the royalty do, because Hashem took us out of Mitzrayim and raised us to this level of status... or, we say this is so we don't get too hungry because we have a lot to talk about because tonight is a big deal... or, he quotes from the Maharal that appetizers are common, so the children won't necessarily be puzzled by it — but after having this salad course, the salad course after hamotzi (which is maror) will be the strange thing, so when we have the provisions for that already on the table it makes the child wonder what's going on.

Looking at what the Talmud describes for the early part of the Seder, we find the following picture: After Kiddush, we serve the vegetables in dip (karpas), even before the meal proper begins, to confuse the children and demonstrate that this night is different from ordinary nights. In case their curiosity is not sufficiently aroused, pour another kiddush cup of wine,¹⁴ and remove the food before eating the meal!¹⁵ All of this is expected to

inspire the children to ask about the weirdness,¹⁶ and if all else fails, the Hagada explicitly spells out the Mah Nishtana to bring out all of this.

Endnotes

1. *Shulchan Aruch* 473:4, quoting the Maharil. Actually, the Maharil takes this wordplay seriously and defends his father's practice of taking leek (כרתי) when celery was unavailable on the grounds that it is also known as a type of כרפס, according to one interpretation of Rashi, *Succa* 39b.
2. Rabbeinu Manoach on Rambam, *Chametz Umatza* 8:2; See also *Torah To-Go*, Pesach 2016, and 2018 (two essays).
3. This is mentioned as an option in various sources, mostly Ashkenazi ones.
4. Still, it seems that the Maharil did view karpas this way, and even finds another allusion to the enslavement in the karpas by noting that it resembles the straw to make bricks if it grows fully, although he does not mention tears or poverty.
5. In *Seder R. Amram Gaon* it appears fourth in a list of suggested vegetables; in R. Yosef Tuv Elem's *piyyut* it appears second; in *Machzor Vitri* it is third out of five, but the label "karpas" is used for this step in the seder.
6. Rambam, *Chametz Umatza* 8:2; *Machzor Vitri* 69.
7. Rashbam, Tosfos 114a; Also *Shulchan Aruch* 473:6.
8. However, the Rambam does insist on at least a minimum of *kzait* like the other required foods.
9. See *Beis Yosef* 473, who infers this dispute from a dispute regarding whether the bracha over karpas covers the maror.
10. This is the policy described in the *Shulchan Aruch*.
11. *Kaf Hachaim* addresses this question and cites the various authorities on both sides of the issue. This depends on a bigger question actually — is reclining warranted when eating the meal? If not, then karpas likewise would not necessarily need reclining; if yes, then reclining for karpas would depend on how to view it. The *Shulchan Aruch* (472:7) recommends reclining for the whole meal.
12. This is what the *Pri Chadash* quotes from the *Rokeach*.

13. *Siman* 473 (See *Torah To-Go*, Pesach 2008)

14. *Shulchan Aruch* 473:7.

15. *Pesachim* 115b.

16. See Tosfos there who remarks that we are trying to get the children to ask about all the unusual things that happen at the Seder — the few contrived things that we do only serving to spark their questioning.

What is Hagada?

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The Rambam writes:

כל מי שלא אמר שלשה דברים אלו בלי חמשה עשר לא יצא ידי חובתו ואלו הן. פסח מצה ומרור. פסח על שום שפסח המקום על בתי אבותינו במצרים שנאמר ואמרתם זבח פסח הוא לה' וגו'. מרור על שום שמרור המצריים את חיי אבותינו במצרים. מצה על שם שנגאלו. ודברים האלו כולן נקראין הגדה. *Anyone who has not said these three things on the night of the 15th has not fulfilled his obligation, and these are: the Pesach sacrifice, matza and maror. The Pesach to commemorate that the Omnipresent passed over the homes of our ancestors in Egypt, as it is stated (Exodus 12:27): "And you shall say: 'It is the Passover sacrifice to the Lord ...'" The maror to commemorate that the Egyptians embittered the lives of our ancestors in Egypt. The matza to commemorate that we were redeemed. These [three] things are all called "Hagada."*

Hilchos Chametz Umatzah 7:5

What exactly is the Hagada?

Colloquially, it begins with Kiddush and ends with Chad Gadya. The Rambam seems to limit it to a brief portion, attributed in the Mishna (*Pesachim* 116a-b) to Rabban Gamliel. The earlier Mishna (116a), which refers to the bulk of Magid, from *Avadim Hayinu* until *Rabban Gamliel Omer*, seems to be excluded.

Perhaps the answer lies in the source of the mitzva of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim*. The Torah states:

וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל הָעָם זְכוֹר אֶת הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה
אֲשֶׁר יִצְאֶתֶם מִמִּצְרַיִם מִבֵּית עַבְדִּים כִּי בָחֻק
יָד הוֹצִיאָהּ אֶתְכֶם מִזֶּה וְלֹא יֵאָכֵל חֶמֶץ ...
שִׁבְעַת יָמִים תֹּאכַל מִצַּת וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי חֹג
לָהּ. מִצּוֹת יֵאָכֵל אֶת שִׁבְעַת הַיָּמִים וְלֹא יִרְאֶה
לָךְ חֶמֶץ וְלֹא יִרְאֶה לָךְ שָׂאֵר בְּכֹל גְּבֻלְךָ וְהִגַּדְתָּ
לְבִנְךָ בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא לֵאמֹר בְּעִבּוֹר זֶה עָשָׂה ה' לִי
בְּצֵאתִי מִמִּצְרַיִם.

*And Moses said to the people,
“Remember this day, on which you went
free from Egypt, the house of bondage,
how the Lord freed you from it with a
mighty hand: no leavened bread shall
be eaten. ... Seven days you shall eat
unleavened bread, and on the seventh
day there shall be a festival of the Lord.
Throughout the seven days unleavened
bread shall be eaten; no leavened bread
shall be found with you, and no leaven
shall be found in all your territory. And
you shall tell your son on that day, ‘It
is because of what the Lord did for me
when I went free from Egypt.’”*

Shmos 13:3–8

The Rambam writes:

מצות עשה של תורה לספר בנסים ונפלאות
שנעשו לאבותינו במצרים בליל חמשה עשר
בניסן שנאמר זכור את היום הזה אשר יצאתם
ממצרים ... ומנין שבליל חמשה עשר תלמוד
לומר והגדת לבנך ביום ההוא לאמר בעבור זה
בשעה שיש מצה ומרור מונחים לפניך.

*There is a positive commandment to
discuss the miracles and wonders that
our forefathers experienced in Egypt on
the night of the 15th of Nisan as it states:
“Remember this day, on which you went
free from Egypt.” (13:3) ... From where
[is it derived that the mitzva occurs] on
the 15th night? From the verse (13:8)
“You shall tell you son on that day,
‘Because of this,’” at the time that matza
and maror are placed before you.*

Hilchos Chametz Umatzah 7:1

There are apparently two parts to this mitzva. One is an independent mitzva of *zechira* (based on *Shmos* 13:3), which is mentioned in the Torah before the mention of matza and unrelated to it. The second is “*hagada*,” (based on the word *v’higadeta*) found in the Torah (13:8) after it mentions matza. Hagada is connected to matza. The first Mishna (116a), which includes Magid until Rabban Gamliel, is *zechira*. The second Mishna, Rabban Gamliel’s statement, is “*hagada*.”

This thesis can be proven from the Rambam’s Seder. The word “*hagada*” is found in the Gemara (115b) — we remove the table from the one who says the “*hagada*,” so that the children will ask questions. The Rambam (8:2) places the removal of the table before Ma Nishtana, a practice we fulfill by covering the matza.

Every printed Hagada instructs us to uncover the matzos before *Avadim Hayinu*. After all, this is “*mas’chil big’nus*” (we start with the Jewish people’s disgrace), the beginning of Magid referred to in the first Mishna (116a). However, the Rambam (8:4) postpones the return of the table and its matzos until just before *Rabban Gamliel Omer*. Why is this so? Are we not told that matza is “*lechem oni* — *she’onin alav devarim harbeh*,” the “bread” upon which we recite many words (115b)?

The answer is that only the second Mishna, the description of (korban) Pesach, matza, and maror and their reasons, the three things that Rabban Gamliel describes as indispensable, are connected to the matza, and therefore must be recited in its presence. The first Mishna, the bulk of Magid, is *zechira*, the independent mitzva of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim* unrelated to matza and fulfilled even in its absence.

A remarkable custom can be a practical outgrowth of this dichotomy. The Rama (O.C. 530:1) records a custom to recite the Hagada on Shabbos Hagadol from *Avadim Hayinu* until “*l’chaper al kol avonoseinu*.” The *Bi’ur Halacha* cites the Vilna Gaon who disputes this custom based on the words of the Hagada “*yachol mib’od yom ...*” The Hagada should not be recited on erev Pesach, but only after nightfall when matza and maror are placed before you. It certainly should not be recited on Shabbos Hagadol.

The Rama could answer simply that while there is certainly no obligation, it is still an appropriate custom. However, another question can yield a deeper answer. Why do we stop at “*l’chaper al kol avonoseinu*”? Why don’t we complete Magid on Shabbos Hagadol?

What words follow “*l’chaper al kol avonoseinu*”? *Rabban Gamliel Omer!* The Rama anticipated the Vilna Gaon’s objection and agrees that the part of Magid that is connected to matza and maror is recited only on Seder night. Only the first and major section of Magid, recorded in the first Mishna (116a), may be said earlier. It begins with *Avadim Hayinu* and ends with “*l’chaper al kol avonoseinu*,” the words just before the second Mishna (116b): *Rabban Gamliel Omer*.

The presence and lifting of matza and maror are linked to *v’higadeta l’vincha*. They are visual aids for the momentous annual opportunity and responsibility of transmitting the *mesora* to the next generation. Many of us were unable to fulfill this mitzva last year. Our shuls were shut and visiting parents and grandparents was prohibited due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We hope to safely resume this critical mitzva this year and we fervently pray: Next year in Yerushalayim.