



Beit Midrash Zichron Dov

PESACH SEDER COMPANION

5782 • Volume 8





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To create a communal atmosphere of learning, engaging and inspiring the Jewish community of the Greater Toronto Area. We apply our Torah heritage to the daily lives of modern Jews in our home Beit Midrash at Yeshivat Or Chaim and in the synagogues, campuses and workplaces of the GTA.

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in memory of Moshe ben Shlomo Reines z"l
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**Dedicated l'ilui nishmat a wonderful husband, father, grandfather, great-grandfather
Aharon Mechel ben Chaim Meir z"l
A man who epitomized the values of Torah uMadda.
With love, honour and respect,
Miriam Frankel, Mark and Judy and family, Ralph and Gitty and family, Esty and family**

**In memory of our dear parents and grandparents,
Alfred and Erika Zauderer and Andor Roberts z"l
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l'ilui nishmas Tobey's brother, Fivie; a great brother I was very lucky to have;
and in honour of Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner
for the thousands of shiurim he has given and made available.
May the Ribono Shel Olam give you continued wisdom, strength and health.**

**Dedicated in honour of our grandchildren נ"י
Ella Breindel, Shimon Aryeh, Sarah Leah, Avi, Binyamin Shimon,
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In loving memory of our dear wife and mother,
נ"ע Maxine Bessin
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in honour of Rabbi Torczyner and everyone at Beit Midrash Zichron Dov
on the wonderful programming they provide to the community

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Dedicated in memory and honour of Ellen Joy Rabinowitz z"l,
whose commitment to the Passover holiday and its lessons for her cherished children are a blessing

Dedicated in memory of Ilana and Mordechai Ronen and Helene and Eli Strassler z"l
who made the Passover journey in our time from the deepest depths to a glorious redemption

Dedicated by Steve and Leah Roth
in honour of the memory of
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in memory of our parents
Naftali Ben Mendel z"l and Chaya Dabrusa bat Shneur Zalman z"l

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in loving memory of Chana Raisa bat Tzvi z"l

Dedicated in memory of
our beloved mother & grandmother, Rosalie Wenner z"l
אסתר רחל בת צבי הערשל וזלאטא ז"ל
Yaffa & David Wenner & Family

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We are grateful to Daniel Safran for his outstanding graphic design; thank you!

שִׁבְעָה: KADESH

Three Tips for a Meaningful Seder



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Chag Sameach! I would like to offer three short tips to enrich our Seder. Each tip is based upon an insight from our Sages, and is meant to bring some different perspectives to our wonderful Seder.

Feel the Holiness

In the very essence of the identity of every Jew are two special nights that seem very different from each other, but on the other hand have so much in common: The Seder and *Kol Nidrei*. On first glance, these two nights seem opposite: one is about family and gathering, while the other is about the individual and introspection; one is about eating, drinking and celebrating, while the other is about prayers, meditation and fasting; one is about freedom, the other is about responsibility.

Rabbi Joseph Dov Soloveitchik (*Festival of Freedom*, pg. 3) suggests that the combination of these two nights can open a window for enriching our Jewish experience of *kedushah* (holiness). He writes, “The common experience on both nights is man’s encounter with G-d. On the night of the exodus, the people met G-d, had rendezvous with Him, and made His acquaintance for the first time. On Yom Kippur night, man gets very close to his Father in heaven, again meets Him, talks to Him, cries before and implores Him. The grandeur and singularity of these two nights lie in the G-d-man confrontation.” Rabbi Soloveitchik invites us to bring some of the essence of Yom Kippur into our Seder, and through that, we can open the gate before our emotions and feel the holiness of the Seder as intensely as possible.

Feel the Home

Pesach is a home-based festival - all of the family gathers together around the Seder table, singing, eating, asking questions and telling stories. Not only is *our* Seder all about getting together, but we know that the original Korban Pesach was eaten in groups. The Talmud (Pesachim 61a) learns this rule from the verse, “But if the household is too small for a lamb, let him share one with a neighbor who dwells nearby, in proportion to the number of persons: you shall contribute for the lamb according to what each household will eat.” (Shemot 12:4, JPS tr.)

In Israel, many families do not start the Seder sitting around a table, but rather they start it in the living room! The family gathers together on couches, sofas, and carpets, turning the official annual ceremony into something a little bit more casual and cozy. This is another great way to enrich our Seder experience, and to give the social element the place it deserves!

Feel the Nachat

We all know the feeling of “the Friday rush”. It doesn’t matter how long before the Shabbat we start preparing for it, but somehow we always end up exhausted and fatigued. This is true even more for Pesach - after so much preparation, cleaning, shopping, cooking, setting - it can be very difficult to feel *nachat* (calm) when the Seder begins.

Rabbi Tzaddok HaKohen of Lublin writes that there is something we can all learn from rushing into something: “The beginning of a person’s entrance into the service of G-d must be in haste, as we find in Pesach in Egypt that it was eaten in haste.” (*Tzidkat HaTzaddik* 1:1) Reb Tzaddok teaches that just like the Korban Pesach of Egypt was eaten in a rush (Shemot 12:34), so our service of Hashem should start in a rush! He continues to explain that when someone feels he has a spontaneous moment when he desires to draw closer to G-d, he should hurry up and catch that moment. “One must rush to that moment and hurry to escape from [the desires of this world], maybe it will be possible.”

Reb Tzaddok then continues to say that just like the Pesach of subsequent generations is eaten calmly, so too the rushing person should slow down after grabbing that spontaneous moment, and transition into a mood of calm in his service of Hashem: “And then he shall go along patiently, slowly, like Pesach of subsequent generations.” Reb Tzaddok teaches us that we should embrace the rush and the preparations, but we should not give up on the *nachat* that comes afterward. Here we are, after some very busy weeks, and it’s time for us to calm down, lean in our chairs (or sofas!) like royalty, and rejoice in our Jewish identity as a free nation.

L’Chaim!

Did you know?

We have held five Sunday morning *Midreshet Yom Rishon* programs for women this year!



ורחץ: **U'RCHATZ**

Why Do We Wash Before Karpas?

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Sgan Rosh Beit Midrash 5772-5774, Community Maggid Shiur 5775-5776

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Among the peculiar things that we do at the Seder, one flies under the radar, since it is not included in the *Mah Nishtanah*. This is the fact that we wash our hands twice at the Seder.

To some, this is not strange at all, because they wash their hands before eating wet produce all year. According to the Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 158:4), one must wash hands without a berachah whenever eating wet produce. The *Mishneh Berurah* (158:20) explains this practice. He writes that some early commentaries believed that the requirement to wash hands when eating wet produce applies only during the times of the Beit HaMikdash, due to a technical concern regarding ritual impurity (the precise halachic calculation is beyond the scope of this article).

Authorities debate whether this applies today. Some argue that since we are all ritually impure, we are not obligated to wash our hands in this instance. Others believe that Chazal's decree to wash hands for wet produce was permanent, regardless of the Beit HaMikdash's existence. Therefore, the Shulchan Aruch made a compromise – one should wash one's hands, but not recite a berachah, since such a berachah may be considered in a berachah in vain. Still, the *Mishneh Berurah* notes that many people rely on the more lenient opinion all year, and never wash their hands before eating wet produce. Similar statements are recorded by the *Aruch HaShulchan* (Orach Chaim 158:4) and *Chayei Adam* (36:4).

For those who do not wash all year, the question posed in the beginning of our article stands tall – why should we wash our hands before eating wet karpas, if we don't do this for the rest of the year?

A few answers have been put forth over the years, each with their own challenges:

- Rabbi David Segal in his *Turei Zahav* commentary to Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 473:6), saw this washing on Pesach as an “open reproof” to those who are not careful throughout the year. However, as we have seen, the more lenient approach is backed by many halachic decisors. It seems unlikely that we perform Urchatz as a form of self-condemnation!
- Rabbi Yaakov Reischer (*Chok Yaakov* to Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 473:28) considered washing on Pesach as another effort to raise the curiosity of the children and encourage them to ask why this night is different from all other nights. However, this explanation is also insufficient, as it doesn't give us an answer for the questioning child!
- Rabbi Naftali Zvi Yehudah Berlin, in the introduction to his *Haggadah Imrei Shefer*, sees washing before karpas as part of a much larger trend during the Seder – a conscious attempt to reconstruct the Seder as it had been in Jerusalem when the Beit HaMikdash still stood. However, this is also difficult; the Seder seems to point us more in the direction of the first Seder in Goshen, Egypt, and not our experiences in Jerusalem, Israel! The Seder is a recreation of our experience during the night in which G-d showed His strong hand while we stayed in our homes.

Perhaps this final point from *Imrei Shefer* can lead us to propose an additional explanation for why we wash. As emphasized by the Talmud (Pesachim 96a), there is a unique character to the korban pesach we sacrificed in Egypt – it is the only korban whose blood is not sprinkled on the altar. Instead, says Rav Yosef, our doorways, upon which the lamb's blood was applied, served as the altar. The simple conclusion: on the revered night of the first Pesach, every Israeli home served as a Temple. That is why the commandment to eat the korban pesach with matzah and not with chametz came even before the actual event of leaving Egypt (Shemot 12:15); just as chametz is not allowed in the Temple all year round (Vayikra 2:11-12), so it was not allowed at that first Seder.

Taking all of this into account, we can suggest that washing before eating karpas does not come specifically from the laws of washing before eating wet fruits and vegetables, but it is in fact derived from the practices of the Beit HaMikdash. The Torah tells us (Shemot 30:21) that before the kohen serves in the Beit HaMikdash, he must wash his hands. So too we, before beginning the Seder, wash our hands. This can also explain the custom some have that only the leader of the Seder washes his hands, even though the Karpas is eaten by all. (See *Maharil*, Haggadah, 13) This is because for the assembled, the leader represents the “Kohen” for the night.

This year, then, when you wash your hands – see it not only as an attempt to eliminate impurity, which is anyway unavoidable. See it also as a way to dedicate and sanctify your hands, for the holy work of the Seder.

כרפס: KARPAS Look Inward First



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The Seder contains four major mitzvot: telling the story of our redemption, eating matzah, eating marror and drinking four cups of wine. Over the course of the Seder we will perform each of these mitzvot. But immediately after Kiddush, before we have started to tell the story of the Exodus, we eat karpas. Why do we need karpas? Why do we start the night with something that isn't a mitzvah at all? What is the message behind this?

Some suggest that the spelling of the word “Karpas” alludes to the 600,000 Israelites who were enslaved in Egypt with hard labour. Read in reverse in Hebrew, the word Karpas spells out the letter *samech* and the word *perech*, “sixty hard labour”. However, this explanation seems to be a bit strange, since we eat enough things at the seder to remind us of our enslavement, such as the bitter herbs and charoset. Why add another one?

Rabbi Isaac Berenstain offers a different explanation. He presents a passage in the Talmud (Pesachim 65b) which describes Pesach in the time of the Temple, when the People of Israel would go home from the Temple after having slaughtered their sacrifice:

It was taught in a *baraita*: Each and every one would place his Paschal lamb in its hide and cast it over his shoulder behind him and carry it home that way. Rav Ilish said: They carried it home in the manner of Arab merchants. (William Davidson edition)

Rabbi Berenstain quotes Rabbi Shlomo Kluger, asking, “Why do we care about the manner they carried the lamb home? This isn't any kind of mitzvah, so why is it important to hold it like Arab merchants?” Rabbi Kluger answers that our Sages wanted to teach us a lesson, that we should remind ourselves of Arab merchants before we start our Seder. Why? Because Yosef's brothers sold him to Arab merchants who brought him to Egypt, which ultimately caused all of us to go to Egypt. Rav Kluger explains that on Pesach we need to remind ourselves that the Egyptians weren't the only ones to hurt us; we also hurt each other.

Rabbi Berenstain explains that this is the message of the karpas, as well. When the Torah describes Yosef's famous coat, Rashi comments that it was made from the colours of *chur*, **karpas** and *techelet*. Rabbeinu Manoach states explicitly that we eat karpas to remember Yosef's coat and to remember that the brothers' reaction to it was the beginning of our troubles. Before we blame others for our difficulties and all the bad things they did to us, we must educate ourselves that sometimes we need to fix things within ourselves to solve our problems.

Rabbi Asher Weiss similarly suggests that the key to personal growth is a willingness to accept responsibility and not blame others. He notes a story in the Talmud (Gittin 58a):

There was **an incident involving Rabbi Yehoshua ben Hananya who once went to the great city of Rome, where they said to him: There is a child in prison with beautiful eyes and an attractive appearance, and his curly hair is arranged in locks. Rabbi Yehoshua went and stood by the entrance to the prison. He said, as if speaking to himself: “Who gave Jacob for a spoil, and Israel to the robbers?”** (Isaiah 42:24). **That child answered by reciting** the continuation of the verse: **“Did not the Lord, He against Whom we have sinned, and in Whose ways they would not walk, neither were they obedient to His law?”**

Rabbi Yehoshua **said: I am certain that, if given the opportunity, this child will issue halakhic rulings in Israel, as he is already exceedingly wise. He said: I take an oath by the Temple service that I will not move from here until I ransom him for whatever sum of money they set for him. They said that he did not move from there until he ransomed him for a great sum of money, and not even a few days had passed when this child then issued halakhic rulings in Israel. And who was this child?** This was **Rabbi Yishmael ben Elisha.** (William Davidson edition)

Rabbi Weiss asks: What did the child say that made such a powerful impression on Rabbi Yehoshua? He explains that Rabbi Yehoshua was impressed by the fact that when he asked who was to blame for Israel's terrible situation, the child didn't point to Rome or other enemies. Instead, he said, “We have sinned.” Our troubles come from us.

Early in the Seder, before we start re-telling our terrible experience in Egypt and how badly they treated us, let us first consider how we can improve our own relationships with each other and with Hashem.

Did you know?

Our Ted & George Manson University Student Program has continued daily during COVID.



יִחַץ: YACHATZ The Most Meaningful Break

**Rabbi Dr. Seth Grauer, rabbigrauer@bastoronto.org
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For many years, I taught a class at Ulpana in Hilchot Shabbat. Among other topics, we spent time learning about the *mitzvot aseh* (commandments) of the day, including the custom of having *lechem mishneh* (two loaves of bread) at the start of our Shabbat meals.

Each time I taught this, the discussion almost inevitably turned to Pesach. I asked my students, "Does anyone know why we have three matzot at the Seder?" The first answer was almost always, "To represent Kohen, Levi and Yisrael," but someone eventually remembered that when we break the middle matzah, we need to be left with two whole matzot, to have *lechem mishneh*. This is the accepted custom; we break a third matzah at Yachatz to help remind us of how poor slaves eat.

Having said that, the Rambam (Hilchot Chametz U'Matzah 8:6) says that after we wash *netilat yadayim* we take only two matzot, break one in half, hold the half with the whole, and make the blessing of *hamotzi*. It is interesting to note that this happens long after we break a matzah at Yachatz in our own Haggadah. More fascinating however, is that the Rambam encourages us to make *hamotzi* without *lechem mishneh* - without having two whole loaves. I have never seen this, but I am told there are Yemenite communities who continue to follow this Rambam today.

Why does the Rambam hold that we only use two matzot, and break one in half? What is his thinking here?

To answer this, we should briefly review the origin of our obligation for *lechem mishneh* in general. Why are we obligated to have two whole loaves in the first place? On Shabbat, we take two whole loaves to commemorate the double portion of manna that fell on Fridays in the desert to provide sustenance for Bnei Yisrael for two days. On Yom Tov, the manna likewise did not fall; thus a double portion was provided the day before. (Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 529:1, *Mishneh Berurah* 529:10) In fact, every meal we eat on Shabbat and Yom Tov, even extra ones, should preferably begin with two whole loaves. (Rama Orach Chaim 291:4)

Based on this, it is of course very logical that we should have three matzot at the Seder. We need to break one matzah, and yet we also need to have two whole matzot – hence the need for three. So for the Rambam, why is this night different from all other nights?

Perhaps it is because the matzot represent *lechem oni*, a poor man's bread, and this cannot be accomplished with two whole loaves. What is needed is a piece, a slice, a crumb... similar to a poor man – whatever they can get. In keeping with the Rambam's instruction "to show oneself as if he himself left Egypt," perhaps eating a symbolic piece of "poor man's bread" is the proper and fitting way to truly remember and viscerally feel the slavery in Egypt. The Rambam emphasizes that we are obligated not just to see ourselves as if we left Egypt, but to demonstrate that. (Hilchot Chametz uMatzah 7:6)

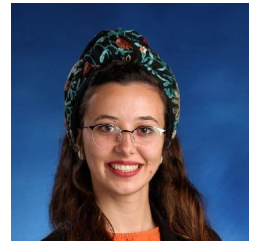
To take this idea further: perhaps we cannot have two whole matzot on Pesach because when we are whole on the night of Pesach, we are actually missing something of critical importance.

The Kotzker Rebbe is famously quoted as saying: "There is nothing more complete than a broken heart." I believe that the Kotzker was likely trying to convey that when we are broken, we open ourselves up to allow Hashem to enter our hearts (and minds). And when that happens, our lives get all that closer to being complete. Everyone experiences a broken heart at some point in their life. That broken heart, while certainly painful in the moment, allows an individual to introspect, meditate and try and connect spiritually with HaKadosh Baruch Hu. The connection that comes from a broken heart helps us grow in immeasurable ways.

If we want to experience slavery on Pesach night and to truly do our best to go from slavery to freedom, we need to experience a life that is lacking. Perhaps the Rambam believes it is not enough to simply take away bread and replace it with matzah; our matzah must also be broken. Not an extra piece that we wouldn't have on a typical night of Yom Tov, but the whole and complete loaves we would always have on Yom Tov – even those should be broken.

Perhaps the Rambam is hoping that by experiencing this broken matzah as an integral part of our regular two-loaf requirement, we will feel a little more broken. Because if we feel broken in even a small way, we will open ourselves up, allow Hashem in and through that – move further along the path to becoming complete. Chag Kasher V'Sameach!

MAH NISHTANAH: מה נשתנה Why Now?



**Mrs. Prielle Rakovsky, prakovsky@bastoronto.org
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Mah nishtanah begins the lion's share of the Haggadah, the *Maggid*, which aims to fulfill the Torah's mitzvah of "You shall tell your child." (Shemot 13:8) But *Mah nishtanah* is odd; the questions are not really spontaneous, expressing a need to explain the difference between the night of the Seder and other nights. We are even halachically required to ask these questions to ourselves if there is no one to ask us the question! (Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 473:7) What is the meaning of a non-spontaneous question? And why ask a question of yourself?

In truth, questions can be rhetorical; they may be declarative statements presented in the guise of questions. But it is hard to define the four questions of the Seder as rhetorical; the Torah describes a give-and-take between participants (Shemot 13:14-16, Devarim 6:20-25). So why must we ask about the differences of this night?

To explore this, let us present a broader question: why don't we ask *Mah nishtanah* on Succot or Shavuot? The questions certainly apply to our other celebrations – "For on all other nights we eat in the house, and tonight we eat in the succah!" Addressing this point will open a window into the overall meaning of Pesach, and will also explain the lack of spontaneity in our Seder questions.

The story of our emergence from Egypt on the original Pesach is a central ingredient in our day-to-day identity; indeed, we are commanded to remember that experience daily, "Remember this day when you emerged from Egypt." (Shemot 20:8) But on Pesach, this mitzvah of commemoration is invested with extra force, as we **tell** it rather than merely **remember** it. [See Mishneh Torah, Laws of Chametz and Matzah 7:1, which emphasizes the story-telling.] The anniversary of our emergence from Egypt is designated as the most fundamental holiday marking our national existence – and this is time for the most fundamental questions.

Four times, the Torah describes telling our children about our emergence from Egypt. One of those occasions, Devarim 6:20, describes the child asking the parent an existential question, "What are the testimonies, laws and statutes which Hashem our G-d commanded you?" This question is not about a particular event or ritual; it is all-encompassing and fundamental.

The parent's response is likewise all-encompassing and fundamental, extending beyond laws and statutes into a journey through time. "We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, and G-d brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand, etc." (ibid. 6:21) Like the child's question, the parent's answer is about **identity**. This is the point of Pesach – clarification of our identity as a Jewish nation freed from slavery. It is a holiday of self-definition. Pesach is unlike Succot, which celebrates a miracle with joy, and unlike the Shavuot celebration of the harvest and the presentation of the Torah. And so we ask on Pesach: who are we? Why do we do what we do? What is important to us? What did Hashem do for us? On the night of the Seder we return to our roots and clarify our identity, as one can do only when one is free, at liberty to take time for self-contemplation.

This clarification of our identity comes through questions. The main figures in Tanach ask many questions which first seem to be limited and pragmatic, but which harbor within them existential exploration. Kayin asks, "Am I my brother's guardian?" (Bereishit 4:9) Moshe asks, "Who am I, to go Pharaoh and bring Israel out of Egypt?" (Shemot 3:11) Iyov asks of G-d, "What is Man, that You elevate him?" (Iyov 7:17) Questions are the most fundamental way to clarify identity – personal and collective, mundane and sacred.

If so, it is not surprising that Pesach – the holiday of identity and freedom – is nourished by questions, specifically. It is no wonder that this holiday highlights our ability to ask ourselves: why is this night different from any other night? And this is why there is room for non-spontaneous questions, and questions that we ask ourselves. The focus is identity. There are no bounds to the depth of the question and its answer. What is different? I am different.

Along the same lines, Rabbi Eliezer Melamed writes regarding the questions of the Seder: "Perhaps it can be said that this question, 'Ma nishtana?' embodies a bigger and deeper question about the Jewish people: Why are we different from all other nations – in our faith, in our mitzvot, in our suffering, in our spiritual achievements, in our exile, and in our redemption? There is no complete answer to this question. Only by contemplating the Exodus from Egypt and the election of Israel can we understand that this is a divine matter; we are capable of understanding part of it, but we will never understand it all. This same question spurs us on, toward infinitely deeper and more sublime understanding." (*Peninei Halakha: Pesach* 15:3, Lichtman tr.)

We know the stereotype: one Jew asks another a question, and the other responds with an additional question. But it's true; we ask and ask further to clarify, continuously. May we merit to see in the questions this evening, and not only this evening, an opportunity for deep clarification of our identity as Jews, servants of Hashem, and free people. Chag sameach!

Did you know?

We offer multiple weekly *chaburot* for Bnei Akiva Schools students!



עבדים היינו: WE WERE SLAVES Still Enslaved to Pharaoh?

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Empires rise and fall. Egypt, Babylon, Greece, and Rome were each the world's leading superpowers for several centuries; yet, due to various factors, they all fell. It is indeed an extraordinary miracle that the Jewish people continue to survive, even as mighty empires have declined and fallen.

On Pesach, we recount and relive our emancipation from enslavement to an Egyptian tyrant. Despite the blow Pharaoh and his people experienced during the Exodus, the Egyptian dynasty continued to exist. Yet, by the fourth century BCE, the Egyptian empire was no more (*World History Encyclopedia*, "Late Period of Ancient Egypt"). In light of the fact that the Egyptian empire has been gone for more than two millennia, a statement within the *Avadim hayinu* paragraph is perplexing. When we explain that we were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt and that G-d took us out, we highlight that, "If the Holy One, blessed be He, had not taken our ancestors from Egypt, we and our children and our children's children would [still] be enslaved to Pharaoh in Egypt." Is it true that had G-d not taken us out when He did, we would *still* be enslaved to Pharaoh in Egypt? Today, there is no Pharaoh; there is no great Egyptian empire!

It is obvious that this statement cannot be understood at face value. If we do not mean these words literally, what *do* we mean?

Commentators to the Haggadah have offered several interpretations:

Up to Four Generations

Rabbi Pinchas Horowitz contended that we are not declaring that *our* children and future descendants would still be enslaved to Pharaoh in Egypt. Rather, had the generation of the Exodus not possessed the strong faith for which they merited redemption, their children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren would have been punished for their deficient faith, based on the concept that G-d visits the "iniquity of parents upon children and children's children, upon the third and fourth generations." (Shemot 34:7) [The Talmud (Sanhedrin 27b) clarifies that this does not mean that the descendants will be punished even if they are innocent; rather, if they commit the same crimes as their ancestors, they will be punished with additional severity.] (*Peirush Hafla'ah al Haggadah shel Pesach*)

Fate of Egypt

Rabbi Yom Tov ben Avraham Assevilli (Ritva) similarly viewed this statement as relating to the merit of the generation redeemed from Egypt, with a slightly different interpretation: Had the generation of the Exodus not merited redemption, their descendants would have become assimilated with the Egyptians over time, consequently losing their identity as Bnei Yisrael; their lasting impact would be as insignificant as that of a slave. (*Biur haRitva al Haggadah shel Pesach*)

Slave Mentality

Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik explained our statement as follows: Had G-d not inspired the generation of the Exodus to realize their inherent value and lofty purpose in the world, they would have retained the mentality of slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt. They, and by extension we, would continue to be unable to view life beyond the present, believing that we are incapable of making decisions that can impact ourselves and the world in significant ways. Rabbi Soloveitchik notes that, unfortunately, "this slave mentality can be found even among politically emancipated people. The scouts sent by Moses to survey the Holy Land summed up their dispiritedness in the words: "And we were in our own sight as grasshoppers" (Num. 13:13)" (*Reflections of the Rav*, pp. 198-99). Consequently, our declaration in *Avadim hayinu* affirms our deliverance as free people with the ability and mandate to make impactful decisions. It also reminds us to be cautious about regressing into the mentality of helplessness and unimportance that our slave ancestors had.

When we state, "And if the Holy One, blessed be He, had not taken our ancestors from Egypt, we and our children and our children's children would [still] be enslaved to Pharaoh in Egypt," we remind ourselves not to take the fact that G-d redeemed us from Egypt for granted. We are forced to remember that our fate could have been very different; that we could have – G-d forbid – missed the opportunity to earn the privilege to become eternal *avadim* to the Master of the Universe.

רבי אלעזר בן עזריה: RABBI ELAZAR BEN AZARYAH The Ultimate Redemption

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Ben Zoma explains: 'It is said: That you may remember the day you left Egypt all the days of your life'; now "the days of your life" refers to the days, [and the additional word] "all" indicates the inclusion of the nights!' The Sages, however, said: "The days of your life" refer to the present-day world; and 'all' indicates the inclusion of the days of the Mashiach." (Rabbi Immanuel Schochet tr.)

At first glance, this story in the middle of Maggid seems easy to gloss over. There's no singing involved like the *Mah nishtanah* or *Dayeinu*, no dipping your finger in wine as is done during the reading of the Ten Plagues, no characters to discuss in depth as we do with the Four Children. When it comes to this story, we usually read it and keep on going.

But upon re-reading this excerpt, I found myself wondering: **what is the significance of Ben Zoma's statement** declaring that the mitzvah of mentioning the Exodus from Egypt applies at night as well as during the day, as opposed to the Sages who posit that the mitzvah only applies during the day?

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon, in his Pesach Haggadah, sheds some light on this question. He suggests that the night symbolizes darkness, difficulty, and exile. According to the Sages, this is not an appropriate time to mention the Exodus. We must wait for the days of the Mashiach, for our complete redemption. The primary significance of the Exodus will be during that time of complete freedom. On the other hand, according to Ben Zoma, there is meaning to our exodus from Egypt even while we are still in exile. The current exile is part of our great salvation from Egypt and is a crucial part of G-d's plan for the Jewish people. The challenges we face demonstrate we are progressing towards our ultimate goal of Redemption.

According to Rav Rimon, today, when we mention the Exodus during the evening Shema prayers, we should keep in mind both factors. As Ben Zoma suggests, we should recognize the significant steps and challenges we have overcome, and, as the Sages argue, keep in mind our destination of reaching the days of the Mashiach, and completing the redemption arc of the Jewish nation.

Building on this idea from Rav Rimon, I would like to emphasize another important part in this discussion.

The Talmud (Berachot 12b) continues the dispute between Ben Zoma and the Sages. Ben Zoma is recorded as responding to the Sages: "And is the Exodus from Egypt supposed to be mentioned during the days of the Mashiach? It's already been said: Therefore, behold days are coming, says the Lord, when they shall no longer say, 'As the Lord lives, Who brought up the children of Israel from the land of Egypt,' But, 'As the Lord lives, Who brought up and Who brought the seed of the house of Israel from the northland and from all the lands where I have driven them, and they shall dwell on their land.'" (Jeremiah 23:7-8, Chabad tr.)"

What Ben Zoma says is nothing short of incredible. One day, in the future, we will no longer mention G-d as the One who rescued us from the perils of Egypt. Rather, we will declare G-d as the One who collected the Jewish people from all around the globe and settled them in the land He has provided for us.

What I find fascinating in this whole saga is that normally, when a dispute is recorded between the Sages and a lone Rabbi, we rule according to the majority. However, in this situation, although Ben Zoma is the minority, we follow his side of the argument, as nowadays we mention the Exodus from Egypt at night as well, during our evening recitation of Shema. Therefore, maybe we should give enormous weight to his reason for disagreeing with the Sages. We recognize the importance of the Exodus. We mention it every day and night, we thank G-d for rescuing us, and it plays a major role in the Passover Seder. But we need to remember, **G-d gathering us from all four corners of the earth and returning us to our homeland, a historical event we have merited to witness in our lifetimes, is the ultimate redemption of the Jewish nation.** It's of such paramount magnitude that, according to Ben Zoma, when we reach the days of Mashiach, it completely dwarfs the story of the Exodus and renders it inconsequential.

Therefore, when we read this exchange in the Haggadah, we can hopefully appreciate the deeper meaning and profound messages taken from the statements of the great rabbis of previous generations.

Did you know?

We engage in our own learning until 12:30 PM daily; we are studying שבועיים: Laws of Neighbours.



כנגד ארבעה בנים: THE FOUR CHILDREN Four Children, Four Lives

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One of the most well-known parts of the Haggadah is the Four Questions, attributed to four different types of children, followed by answers that cater specifically to each of them:

"What does the wise child ask? "What are these testimonies, statutes and judgments that our G-d commanded you?" And accordingly you will answer them with the laws of Passover...

What does the wicked child ask? "What is this worship to you?" 'To you' and not 'to them.' Since they excluded themselves from the collective, they deny a fundamental principle... Say to them, "It is because of that which Hashem did for me when I left Egypt..." 'For me' and not 'for them.' If they had been there, they would not have been saved.

What does the simple child say? "What is this?" And you will say to him, "With the strength of His hand did Hashem take us out from Egypt, from the house of slaves."

And for the child who doesn't know how to ask, you will open the conversation for them. As it is stated, "It is because of that which Hashem did for me when I left Egypt."

When the Talmud Yerushalmi (Pesachim 10:4) presents these questions, the answers given to the wise and simple children are switched. The wise child is given the basic answer while the simple child is taught the intricacies of the korban pesach. Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm zt"l, in *The Royal Table*, suggests that the reason for such a reversal is that the Talmud Yerushalmi "was probably thinking of a surrealist period" in which a wise person is treated as simple and a simple person is treated as if wise. Rabbi Dr. Lamm goes on to write that the contemporary age in which we live is, unfortunately, just such a period in time. Regarding today's simple individuals who masquerade as wise men and women, he writes that, "we can only hope and pray that the good Lord, in His own time, with *hozek yad*, will demonstrate to them the truth of Torah and the merit of loyalty to our sacred Jewish tradition."

What can we do for the simple of our generation to prevent the "surreal situation" where the simple believe they are wise? How can we educate them to better understand and appreciate our Torah and traditions? An answer may be found in Rabbi Yitzchak Arama's *Akeidat Yitzchak*. Rabbi Arama interprets the word "simple" not in terms of intelligence but rather in terms of religion and ethics. Rabbi Dr. Lamm suggests in light of this that Hebrew word "*tam*," which is often translated as "simple," should actually be translated as "wholesome." And, the way to make sure that the *tam* children remain on their path is to give them proper guidance and answers, strengthening their inner light, rather than allow them to fall victim to a world of foreign and corrosive influences.

This help is clearly appropriate for the simple child, and it's also true for each of the four types of children. There is a responsibility upon the shoulders of their parents and teachers to help them travel the road of life from wherever they are starting.

This is especially true regarding the child who does not even know how to ask a question. Rabbi Yaakov Houli, in *Me'am Lo'ez*, writes that the child who does not know how to ask lacks imagination and curiosity. The obligation to tell them the story of the Exodus from Egypt is meant to stimulate their imagination and encourage them to come up with questions as they experience our history of freedom from slavery.

Ultimately, the Four Children are not only an educational tool, but they also serve as a wake-up call for everyone at the table to reevaluate their own relationship with Judaism. Indeed, Rabbi Dr. Lamm notes that the passage of the Four Children is preceded by a blessing for the giving of the Torah. The four children represent four different attitudes towards Jewish tradition, and all are welcome to sit at the table and partake in a quest towards truth together. Their questions must be responded to in a way that will productively bring each closer to their rightful share of Torah: the wise should continue to learn, the wicked should be welcomed back to the light, the simple should be made wholesome, and those who do not know how to ask should be inspired to embrace questions and begin walking towards the answers. Indeed, in Rabbi Dr. Lamm's words, "Questioning of the tradition is itself a tradition!"

מתחילה: AT THE BEGINNING Renewing Our Covenant



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Our Sages structured the Haggadah around a central vision: “We begin with disgrace and conclude with praise.” (Pesachim 116a) Re-telling the story of our emergence from Egypt requires that we begin with the uncomplimentary aspects of our ancestors’ existence, and conclude with our national arrival at our highest state, serving Hashem as free people in our own land.

Our Sages (Pesachim ibid.) disagreed regarding which disgrace should begin our story. Rav selected the era of Terach, father of Avraham, saying we should begin, “From the beginning, our ancestors were idolaters.” Shemuel chose the actual suffering in Egypt, “We were slaves.”

Logically, Shemuel’s view would appear to be more correct: the purpose of the evening is to re-tell the story of our Exodus, and the starting point should be the slavery. Redemption from slavery is what brought about the birth of our nation, with the presentation of the Torah – a spiritual and physical liberation. Nonetheless, Rav’s view is the one we follow; why was this view accepted? In order to understand this, we need to examine the verses which speak of our original idolatry, and their context.

The Haggadah employs a passage from the last chapter in the Book of Yehoshua, in which Yehoshua assembled the nation and presented a concise version of our national history. He began, “Your ancestors lived beside the river long ago; Terach, father of Avraham and father of Nachor. And they served foreign gods.” (Yehoshua 24:2) Yehoshua connected the nation with a part of their past – our past – that is not usually discussed. Avraham, the first of the patriarchs, was born to a family and culture in which idolatry was meaningful. Up to the age when he discovered Hashem, Avraham was part of that culture. Hashem actively lifted Avraham out of that culture, as Yehoshua reported, speaking for Hashem: “And I took your father, Avraham, from beside the river, and I walked him throughout the entire land of Canaan.” (24:3) Hashem actively “took” and “walked” Avraham out of that culture, bringing him to his new role in Canaan of spreading Hashem’s knowledge of Hashem’s Name.

When we speak of our national roots and we educate our children about our ancestors, we normally begin with Avraham and Sarah, Yitzchak and Rivkah, and Yaakov and Leah, Rachel, Bilhah and Zilpah. If so, why did Yehoshua reference Terach as a father of the nation? And on Pesach night, when we celebrate the birthday of the Jewish nation, why do we tie our identity to this idolater?

The answer may be rooted in the second half of that chapter in Yehoshua, right after the section recorded in the Haggadah. Yehoshua warned the Jews not to abandon Hashem and follow foreign gods, saying, “And now, revere Hashem and serve Him completely and in truth, and remove the gods whom your ancestors served beside the river and in Egypt, and serve Hashem.” (24:14) Yehoshua again referenced Terach’s idolatry, alongside the idols worshipped by Jews in Egypt. We may learn from Yehoshua that idolatry was not only the starting point of this nation, but throughout our history it remained an influence. This was not only a record of ancient history; Yehoshua was rallying the nation to contemplate the past and learn from it, lest they return to the errors of their ancestors and resemble Terach rather than Avraham.

The nation responded to Yehoshua, “It would be a desecration for us to abandon Hashem and serve foreign gods. Hashem our G-d is the One who brought us and our ancestors up from Egypt, from the house of slaves, and who performed these great signs, and who protected us throughout the path we walked and among the nations in whose midst we travelled.” (24:16-17) In effect, a covenant was created here, between Hashem and the nation that was entering the land – a nation which knew its past, and undertook not to err and return to the sins of that past.

Let us now return to our day, and the Haggadah. Normally, Terach would not be named in the same breath as our patriarchs, even though he certainly was our genetic ancestor. Specifically on our founding day, the day Hashem choose to bring us from slavery to freedom, the day we were born as a nation, it is important to remember that our beginning was in a place of idolatry. Just as Hashem took Avraham and brought him to the land of Canaan, so Hashem continued to bring us out of idolatry throughout our national history.

On the night when we are commanded to re-tell the Exodus, we are again expected to create a covenant, just as the Jews did at the end of Yehoshua’s life. On the night of the Seder we say, “From the beginning, our ancestors were idol worshippers” – our opening point as a nation was very low, and we are aware that we are vulnerable to returning there. But we continue, “Now Hashem has drawn us close to His service.” We choose daily, and especially on Pesach, to renew the covenant and declare, “It would be a desecration for us to abandon Hashem... Hashem is our G-d.”

Did you know?

We held 3 CE-eligible ZOOM Business Ethics sessions in November, with 3 more planned for May.



וְהִיא שְׁעַמְדָּה: V'HE SHE'AMDAH V'He She'amdah in the Warsaw Ghetto

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“And this is what stood for our ancestors and for us...”

One challenge to understanding the *V'He she'amdah* paragraph of the Haggadah is that the paragraph begins with the word “this” (a rough translation), without explaining what the word “this” refers to. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks zt”l translates this paragraph as “It is this [promise] that has stood by our fathers and by us! For it was not one man who stood up against us, but in every generation they stand up against us to destroy us- and the Holy Blessed One saves us from their hand!” As is clear from Rabbi Sacks’ translation, the text of the Haggadah is not clear about what “has stood by our fathers and by us.” Rabbi Sacks adds the word “promise” in brackets, which is how many of the early commentators understood this paragraph- it is G-d’s *promise* that has stood by us.

In the context of the Haggadah, it makes sense to understand this paragraph as a reference to G-d’s promise. The previous paragraph of the Haggadah praises G-d for keeping His promise to Avraham to redeem Avraham’s descendants from slavery in Egypt. G-d promised Avraham that He would redeem the Jews, and G-d fulfilled His promise. Rabbi Sacks’ translation, likely based on the early commentators, shows that *V'He she'amdah* is a continuation of the theme of the previous paragraph: “Blessed is G-d who keeps His promises... It is this [promise] that has stood by our fathers and by us!”

Rabbi Kalonymus Kalman Shapira (1889-1943), also known as the Piaseczner Rebbe, was a prominent rabbi who began his rabbinic career in Piaseczno, Poland, and then moved to nearby Warsaw after World War I. During the years of the Holocaust, he delivered oral sermons on Shabbat and on the festivals in the Warsaw Ghetto, and recorded the sermons in writing during the week. The sermons were buried, with other documents in the [Ringleblum Archive](#), and were miraculously found after the war.

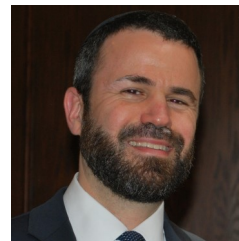
In a sermon given around Passover 1941, at a time when the Jews had already been sealed in the Warsaw Ghetto, the Piaseczner Rebbe writes that it is G-d’s *salvation* that has stood by our fathers and by us. “Not only before we are given into our enemies’ hands; even after we have been given into their hands, G-d saves us. ‘This has stood for us,’ and we must strengthen our hope that even after it appears that we are in our enemies’ hands G-d forbid, even then G-d saves us.” In the Warsaw Ghetto, the Piaseczner Rebbe did not emphasize G-d’s promise to redeem in the future; he emphasized G-d’s salvation in the present. One could adapt Rabbi Sacks’ translation, based on the words of the Piaseczner Rebbe, as, “It is this [salvation] that has stood by our fathers and by us!” To the Jews suffering in the Warsaw Ghetto, the Piaseczner Rebbe does not focus on G-d’s promise of a future redemption; he focuses on an actual redemption in the present.

There is a deeper layer to the Piaseczner Rebbe’s explanation. In 2017, Daniel Reiser published a critical edition of the Piaseczner Rebbe’s sermons, based on the handwritten manuscript of the sermons which is found in the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw. Reiser discovered many differences between the printed edition of the sermons (called *Eish Kodesh*), and the handwritten manuscript. One such difference concerns the order of the Passover sermons. The printed edition put the sermons in the order of the Haggadah, so a sermon about an earlier section of the Haggadah appeared before a sermon about a later section of the Haggadah. In the original manuscript, however, the sermons were written in *reverse* order. The first sermon is for *V'He she'amdah*; the next sermon is about the child who does not know how to ask, and the last sermon is about the sages who stayed up all night discussing the Exodus.

Reiser suggests that the sermons were organized thematically. First, in *V'He she'amdah*, the Piaseczner Rebbe focuses on the idea of salvation. The next sermon demonstrates that the potential for redemption exists, and the Jews must actualize this potential by learning Torah. The third sermon establishes the mechanism for how learning Torah brings salvation. (pp. 67-68) By examining the manuscript, Reiser discovered that the Piaseczner Rebbe’s explanation of *V'He she'amdah* is the foundation of an interpretation which emphasized actual redemption to the Warsaw Jews in 1941.

The salvation that the Piaseczner Rebbe hoped for did not occur. The Piaseczner Rebbe and almost all the Warsaw Ghetto Jews did not survive the Holocaust. The Piaseczner Rebbe’s words, however, were saved. The sermons for Pesach 1941 remind us of the inspiration that the Rebbe must have given to the Warsaw Jews in the Holocaust. His words also remind us that we must hope and pray for a current redemption. “It is this [salvation] that has stood by our fathers and by us!”

צא ולמד : GO OUT AND LEARN Lavan's Revenge



Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner, torczyner@torontotorah.com
Rosh Beit Midrash, 5770-5782

Lavan does not shine in his moment under the Haggadah's spotlight. After we declare that Hashem has saved us from enemies in every generation, we highlight Lavan, "who sought to uproot everything." Then we invoke our national descent to Egypt, and we forget all about Lavan and his plans.

Commentaries vie to explain how Lavan tried to destroy us. The simplest approach is to point to Bereishit 31:29. After twenty difficult years, Yaakov's family fled from Lavan's house, and Lavan pursued them. When Lavan caught up to them, he declared that he would have harmed them, had Hashem not warned him against it. That thwarted harm was Lavan's plan to "uproot everything." (Rashi to Devarim 26:5)

Others see a more spiritual threat from Lavan. Noting that he declared to Yaakov, "The daughters are my daughters and the sons are my sons," they contend that Lavan meant to claim the family for his idolatrous religion. (Rabbi Eliezer Ashkenazi, *Haggadah Maaseh Hashem*)

In recent generations, various scholars have noted a midrash that Lavan and his father Betuel attempted to poison Avraham's servant, when the latter came to find a wife for Yitzchak. Had they succeeded, Yitzchak would not have known who had been betrothed to him, and would have been unable to marry anyone, lest he marry a relative of his betrothed. [This was made more likely by the fact that Yitzchak was already expected to marry within a particular family.] (Rabbi Fischel Sofer, cited [here](#))

In one more approach, commentators cite midrashim identifying Lavan with Bilam. [See, for example, Tanchuma Vayetze 13.] Perhaps Lavan's attempt to uproot everything actually refers to Bilam's attempt to curse the Jews. [See, for example, *Hadar Zekeinim* to Shemot 1; and Rabbi Eliezer Waldenberg in *Tzitz Eliezer* 22:27:6.]

All of these explanations lead to the same point: Lavan tried to harm us and was defeated, just as the Haggadah declares that Hashem will thwart all of our foes. But Lavan did succeed; as the Haggadah says, "An Aramean tried to destroy my father and he descended to Egypt," Lavan got his revenge. Lavan was the catalyst of our descent to Egypt.

When Lavan switched Leah for Rachel (Bereishit 29:18-28), the result was more than income for Lavan. It led to jealousy between Rachel and Leah; Rachel lashed out at Yaakov for producing children with Leah and not with her, and Leah declared to Rachel that Yaakov was "hers". (ibid. 30:1-3, 14-15) It also led to the addition of Bilhah and Zilpah, when Leah and Rachel wished for a greater share of the family's children.

Each wife's children were siloed, as seen when Yaakov's family met Esav (ibid. 33:1-2), and when the sons herded Yaakov's animals (ibid. 37:2). This translated into the sale of Yosef (son of Rachel), led by Reuven and Yehudah (sons of Leah). Further, a midrash implicates Shimon and Levi (sons of Leah) as instigators of the initial attempt to murder Yosef. (Rashi to Bereishit 49:5) The tribes are consistently divided as a result of Lavan's maneuver.

Even in later generations, after the Exodus, the descendants of the different wives of Yaakov would be defined as different groups. The *nesi'im* who led each tribe were grouped based on the wife who had produced the tribe (Bamidbar 1), and the tribes travelled in camps loosely based on the mothers as well (ibid. 2; note that Gad of Zilpah joined the Leah tribes because Levi was not included).

We even see Lavan's impact generations later. The rebel Sheva ben Bichri of Binyamin (Rachel) tried to rally people against King David of Yehudah (Leah). (Shemuel II 19-20) And of course, Yeravam ben Nevat took control of the northern kingdom, identified with the tribe of Ephraim (Rachel), splitting them from the south, which was led by King Rechavam of Yehudah (Leah). (Melachim I 11-12) We could bring more examples, but the point is clear. Lavan lost in his initial attempt to "uproot everything", but his impact led to a great deal of pain in Egypt, and beyond.

Our national existence requires social capital and trust in each other. As Rabbi Zalman Sorotzkin noted in his *Haggadat HaShir v'haShevach*, the experience in Egypt could have built up that social capital and trust. The humbling experience of slavery, and the bonding that comes through shared suffering and learning to rely on each other, was supposed to knit us together. But as we see in the examples above, suffering did not fully unite us.

In truth, the passage of time has done what our slavery did not; most of us don't know which matriarch is our ancestor. But rifts certainly remain, with fallout that can be as dramatic as the sale of Yosef. We will need to defeat Lavan not through a slavery experience, but through the lived experience of a unified people. May we, in our own day, take the steps we will need in order to heal the rifts of our people and emerge united.

Note: For other explanations for the link between Lavan's attempt to destroy us and our descent to Egypt, see the Ritva's commentary to the Haggadah, Chatam Sofer to Gittin 17a, and Tzitz Eliezer 22:27:6.

Did you know?

We teach in the broader Jewish community, including Adath Israel, Beth Emeth and Beth Tikvah!



ארמי אובד אבי: ARAMI OVEID AVI Why is Lavan in the Haggadah?

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The central component of Maggid, where we retell the story of leaving Egypt, is the recital and analysis of a passage from the Torah that begins *Arami oveid avi*. (Devarim 26:5) This passage is sourced from the text that Jews bringing *bikkurim* (first fruit offerings) to the Beit HaMikdash would recite. The Jew coming to the Beit HaMikdash tells the ministering kohen, "I acknowledge (*higadeti*) this day before your G-d, Hashem, that I have entered the Land that Hashem swore to our fathers to give us" (26:3).

The verb *lehagid* as used in the Torah, and in the word *Haggadah*, involves using a story to appreciate one's own life experiences. In the case of *bikkurim*, the Jew contextualizes his own successful crop within Jewish history as a whole. The Mishnah (Pesachim 10:4) instructs us to do something similar with the same text on the night of the Seder, in our Haggadah. Namely, to contextualize our own freedom within the story of the Exodus and the scope of Jewish history.

Given this goal, the meaning of the first verse in this passage is confusing. *Arami oveid avi* means (following Onkelos, Rashi, and other commentaries) "An Aramean (Lavan) attempted to destroy my father (Yaakov)". This is a reference to Yaakov's experience with his father-in-law Lavan, and the former's dramatic escape from Aram. During this episode G-d appears to Lavan in a dream and forbids him from harming Yaakov or his family. The implication, as Lavan himself confirms, is that he would have harmed Yaakov, given the chance. The question is this: What does the story of Lavan have to do with the Exodus? Why do we mention it in the Haggadah? Let's consider three approaches:

Coincidence

What is arguably the most obvious answer is also the least exciting. The mention of Lavan, while important when using this text for the *bikkurim*, is not relevant for the Exodus. We recite the whole text for the sake of consistency, but we are really interested in the description of Egypt. The mention of Lavan is incidental. Rabbi Shimon ben Tzemach Duran takes this approach in his commentary on the Haggadah. He notes that while the story of Lavan is conceptually related to the Exodus, it's only mentioned here as part of the larger text.

The First Redemption

A second approach to our question considers the context of this passage within the Haggadah overall. It comes after we mention G-d's promise to Abraham regarding the exile in Egypt. G-d tells Abraham that his children will be enslaved by another nation, but that G-d will then judge that nation and free them. At the Seder, we declare that this promise doesn't only apply to Egypt, but to any time enemies have threatened the Jews throughout our history. Right after this we launch into *Arami oveid avi*.

Taking this context into consideration, an anonymous medieval commentary on the Haggadah suggests that the Divine promise came into effect even before the Israelites went to Egypt. The first example of "I will also judge the nation that they serve" (Bereishit 16:4) is with Lavan and Yaakov. In this reading, the mention of Lavan is part of our contextualizing of the Exodus. G-d's actions in Egypt were not an anomaly. They were part of a pattern that began before Egypt, and has continued since. The story of the Exodus demonstrates a relationship between G-d and the Jewish people, and the case of Lavan and Yaakov is an important example of that. (*Peirush Kadmon*, published in the *Torat Chaim* edition of the Haggadah.)

The Beginning of Exile

A final approach also considers the context of this passage in the Haggadah, but comes to the opposite conclusion. In his Haggadah commentary, Rabbi Yehudah ben Yakar argues that the story of Lavan and Yaakov wasn't the first example of redemption but rather the beginning of the Egyptian exile. It was the first of a series of unsettling events in Yaakov's life that ultimately led him to move to Egypt.

This last approach raises a further question. If G-d intervened to save Yaakov from Lavan, how can we *not* view this episode as an act of salvation or redemption? What distinguishes it from the Exodus?

I don't have a good answer to this question, but I bet someone at your Seder does!

עשר מכות: THE TEN PLAGUES

The Purpose of the Ten Plagues



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One of the highlights of the Seder is the recital of the *Eser Makkot* – the Ten Plagues. What was the Almighty's purpose in bringing these Ten Plagues (called *makkot*, *otot*, *moftim*, and *shefatim* in the Chumash)? Commentators offer numerous suggestions, including the following:

- Punishing Pharaoh for his cruel enslavement of the Israelites
- Forcing Pharaoh to release the Israelites
- Educating Pharaoh about Hashem as the omnipotent, all powerful G-d of the world, and as a corollary, the worthlessness of Pharaoh's own idols

Other suggestions focus on the role played by the Plagues in educating the Israelites about the power and greatness of Hashem. This is not necessarily exclusive of the other reasons.

The Israelites needed to experience the Plagues in order to accept Hashem completely. This is highlighted by midrashic texts such as one that records the death of four-fifths of the Israelites during the plague of Darkness (interpreting the term *chamushim* in Exodus 13:18 as meaning only one-fifth of the Israelites actually left Egypt), as well as the simple reading of the various complaints by the Israelites in the desert, and their demand to return to Egypt. Their feeling that this could still be a viable option is telling.

Rabbi Mordechai Yosef Leiner, the Ishbitzer Rebbe, takes this one step further in his *Mei HaShiloach*. He suggests that the Ten Plagues were brought not only to convince the Israelites of the magnificence of Hashem, but also to convince them that the land of Egypt could no longer be considered their homeland. The Ten Plagues were meant to chase the Israelites out of Egypt and force them to leave. During the *makkot*, the Israelites saw their "homeland" destroyed by one plague after another. Furthermore, the Egyptian economy was decimated and its society was broken down. This occurred so that the Israelites would understand that they had no choice but to leave the land of Egypt and follow the Almighty and Moshe into the wilderness.

The Ishbitzer's comments on a dialogue between Moshe and the Almighty highlight this approach. The Torah states the following complaint brought by Moshe to the Almighty: "Moses returned to Hashem, and said, 'Lord, why have You brought trouble on this people? Why is it that You have sent me? For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has brought trouble on this people; neither have You delivered your people at all.'" (Shemot 5:22-23)

Here are the words of the Ishbitzer:

This is astounding; how could these words come out of Moshe against Hashem? But the answer is... Moshe loved the Jewish people; and when he heard from the mouth of Hashem that they would still have to be in Egypt until the end of all the plagues He asked Hashem: surely You have in Your power to redeem the Jewish people instantaneously. Why must they be in Egypt another twelve months to watch the plagues and be afraid of them as it later says (Deut. 28:60) "before which you trembled"....?

That is why Moshe questioned Hashem. And that is why Hashem explained to Moshe there was a need for this, because the Jewish people had a very real connection to Egypt, as it is later said [about the process of the Exodus] (Deut. 4:34) "to take a nation from inside a nation." Like a fetus from inside the mother who always maintains a relationship with her [did the Jewish people maintain a close connection to Egypt.]. This is why the Jewish people were required to be tested and be frightened by the plagues. This fear is what purified their hearts, as the Talmud said (Berachot 50a): thunder was only created in order to straighten the crookedness of the heart

The Ishbitzer also comments on Exodus 6:2 that G-d responded and said to Moshe, "Go to the Jewish people and discover for yourself that they will not listen to you, they are not [yet] ready."

According to the Ishbitzer, the purpose of the Ten Plagues was to chase the Jewish people out of Egypt, to make the Israelites realize that this was not their land. The plagues changed their mindset so that they themselves understood that they could no longer want to remain there. Despite their enslavement, many Israelites preferred the known difficulties of serving the Egyptians over the unknown challenges of going out into an inhospitable wilderness. In fact, these feelings still permeated the Israelites during many of their complaints to Moshe in the Wilderness: "Why did you take us out to die here? Bring us back to the fleshpots of Egypt, the cucumbers, the seafood etc!" But at this point, the effect of the Ten Plagues made the Israelites realize they could no longer remain; the Egyptian economy and society were destroyed, and there was nothing left to allow Bnei Yisrael to stay there.

There may be a takeaway lesson for us. Have not the Jewish people sometimes continued to cling to their Diaspora lives throughout many eras and places? At times this was even during less than ideal circumstances. They did so until it became almost impossible to maintain their lives in those areas. Only then did immigration become a consideration. Aliyah is at times fueled by the practical realities of the extreme difficulty in maintaining Jewish life in local Diaspora communities.

Did you know?

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פסח, מצה ומרור: PESACH, MATZAH AND MARROR Not So Fast...

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The Haggadah has firmly taken its place among our greatest and most popular texts, second only to the Siddur among published Jewish books. That being said, the editorial role it often plays in our processing of the Exodus story is not necessarily authoritative. Further, we should note that the version of the Haggadah we are most familiar with occasionally diverges from the other traditional texts which it seems to draw from, as well as from the received Haggadah texts of notable scholars (e.g., Maimonides).

With that in mind, let's look at the Haggadah's explanation of matzah in the name of Rabban Gamliel:

This matzah that we eat – what is it about? That our forefathers' dough did not have time to rise before the King of kings, the Holy One, Blessed is He, appeared to them and redeemed them, as it is written: “And they baked unleavened cakes of the dough that they had taken out of Egypt, for it was not leavened, since they had been driven out of Egypt and could not delay; nor had they prepared any provisions for themselves.” (Shemot 12:39)

Such is the “classic” approach to matzah, and our Haggadah text seems to be what has popularized it as such. Matzah is the food we eat to remember the hurried way in which we left Egypt. A major difficulty with this approach, however, is that the prooftext only describes the **second** instance in which the Israelites ate matzah. Prior to this eating of matzah – and before anyone hurried out of Egypt – we were already instructed to eat matzah together with our Passover offering (Shemot 12:8)!

Although G-d is all-knowing, and one could suggest the original command to eat matzah was to commemorate a future event, it is not unreasonable to believe something else is at work here. This is especially so when one considers that in a mishnah (Pesachim 10:5), Rabban Gamliel explains the meaning of matzah much more plainly. We eat it “on account of our forefathers, that they were redeemed from Egypt,” without quoting the verses we are familiar with from the Haggadah text. Indeed, the “hurrying” explanation doesn't appear in some Haggadah texts, like that of Rav Amram Gaon. Most importantly, the text of the chumash provides a different – though unclear – explanation of matzah when we are first introduced to it:

Be careful regarding the matzot, because on this very day I will have brought your masses out of Egypt. You must carefully keep this day for all generations; it is a law for all times. (Shemot 12:17)

What then **is** matzah about?

We might suggest the following: Our Sages (Sifrei 337:1) tell us in other contexts that the phrase “on this very day” (*b'etzem hayom hazeh* in the original Hebrew) indicates a certain force which counters significant opposition. Though they don't speak of the term's usage in the context of matzah, one example they give is in reference to a different verse in the same chapter of our Exodus story:

What did [G-d] see that he said with respect to Egypt “On that very day, (*b'etzem hayom hazeh*)”? (Exod. 12:51). That the Egyptians said: “[We swear] by such and such, that if we notice them [trying to leave], we won't allow them [to leave]! And not only that, but we will take blades and swords and we will kill them!” [To this,] the Omnipresent said: “Behold, I will take them out in the middle of the day and let anyone who has the power to prevent it, come and prevent it!”

How might this idea help explain our consumption of matzah? With the permission of Maimonides (see his Guide for the Perplexed 3:49) and the help of relatively recent archaeological insights, one could suggest that our consumption of matzah “on this very day” is to make a forceful counter-cultural statement against Egyptian society. Egypt, it seems, was the inventor of *se'or*, known to us as sourdough, or “starter”, the key to quick fermentation of dough and the mass production of bread. Especially when one considers the investment of time it would take to create *se'or* (and the sacrifice of ridding oneself of it) as well as the need for heavier, non-portable ovens to produce bread, the eating of matzah – unleavened dough, baked (at least potentially) on nothing more than a hot surface typical of nomadic groups – can be seen as a statement that the Egyptian way of life was being completely left behind. [For more details on this, see Gil Marks' *Encyclopedia of Jewish Food*.] In this light, we must take care to eat matzah properly as an expression of what Rabban Gamliel tells us, that G-d “redeemed us from Egypt” – that we would no longer identify with our oppressors' way of life.

What, then, of the Haggadah's explanation? Our hurried trip out of Egypt seems to be an **enhanced** expression of what matzah was originally about. One can find Moses himself noting such in his recounting of Pesach in Devarim 16:3, where matzah is explicitly connected to our leaving in haste (see Nachmanides there, as well as his explanation of Shemot 12:39). But with all that in mind, it is important to consider matzah's more basic message, of what exactly it is that we are so enthusiastic about – our shedding of an old Egyptian identity in exchange for a new identity as G-d's chosen nation.

מוציה מצה: MOTZI MATZAH For Heaven or Leaven?



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Why must we eat only bread that is unleavened on Pesach? Why do we eat matzah, instead of lovely fluffy loaves?

The Haggadah answers, based on a mishnah (Pesachim 10:5):

Why are we eating matzah? Because the dough of our ancestors did not have enough time to rise before G-d, the King of kings, revealed himself to them and redeemed them, as it says, “They baked the dough that they brought with them out of Egypt as cakes of Matzah, for it was unable to rise, because they were kicked out of Egypt and unable to tarry, and did not prepare other food for themselves.” (Shemot 12:39)

But why did Bnei Yisrael need to eat matzah on the night of the Seder in Egypt, if they hadn’t yet rushed out? If we look at the mishnah which the Haggadah quotes, we see Rabban Gamliel emphasizing that one must talk about the korban pesach, matzah, and marror to fulfill one’s obligation at the Seder. For matzah, the reason is “because our ancestors were redeemed from Egypt.” But what element of this redemption is the matzah supposed to recall?

Further: if we look at the command to eat matzah in Egypt (Shemot 12:8-20) we see that we are told not to eat leavened bread, under threat of receiving the punishment of *karet*, being cut off from G-d. Why the harsh punishment for eating leavened bread? Why couldn’t we eat leavened bread while in Egypt?

One option to explain the role of matzah can be found in Maggid during the Aramaic portion, *Ha Lachma Anya*, where we say “This is the bread of *oni* that our ancestors ate in the land of Egypt.” This *lechem oni* (a term from Devarim 16:3) can mean two things: poor man’s bread or bread of affliction. But whether matzah is a pauper’s bread or bread of affliction, why was it eaten in Egypt itself, when we needed no reminder of these experiences?

We might also ask: the prohibition against leavened dough is not only on Pesach. It also applies year-round, in the Beit HaMikdash: “No meal offering, which you shall bring to the Lord, shall be made with leaven: for you shall burn no leaven, nor any honey, in any offering of the Lord made by fire.” (Vayikra 2:11 JPS 1985 translation) Why can’t we offer leavened bread to G-d? Is there something inherently wrong with it? Don’t we eat fluffy leavened bread every Shabbat?

The best answer I have heard was in Grade Four at the Yavneh Academy, from Morah Rachel Frazer. Her husband, Rabbi Chaim Frazer, was reading Reay Tannahill’s *History in Food*. Apparently, ancient Egyptians invented leavened bread and would specifically use it in service of their gods, showing their power over the elements and ingenuity for inventing fluffy bread. They felt that using anything short of their most technologically advanced foods would not be fitting for their gods, nor would it properly represent their capabilities. They needed to show their gods how great they, the Egyptians, were.

When we eat matzah instead of leavened bread, we show our deference to G-d instead of our arrogance. We differentiate ourselves from the Egyptians and embrace our *lechem oni*, our poor man’s bread, our bread of affliction, choosing to serve G-d and not to serve ourselves.

At the Seder, or when we offer sacrifices to G-d in the Beit HaMikdash, we humbly present ourselves before G-d. We recognize G-d and the support He gives us, whether specifically when we left Egypt or every day. May we one day soon be able to merit fulfilling both of these conditions at the same time, when we eat our matzah on Pesach in Yerushalayim, with a rebuilt Beit HaMikdash.



מרור: MARROR The Bitter/Sweet Marror

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Why do we eat marror at the Seder?

The question is so basic that the Haggadah directly answers it, quoting a mishnah (Pesachim 10:5) – “This marror that we are eating, what is it for? It is because the Egyptians embittered our ancestors’ lives in Egypt, as it is stated (Shemot 1:14), “And they made their lives bitter with hard service, with mortar and bricks, and all the work in the field...” In order to bring us back to the pain of slavery, we eat these bitter herbs.

However, if this is the case, the placement of marror is incorrect. By the time that we finally dig into these bitter herbs, we have already discussed the entire Exodus story and we have begun to recite Hallel, praises to G-d for having redeemed us. If the purpose of marror is really to remember our enslavement in Egypt, we would have expected the Seder to begin with it. Indeed, a mishnah in Pesachim (10:4) tells us that “we begin [the Haggadah] with [our] disgrace and conclude with [our] praise.” [See Pesachim 116a, where Shemuel indicates that “our disgrace” refers to our servitude in Egypt.]

Accordingly, the bitterness evoked by marror must be referring to something beyond the experience of slavery. Instead, as unlikely as it may seem, the bitter herbs eaten at the Seder must draw our attention to something more positive.

Rabbi Zvi Elimelech Spira of Dinov (*Bnei Yissaschar*, Nissan 9:1), explains that the servitude in Egypt was actually beneficial, though it was impossible to see at the time. After experiencing salvation and receiving the Torah, Rabbi Spira writes, we can reflect on the Egyptian servitude and see how it primed us, as a nation, to be willing to accept the yoke of Hashem’s commandments. In other words, we realize in retrospect that the bitterness of Egypt was beneficial for our development as a nation and this arouses positive feelings.

Rabbi Yehuda Leib Alter (*S’fat Emet* on Vayikra, Pesach 5632) writes along similar lines. He explains, quoting his grandfather, that the pain of slavery was the beginning of our redemption. In his words, “that which was bitter for them was actually a piece of the redemption... their sighs [under oppression] led to their redemption.” All the affliction that Bnei Yisrael suffered in Egypt was part of the process of their redemption. Therefore we eat the marror at the very moment that we recall our redemption because the bitterness was, in fact, part of the redemption.

Still, one need not go so far as to say that the consumption of marror reflects the idea that slavery was good for us. Rabbi Chaim ibn Attar (*Or HaChaim* on Shemot 12:8) writes that the added bitterness enhances appreciation of our redemption. He writes that “letting the bitter herbs precede the meat in his mouth made one more conscious of the contrast and of how something which by itself had tasted bitter would suddenly transform the whole meal into an enjoyable experience” (Rabbi Eliyahu Munk translation, Sefaria.org). We appreciate our salvation, and our meal, when it is juxtaposed to bitterness. Marror reminds us of our pain, but it also reminds us how far we’ve come.

Rabbi Chaim ibn Attar’s approach notwithstanding, it is essential to remember that Marror is not the final stage in the Haggadah. There is a story told by Rebbe Nachman of Breslov about a Jew and a non-Jew who were good friends. For whatever reason, the Jew decided to train the non-Jew in Jewish practices so that the latter could navigate easily through the Jewish community. When Pesach came, the Jew made sure to teach his friend all about the practices and customs of the holiday, but he neglected to tell him about some key points about the Seder, including its length. The non-Jew was invited to a Seder but suffered through the Haggadah absolutely famished. Once they finally reached Marror, the guest stormed out of the house. He was furious that after such a long ceremony the only thing that he was given to eat was a bitter herb. Later that night, the two friends met up. The non-Jew expressed his complete disgust with the Jewish community at how they could be such uninviting hosts, serving only bitter herbs for the meal. The Jew began to laugh and exclaimed, “You fool! If you had only waited a little bit longer, you would have been treated to a delicious meal!” (Complete story can be found [here](#).)

No matter how we understand the role of the marror, whether as a primer and part of the redemption (as *Bnei Yissaschar* and *S’fat Emet* understood it) or as a contrast to help us better appreciate our current state (like *Or HaChaim*), we acknowledge that our Jewish experience goes beyond the bitterness we experience at the Seder table. This year, may we appreciate the message of the marror, and may we be sure to enjoy the celebration of the meal as well.

The Beauty of the Private Experience

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Tzafun marks the point in the Seder at which we complete our lavish Yom Tov meals by eating the afikoman. However, the word *Tzafun* makes no reference to eating. *Tzafun* means hidden, and likely refers to our retrieval of the afikoman, which we hide after we break a matzah into two pieces during *Yachatz*. It is striking that we highlight this custom by referring to this stage of the Seder as *Tzafun*. Why emphasize the hiddenness of the afikoman? Why do we hide the afikoman at all?

Kol Bo (50:23), a 13th-14th century halachic work, offers two suggestions which explain why we hide the afikoman. First, *Kol Bo* suggests we hide one of the matzot to pique the curiosity of the children at the Seder. When children see that we are taking one piece of matzah, wrapping it up, and hiding it, the scene will inspire them to ask: Why are we hiding away the matzot if we haven't eaten yet? Second, *Kol Bo* argues that we hide the afikoman due to pragmatic concerns. Halachah dictates that the afikoman must be the last food we eat on the night of the Seder. (Rambam, Hilchot Chametz U'Matzah 8:9) We fear that if we leave the afikoman on the table, someone might accidentally consume it during the meal and leave us without any matzah to eat during *Tzafun*. Therefore, we hide the afikoman to ensure the matzah is available at the end of the meal.

While the *Kol Bo*'s suggestions explain the reasoning behind the custom to hide the afikoman, they don't provide a satisfying rationale for the title of *Tzafun*. If we hide the afikoman merely to pique the curiosity of children, or to prevent a hungry Seder attendee from eating it too early, it would be strange to name a stage of the Seder after the custom. Perhaps this difficulty is what inspired Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak HaKohen Kook to suggest a more profound explanation. Rav Kook (*Olat Re'ayah* on *Tzafun*) begins his explanation with an insight about the spiritual force of human emotions. At first glance we might assume that our emotions occupy a lower rung than our intellect on the ladder of spirituality, but when the intellect raises the level of the soul to a certain level, our emotions can access spiritual experiences that our minds can't fully rationalize or put into words. However, we can't tap into the profound feelings hidden within the inner recesses of our souls through our public, revealed experiences. Rather, our hidden private experiences unlock the deepest and most sanctified parts of ourselves.

Based on this insight, Rav Kook reveals the depth of the hidden afikoman. We eat the afikoman at the end of our meals, when we have already eaten our fill. Therefore, unlike most of our eating in which we simply respond to a physiological urge, the act of eating the afikoman doesn't merely fill the pragmatic role of filling our appetites. Rather, we eat the afikoman with no ulterior motive in mind other than fulfilling the will of G-d and experiencing the sanctity of the freedom of the night of the Seder. Hiding and retrieving the afikoman signifies our attempt to maximize this spiritual experience by unlocking our deepest feelings, hidden within the innermost recesses of our souls.

The emphasis on private, hidden experiences at the end of our Seder contrasts with the other customs we observe over the course of the night. Throughout the rest of the Seder we focus on open, revealed experiences. We fill our tables with all sorts of symbols of freedom and slavery which are intended to be easily accessible. We retell the story of all the public, earth-shattering miracles of the Exodus. The dialogue of the Seder takes place publicly, as open discussion between participants of various ages, backgrounds, and levels of understanding. Perhaps after a night of openness and revealed experiences, *Tzafun* plays a crucial role and leaves us with an essential message. While our public accomplishments generate more fanfare and help build our reputations, it is often the most private, hidden experiences that allow us to reach our true spiritual potential.



ברך: BAREICH

A Mitzvah for Every Day, and the Seder

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Sgan Rosh Beit Midrash, 5775-5778

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Some components of the Seder are unique to Pesach; others are daily commandments that integrate into the unique experience of the night. All meals based on bread or matzah require *Birkat HaMazon* (Grace after Meals), and recitation of those blessings with a cup of wine is standard. Yet, despite its pedestrian character, a mishnah (*Pesachim* 10:7) identifies the drinking of this glass of wine with those blessings as part of the Seder. While this may be a technicality, the themes of these blessings are interwoven with the lessons of the Exodus, and thus thematically deserve their place in the Seder.

The Talmud (*Berachot* 20a) notes that the blessings of *Birkat HaMazon* are of biblical origin, a rarity among blessings. While the text need not be exactly as we recite it, several themes must be mentioned to fulfill the obligations. (*Berachot* 48b-49a) These points highlight the significance of the lessons of *Birkat HaMazon*. This obligation is derived from the imperative, “And you shall eat, and you shall be sated, and you shall bless Hashem your G-d for the good land given to you.” (*Devarim* 8:10)

As the subsequent verses indicate, this blessing is not a mere expression of gratitude. Rather, thanking G-d protects from the hubris that comes from wealth, a danger that the Jews face as G-d showers them with beneficence in the Land of Israel. In turn, this can lead to forgetting G-d, culminating in the belief that all we have is because of “My own power and the might of my own hand have won this wealth for me.” (*Devarim* 8:17, JPS tr.) To prevent this, the Torah warns:

“Take care lest you forget your G-d and fail to keep the Divine commandments, rules, and laws which I enjoin upon you today. When you have eaten and been sated, and have built good houses and lived in them, and your herds and flocks have multiplied, and your silver and gold have increased, and everything you own has prospered, beware lest your heart grow haughty and you forget your G-d...” (*ibid.* 11-13, adapted JPS tr.)

What memory can we draw upon to avoid the pitfalls of wealth? The verses continue with the answer. The key is to remember a time when we were not as lucky, not as wealthy, and our dependence on G-d was clearer. Specifically, we remember the Exodus from Egypt and the subsequent forty years, when G-d miraculously sustained us in the desert. Hence, the verses continue that we remember our G-d:

“who freed you from the land of Egypt, the house of bondage; who led you through the great and terrible wilderness with its seraph serpents and scorpions, a parched land with no water in it, who brought forth water for you from the flinty rock; who fed you in the wilderness with manna, which your ancestors had never known, in order to test you by hardships only to benefit you in the end...” (*ibid.* 13-16)

Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch (commentary to *Devarim* 8:16) notes that liberty can make us forget how hopeless we once were, and thus we invoke the slavery in Egypt to remind us of those hard times. Mentioning the Exodus underscores that even when we are successful, and G-d’s aid is hidden in nature, He is still there. As Ramban (end of *Parshat Bo*) notes, the open miracles remind us of the miraculous essence of nature itself.

Thus, the standard text of the second blessing specifically invokes the memory of Egypt: “We thank You Hashem our G-d, for You bequeathed to our fathers a desirable, good and ample land, and because You brought us out, Hashem our G-d, from the land of Egypt, and redeemed us from the house of bondage...”

Rabbi David Avudraham (on *Birkat HaMazon*) adds a dimension and writes that the juxtaposition of Israel and Egypt alludes to the following verse: “And I have declared: I will take you out of the misery of Egypt to the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, to a land flowing with milk and honey.” (*Shemot* 3:17) Thus, recognition of the abundance in the Land of Israel is highlighted by contrasting our current blessing with the state from which G-d extricated us.

Taken together, the invocation of Egypt in *Birkat HaMazon* accomplishes at least three goals:

- 1) It prevents hubris, and the forgetting of G-d that it entails, by pointing towards a time when we were less fortunate.
- 2) Remembering the miracles of the Exodus and the years in the desert reminds us that G-d is ultimately responsible for all we have, whether He shows His hand openly or not.
- 3) Contrasting our current success with our lowly past shows the extent of G-d’s kindness.

Thus, while *Birkat HaMazon*, and the glass of wine that accompanies it, are not unique to Pesach, the lessons of *Birkat HaMazon* are intertwined with those of the slavery in, and Exodus from, Egypt. Thus, the integration of this mitzvah into the Seder is proper and demands that the messages of the Seder be remembered every time we eat, enjoy our success, and thank G-d for His constant presence in our lives.

חזק גדיא: CHAD GADYA Who Knows One?



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Leave the Cat Alone

In the 18th century, a far-reaching battle broke out among the European rabbinate regarding the false messiah Shabbtai Zvi and a new generation of Sabbateanism. At the heart of the battle lay a dispute between Rabbi Yaakov Emden and Rabbi Yehonatan Eibenschutz, both well-known sages who published great works of Torah.

It is told (some attribute this story to Rabbi Moshe Sofer) that one day, Rabbi Yehonatan Eibenschutz travelled to a city where he was not recognized. He entered the local study hall to learn, and then he heard some of the resident Torah scholars saying terrible things about him, and discussing the dispute between himself and Rabbi Emden.

Rabbi Eibenschutz approached the group, and asked them if they could respond to a question. Since he seemed to be a traveller like any other, they did not anticipate a complicated question. Indeed, Rabbi Eibenschutz told them it was not a question requiring great scholarship; it was about one of the poems in the Haggadah.

He asked thus: The goat is the innocent player in the story; he has done nothing wrong. If so, then the cat which ate the goat is a criminal, and the dog which bit the cat acted properly. The stick which punished the righteous dog did not act properly – and so the fire, which burned the stick, was in the right. The water which extinguished the fire was incorrect, and the ox which drank the water acted properly. If so, then the *shochet* who slaughtered the ox was incorrect, and the Angel of Death which took the *shochet* was right for doing so. If so, why did Hashem act improperly, punishing the Angel of Death?

Rabbi Yehonatan Eibenschutz then answered his own question. From our perspective, the dog which punished the cat was legally right. However, this is not correct. If there is a fight between a goat and a cat, the dog has no business interfering. This gives us a different perspective on the entire set of interactions. And Rabbi Eibenschutz then added: There is a dispute between rabbis, giants in Torah – why are you putting yourselves between these two giants?

At Our Seder

Certainly, Rabbi Eibenschutz's point is correct; people often enter into fights in unhelpful ways and stumble in sinful speech, bringing harm upon themselves and others. But why is this message appropriate for the Seder?

Rabbi Yosef Chaim of Baghdad (a.k.a. "Ben Ish Chai") used the following parable to explain the connection between the *Chad Gadya* poem and the Haggadah. The Egyptians complained: why is Hashem punishing us with the Exodus? Didn't Hashem declare, "They will enslave them and oppress them"? But one may respond that Hashem declared, "Your descendants will be strangers in a land not their own," without specifying which nation would be their host and would enslave them. The Egyptians chose to take on that "mission".

Like the dog in *Chad Gadya*, who was not asked by anyone to serve as judge, jury and executioner, so the Egyptians acted without being invited to do this. Therefore, like the dog struck by the stick, they were punished severely. As Rabbi Menachem Mendel Kasher said, the chain of events in *Chad Gadya* reminds us that there is a Judge and a Verdict for every event; or as Hillel warned in Pirkei Avot, "Because you drowned another, you were drowned. And in the end, those who drowned you will be drowned."

The End

Rabbi Yosef Chaim and Rabbi Kasher successfully link *Chad Gadya* with a theme of the Seder and the Exodus, but we may still ask: why is this an appropriate **conclusion** for the Seder? Why should the Haggadah end with a refutation of Egypt's self-defense? Perhaps we may answer by pointing to a well-known midrash (Bereishit Rabbah 38:13):

[Nimrod] said to him Let us serve fire. Avraham replied: Then let us serve water, which extinguishes fire!

Nimrod said to him: Let us serve water. He replied: If so, then let us serve clouds, which carry water.

He said to him: Let us serve clouds. He replied: If so, then let us serve wind, which scatters clouds.

He said to him: Let us serve wind. He replied: If so, then let us serve people, who withstand wind.

He said to him: You are just talking; I will only bow to fire, and I will throw you into it.

When trying to discern who controls our environment, people may select a particular force, but each of these forces is always subject to a greater force. This is true until we reach Hashem. On the night of the Seder, we choose to conclude with a general understanding that within the natural chain of events, within the attempt to understand who is righteous and who is wicked, who will win and who will lose, there is only one absolute truth, which may not be immediately obvious as events unfold.

In truth, we could call this poem "Who knows One?" The subject is not the one goat, but the One Hashem, who moves the world according to His will.

Did you know?

Past members of our Beit Midrash are now synagogue rabbis, teachers, JLIC Rabbis and more!

NEW FEATURE

Questions Submitted by Teens

IT'S A LONG STORY...

Question: Why is the Haggadah so long? We could learn the story and have a meal without the headache!

Idan Rakovsky: In 2021, the Walt Disney Studios released a movie called *Encanto*, one hundred and nine minutes of plot and storyline. When I first watched the movie, I thought to myself afterwards exactly what you asked about the seder: why is this so long?

But then I realized, from the fact that I really enjoyed the movie, and especially its characters, and I was actually touched by the emotions it tried to convey – that in order to build up a strong plot, with strong feelings toward it, you must build it slowly, step after step, each step building toward the next.

The Seder doesn't have to be a headache! Just the opposite, it is a night of opportunity to reunite with our families, friends, and above all – ourselves – in holiness. The Haggadah is just like the plot of a movie - it has heroes and villains, it has emotional stories, sad moments and heart-lifting climaxes. In order to build a connection and identification with the storyline, it must evolve slowly but surely. We move from one part, that reveals one shade, to the next which is soon to be found.

May we merit to listen carefully to the plot of the Haggadah, to feel it, experience it first-hand, and identify with its heroes, just as it says, "One must see himself as though he himself had emerged from Egypt."

Chag Sameach!



WHAT'S THE POINT?

Question: With all of the intricacies in the Pesach story, is there anything specific that we are supposed to be learning, besides upholding Seder and Chol HaMoed traditions?

Rabbi Steven Gotlib: This is such an important question, thanks for raising it! The Pesach story is one of the most drama-filled and action-packed in all of Tanach. There are many details crammed into a small space, and if you don't stop to look around once in a while, you could miss something incredibly profound.

A core idea that appears time and again, though, is our freedom from Egypt. We see this in a mishnah (Pesachim 10:5), which records Rabban Gamliel's statement that anyone who does not mention the Pesach offering, matzah, and marror during the Seder does not fulfill their obligation. As the mishnah spells out, these three items tell the story of our people's journey from slavery to freedom:

- 1) The Pesach offering represents how Hashem "passed over" (*pasach*) the homes of our ancestors in Egypt;
- 2) The matzah represents the hurried exit from Egypt without even time to bake proper bread;
- 3) The marror represents the bitterness of our time in slavery.

Not only did this mishnah make it into the text of the Haggadah, but it is also codified by the Rambam (Hilchot Chametz U'Matzah 8:4). These core elements of the Seder, and what they represent, help us to truly see ourselves as if we had left Egypt along with our ancestors. In addition to upholding the Seder and Chol haMoed traditions, Pesach is meant to show us what it is like to transcend slavery and embrace freedom as a Jew. Chag kasher v'sameach!

NEW FEATURE

Questions Submitted by Teens

CALENDAR CONFUSION

Question: Why does Pesach need to be in the spring?

Rabbi Jared Anstandig: Hey, great question. You correctly assume that Pesach is always in the spring. Since the lunar year is shorter than the solar year, this timing is not necessarily a given. Compare with Ramadan, based on a purely lunar Islamic calendar, that migrates throughout the seasons over the years. Despite our calendar being lunar, the Torah emphasizes that Pesach must be celebrated in the spring (see for example Devarim 16:1). To ensure that Pesach is not celebrated too early, seven times every nineteen years we have a leap year (like this year, 5782) which adds an additional month just before the month of Nissan. This delays Pesach until the spring.

But why is it so important that Pesach fall in the springtime? The simple answer is that Pesach is linked to Yetziat Mitzrayim. Since Yetziat Mitzrayim occurred in the spring, so too Pesach is celebrated in the spring. Still, we can ask: why did G-d choose to take Bnei Yisrael out of Egypt specifically during spring?

Rashi (Shemot 13:4) suggests that the reason was practical. Spring is the most ideal time to travel through the desert. During the spring, “it is neither too hot, nor too cold, nor too rainy.” To make Bnei Yisrael’s travel more pleasant, G-d chose to take them out during the spring.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (Commentary to Devarim 16:1) explains that there is yet a deeper significance to Pesach being in springtime. He writes, “The festival of our historical revival must also be the festival of the revival of nature. The G-d Whose breath of spring awakens nature from the death-like numbness of winter is the same G-d Who delivered us from death and bondage and granted us life and freedom.” Just as G-d takes the dormant and cold year and causes it burst with life and vegetation, so too G-d brought us from the darkness of slavery to the light of freedom and worship of G-d. We celebrate Pesach during this time in order to capture this parallel.

According to Rashi and Rabbi Hirsch, the timing of Pesach is significant. For Rashi it reflects G-d’s care for us, even to the extent of timing our departure from Egypt for when it would be easiest. For Rabbi Hirsch, Pesach being in the spring helps us appreciate that Pesach is the time of our spiritual rebirth, in the past and in the present.



DIDN'T WE WASH OUR HANDS ENOUGH DURING COVID?

Question: If we don't usually wash our hands before eating vegetables dipped in salt water, why do we do it at the Seder?

Rabbi Jared Anstandig: That’s a good question, so good that Rabbi Weintraub discussed it above, on Page 8! As Rabbi Weintraub wrote, there is a position quoted in the Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 158:4) that before eating any food dipped in certain liquids, one must wash his/her hands. Yet, as *Mishneh Berurah* notes (158:20) most people do not have this practice. If this is the case that we are generally lenient in this respect, then why are we strict specifically at the Seder? Below we offer a few more answers, distinct from the ones that Rabbi Weintraub brought in his article.

Rabbi Mordechai Yoffe (*Levush* 473:6) argues that even though we are lenient with this halachah during the year, on Pesach we opt to go above and beyond. He explains, “Even though we are not strict about this during the rest of the year, it could be because of the love of the holiday... they act now with additional purity.” There is something special about the Seder that encourages us to behave with a higher level of purity and stringency.

(continued on the next page)

Did you know?

Our Women’s Beit Midrash holds three weekly programs for female university students!

NEW FEATURE

Questions Submitted by Teens

Rabbi Yoffe's teacher, Rabbi Moshe Isserles, in *Darchei Moshe* (473:12), offers a similar suggestion. He notes that, "The reading of the Haggadah is similar to prayer, for we are telling the honour of the praises of G-d. Therefore, one must wash at this point [as we do before prayer]." The recital of the Haggadah, just like prayer, requires preparation by washing the hands.

Rabbi Yechiel Michel Epstein, in *Aruch HaShulchan* (Orach Chaim 473:18), suggests that there is nothing inherently special about our washing. Instead, we wash at the seder because it is a strange thing to do. He writes, "For behold, we do many things differently on this night... for we have already explained that the Torah desires that children ask questions on this night." According to this, *U'rchatz* is like many of the features of the Seder – something out of the ordinary, in order to encourage the children to ask.



COULDN'T WE EAT FIRST?

Question: Why do we say Maggid before we eat matzah, marror, and charoset? Wouldn't it make sense if we ate a little before, so we are not hungry while reading Maggid?

Rabbi Chaim Metzger: Excellent point! You are correct, and many rabbis have written about this. The meal is late because we say Maggid before we eat matzah, marror, and the main meal, so that we tell the story while the foods symbolizing the korban pesach, matzah, and marror are laid out before us. This is recorded in the Maggid itself, in the paragraph that begins *Yachol*.

However, this often leads to people being very hungry and impatient during Maggid. How can we alleviate the problem? Here are four approaches:

1) Be organized - Rav Ovadia Yosef ז"ל recommended being organized - saving many of the divrei Torah for the meal itself to allow for reaching matzah, marror, and the meal more quickly.

2) Eat more karpas - The general custom is to eat less than a *kezayit* (olive's bulk) of a vegetable for karpas, to avoid the problem of whether to say a *borei nefashot* blessing afterward, or whether the berachah on karpas extends to marror as well. But the Rambam (Laws of Chametz and Matzah 8:2) says that one should eat more than a *kezayit* of karpas, and this is the practice of Yemenite Jewry. Certainly, this will help with hunger.

Rabbi Hershel Schachter recommends that someone who is hungry should keep eating more than a *kezayit* of karpas, so long as they eat in a way that there is no mental break between karpas and marror.

3) Drink something besides wine - Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Auerbach (*Halichot Shlomo* 9:34) allows those who are hungry to eat or drink during Maggid, so long as they do not drink wine.

Interestingly, Rabbi Shlomo Zalman used to surreptitiously eat less than a *kezayit* of karpas multiple times throughout Maggid, so that the time to say a berachah after eating karpas. However, he did not encourage others to follow this stringency

4) Certain snacks - Rabbi Ovadia Yosef is quoted as saying that one may eat non-vegetables, since they are not fit to be used for marror or karpas.

Rabbi Yitzchak Yosef explained that his father, Rav Ovadia, would often eat rice (Sephardim eat kitniyot on Pesach) right after kiddush and make a *borei nefashot*, before reaching karpas in the Seder. He said that the same is true of eating eggs.

All of these are suggestions. Please consult your Rabbi to see which solutions are right for you.

NEW FEATURE

Questions Submitted by Teens

THE EGYPTIANS DIDN'T HAVE A CHOICE!

Question: Hashem told Avraham that the Jews would be slaves and would suffer in Egypt. (Bereishit 15:13-14) So the Egyptians didn't have free will. Why were the Egyptians punished?

Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner: You are asking a very good question; in fact, the Rambam asked it as well. (Hilchot Teshuvah 6:5) Here are a few answers:

- First, Bereishit 15:13-14 never said that the Jews would suffer in Egypt, specifically. Our slavery could have happened elsewhere.
- Second, Rambam argues that each individual Egyptian was free to decide whether to harm the Jews, or whether to be good to the Jews.
- Third, Rabbi Avraham ben David (Raavad) points out that making us work, and making us suffer, did not have to include killing adults and drowning babies.

I would support the Raavad's answer by adding two points:

- 1) Hashem told Avraham that we would be slaves for 400 years, but we know that we were in Egypt for a shorter period. We can see that just by adding up the lifespans of Kehat, who was already alive when the Jews came to Egypt, his son Amram, and Amram's son Moshe. (Mechilta d'Rashbi 12:40) Some explain that our term was abbreviated because the Egyptians were more cruel than was originally forecast. This shows that they did not have to be as cruel as they were.
- 2) The Torah calls the slavery in Egypt "*perech*" (Shemot 1:13) One explanation for the word *perech* is that it is crushing. We were supposed to suffer under hard labour, but the Egyptians were even more ferocious against us, inflicting labour which was *perech*.



THE NON-JEW AT THE SEDER

Question: Why can't you invite a non-Jew to your Seder?

Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner: I've heard this question from many people, but I think it actually stems from a misunderstanding.

The Torah (Shemot 12:43) says that a *ben nechar* may not participate in the korban pesach. The literal translation of *ben nechar* is "foreigner"; our Sages have understood it to refer to people who worship foreign gods. (Zevachim 22b, Hilchot Korban Pesach 9:7) This prohibits such people from eating of the korban pesach; one who does not buy into the messages of Pesach about Hashem's miracles and Hashem's covenant with the Jewish People, should not partake of this korban.

However, that law is not about the Seder we observe when there is no Beit HaMikdash. Even though our Seder is meant to emulate the korban pesach celebration, we may invite a "foreigner". Some specifically avoid sharing the matzah on which we recite the berachah, but that's it. (Taz Orach Chaim 167:18) And of course, inviting a "foreigner" to your Seder may be a wonderful idea in particular situations.

But I should note a separate issue, which affects the Seder and every Yom Tov meal. On Yom Tov, we are only permitted to cook for Yom Tov meals; all other cooking is prohibited, like on Shabbat. For a non-Jew, there is no such thing as a "Yom Tov meal", and so we may not invite a non-Jew to any meal on Yom Tov. There are certain exceptions, such as for Yom Tov which is also Shabbat, when we won't cook anyway. Or if a non-Jew surprised everyone and arrived after all of the cooking was done, there would be no problem with them being present. But otherwise, we may not invite a non-Jew.

NEW FEATURE

Questions Submitted by Teens

Question 8: LET'S DO IT AGAIN!

Question: Why don't we have a Seder on the last days of Pesach?

Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner: This is a great question. I'm tempted to say that it's because we put so much work into the Seder on the first days, but in truth I think there is a better answer.

Different people find meaning in different aspects of the Pesach Seder. Some people really enjoy the chance to get together with family. Other people like to ask and answer questions about our emergence from Egypt. There are people who come to the Seder just for the food, or who appreciate the wave of nostalgia that comes with thinking about the Sedarim of the past. But at its core, the Seder is about observing the mitzvot of the first night of Pesach. [See Shemot 12-13.] We don't have a korban pesach right now, which limits what we can do. But we eat matzah and marror, we lean and drink wine, and we tell the story of our emergence from Egypt, all of which are essential mitzvot of Pesach night. As the Haggadah itself says in the *Maggid*, this is something we can only do on that night, the anniversary of when we left Egypt.

Of course, you could still ask: why don't we have a different Seder for other occasions? We crossed the Sea on the seventh day of Pesach; why don't we have a Seder to commemorate that moment? We could sing Az Yashir, drink four cups of water, and march around the room... Or we could have a Seder on Succot in the succah, or on Shavuot with a basket of produce like the *bikkurim* [first fruits]... One answer may be that having multiple Sedarim would dilute the impact of the Pesach Seder. Convening family, having an extended reading and discussion, and performing rituals with particular foods makes a big impression if we do it once; if we do it for every holiday, it loses its strength. [Have you ever found it difficult to muster enthusiasm for the Seder on the second night of Pesach?] We reserve that energy for the start of Pesach, when we remind ourselves and teach our children about how and why we became a nation.

For more on this excellent question, please see the article in this Seder Companion, "*Mah Nishtanah – Why Now?*" by Mrs. Prielle Rakovsky.

What Questions Came Up at Your Seder?

**Please send them to us at info@torontotorah.com,
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