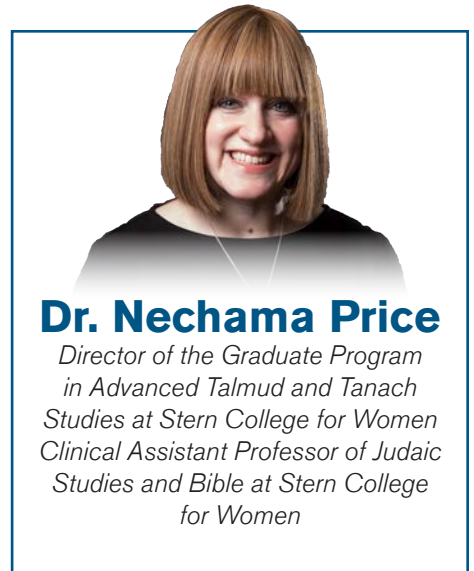


# Understanding the Unexpected

During the Pesach Seder's Maggid, we recount the Jewish people's journey from slavery to redemption and fulfill the biblical obligation of *ve-higadeta le-vincha*,<sup>1</sup> articulating the yetziat Mitzrayim narrative to our children. Thus, the intuitive choice for the Hagaddah's historical account of the Exodus would be a text written in the most organized and clearest fashion, ensuring that children of all ages can understand precisely what occurred and the lessons they are meant to glean from the story. In fact, that would seem to be the lens through which we consider Ba'al Ha-Hagaddah's choice for the

primary text selected to tell our national story.

Precisely for this reason, questions arise regarding the pesukim that the Ba'al Ha-Hagaddah chose to include or omit when relaying the story of yetziat Mitzrayim. It is quite unexpected, for example, that the Hagaddah begins with the tale of Avraham's father, Terach, and his idol worship.<sup>2</sup> But even stranger, the Ba'al Ha-Hagaddah selects pesukim from Navi, parroting Yehoshua's summary of Jewish history that he imparted just before he died (Joshua 24:1-4).<sup>3</sup> Why does the Ba'al Ha-Hagaddah choose to retell the story



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in the past tense, from the perspective

1 Ex. 13:8. Also see Mishnah Pesachim 10:5; Sefar HaChinukh 21:1; Rambam Sefer HaMitzvot 157.

2 הגדה של פסח: מתחלה עובדי עבודה זרה היו אבותינו, ועכשיו קרבנו המקום לעבודתו, שנאמר: ויאמר יהושע אל כל העם, כה אמר ה' אלקי ישראל: בעבר הנהר ישבו אבותיכם מעולם, תרח אבי אברהם ואבי נחור, ויעבדו אלהים אחרים ואקח את אביכם את אברהם מעבר הנהר ואולף אותו בכל ארץ כנען, וארבה את זרעו ואתן לו את יצחק, ואתן ליצחק את יעקב ואת עשו. ואתן לעשו את הר שעיר לרשת אתו, ויעקב ובניו ירדו מצרים:

3 יהושע כד:א-ד: (א) ויאסף יהושע את כל שבטי ישראל שכמה ויקרא לזקני ישראל ולראשיו ולשפטיו ולשטריו ויחיצבו לפני האלקים. (ב) ויאמר יהושע אל כל העם כה אמר ה' אלקי ישראל בעבר הנהר ישבו אבותיכם מעולם תרח אבי אברהם ואבי נחור ויעבדו אלהים אחרים. (ג) ואקח את אביכם את אברהם מעבר הנהר ואולף אותו בכל ארץ כנען [וארבה] (וארב) את זרעו ואתן לו את יצחק. (ד) ואתן ליצחק את יעקב ואת עשו ואתן לעשו את הר שעיר לרשת אתו ויעקב ובניו ירדו מצרים.

of Yehoshua, rather than quoting the original account of the story, namely the pesukim found in Parshat Shemot?

However, upon further examination, there is an even more basic question based on the selection of the Ba'al Ha-Hagaddah. When comparing the words found in the Haggadah to the words of Yehoshua, it is striking that the Ba'al Ha-Hagaddah seems to purposely end the citation from Sefer Yehoshua before the conclusion of the story! Yehoshua begins with Terach and Avraham and continues to describe Moshe and Aharon taking us out of Egypt, and concludes with a brief mention of the conquest of the land of Israel.<sup>4</sup> However, the Hagaddah ends its quotation four pesukim early, leaving out most of the story: Moshe and Aharon being chosen and the miracles G-d performs in Egypt, which lead to our inheriting the land of Israel (24:5-8). Thus, we are forced to question: What is the objective of the Ba'al Ha-Hagaddah and how does his selection and omission of pesukim help him accomplish his goal, ultimately helping us to fulfill our obligation of teaching our children the story of the exodus from Egypt?

Fascinatingly, just a little further into the Maggid section of the Hagaddah, the Ba'al Ha-Hagaddah repeats this exact

pattern! A few paragraphs later, the Hagaddah begins a second rendition of the story of yetziat Mitzrayim, choosing yet again not to cite the pesukim from Sefer Shemot.<sup>5</sup> This time, the Ba'al Ha-Hagaddah selects a quote from Sefer Devarim (21:5-8), citing a declaration made by a farmer bringing his first fruits (Bikkurim) to the Beit HaMikdash.<sup>6</sup> These pesukim, once again, begin with a story from Sefer Bereishit, this time the tale of Lavan and Yaakov, followed by the narrative of the Jewish people's plight in Egypt.<sup>7</sup> Additionally, once again the Ba'al Ha-Hagaddah stops quoting the farmer's speech before its conclusion, intentionally omitting the final verse that celebrates the bringing of the Jewish people to the land of Israel (v. 9).<sup>8</sup>

Thus, a very specific pattern emerges: Twice the Ba'al Ha-Hagaddah quotes pesukim of **someone** reciting the story of yetziat Mitzrayim to others rather than quoting the original story found in Sefer Shemot. Twice, he begins the story too early, citing narratives from Sefer Bereishit and ends the story too soon, purposely excluding the conclusions of the sources he is quoting.

To address these questions, we must consider the setting and context of each of these recitations of yetziat

Mitzrayim quoted in the Hagaddah. As mentioned earlier, the pesukim from Sefer Yehoshua are excerpts from Yehoshua's speech relaying his final message to Am Yisrael before his death. Under his leadership, the Jewish people successfully enter, conquer, and divide the land of Israel. Thus, his audience is the next generation, a Jewish people who are now living and settled in the land of Israel, who did not experience firsthand the freedom from slavery of their parents' generation. Similarly, the farmer bringing his bikkurim is simply reciting a story from the distant past. Since this farmer must be living in Israel, he must have acquired a piece of land, planted a field, produced fruit, and now brings his first fruits to the Beit Hamikdash. Both stories are being told from the perspective of Jewish people already living in the land of Israel, not those who have directly experienced slavery and redemption.

Indeed, further comparison of these two accounts highlights more similarities between them. First, both stories are being told specifically in the presence of G-d: Yehoshua gathers the nation to the land of Shechem, a location described in the pasuk as, "ויתיצבו לפני האלקים" *"they stood before G-d"* (Josh. 24:1).<sup>9</sup> Similarly, when bringing the first fruit, the concept of

4 יהושע כד-ה: (ה) ואֶשְׁלַח אֶת מֹשֶׁה וְאֶת אֶהֱרֹן וְאָגַף אֶת מִצְרַיִם כַּאֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתִי בְּקִרְבּוֹ וְאַחַר הוֹצֵאתִי אֹתְכֶם. (ו) וְאוֹצִיא אֶת אֲבוֹתֵיכֶם מִמִּצְרַיִם וְתָבֵאוּ הֵימָּה וְיִרְדְּפוּ מִצְרַיִם אַחֲרֵי אֲבוֹתֵיכֶם בְּרָכָב וּבַפָּרָשִׁים יָם סוּף. (ז) וַיִּצְעְקוּ אֵל ה' וַיִּשְׂם מֶאֱפֶל בַּיַּיִנִּים וּבֵין הַמִּצְרַיִם וַיְבִיא עֲלֵיו אֶת הַיָּם וַיִּכְסְהוּ וַתִּרְאֶינָה עֵינֵיכֶם אֶת אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתִי בְּמִצְרַיִם וְתִשְׁבוּ בַּמִּדְבָּר יָמִים רַבִּים. (ח) [וְאָבִיא] (וּאֲבִיא) אֶתְכֶם אֶל אֶרֶץ הָאֱמֹרִי הַיּוֹשֵׁב בָּעֵבֶר הַיַּרְדֵּן וַיִּלְחַמוּ אִתְּכֶם וְאִתָּן אוֹתָם בְּיַדְכֶם וַתִּירָשׁוּ אֶת אֶרֶץ וְאֲשֶׁמִּידִם מִפְּנֵיכֶם.

5 הגדה של פסח: צא ולמד מה בקש לבן הארמי לעשות ליעקב אבינו: שפרעה לא יזר אלא על הזקרים, ולכן בקש לעקר את-הכל. שצאמר: ארמי אבד אבי, וירד מצרימה ויגר שם במתי מעט, ויהי שם לגוי גדול, עצום ורב; וירעו אתנו המצרים ויענונו, ויתנו עלינו עבדה קשה; ונצעק אליה' אלקי אבותינו, וישמע ה' את-קולנו, וירא את-ענינו ואת עמלנו ואת לחצנו: ויוצאנו ה' ממצרים ביד חזקה, ויברע נטויה, ובמרא גדל, ובאותות ובמפתים:

6 דברים כו-ה: (ה) וענית ואמרת לפני ה' אלקיך ארמי אבד אבי וירד מצרימה ויגר שם במתי מעט ויהי שם לגוי גדול עצום ורב. (ו) וירעו אתנו המצרים ויענונו ויתנו עלינו עבדה קשה. (ז) ונצעק אל ה' אלקי אבותינו וישמע ה' את קולנו וירא את ענינו ואת עמלנו ואת לחצנו. (ח) ויוצאנו ה' ממצרים ביד חזקה ויברע נטויה ובמרא גדל ובאותות ובמפתים.

7 Although there are mefarshim who translate the phrase "Arami oved avi" as referencing Avraham (Rashbam Deut. 26:5) or Yaakov (Ibn Ezra and Rabbeinu Bachya Deut. 26:5), the Hagaddah posits the interpretation of the verse based on Rashi (Deut. 26:5) that it is referring to Lavan seeking to destroy Yaakov.

8 דברים כו:ט: ויבאנו אל המקום הזה ויתן לנו את הארץ הזאת ארץ זבת חלב ודבש.

9 One may question why Shechem is referenced as standing before G-d, since during Yehoshua's time the Mishkan was established in Gilgal. Ralbag (Josh. 26:1) explains that Yehoshua's speech is a preamble to his renewing the covenant between G-d and the Jewish people, thus this location is granted the status of "lifnei Hashem." R. Moshe Yitzchak Ashkenazi in his *Sefer Hoil Moshe* (Josh 26:1) adds that Shechem is the place where two of our forefathers, Avraham and Yaakov built a *mizbeach*, an altar, to serve Hashem (Gen. 12:8; Gen. 33:20), earning the title of "lifnei Hashem."

being “*lifnei Hashem*” is repeated twice. The farmer is commanded to stand, “לפני מזבח ה' אלקיך,” “*in front of the altar before Hashem your G-d*” (Deut. 26:4) and make this declaration “לפני ה' אלקיך,” “*before Hashem your G-d*” (Deut. 26:5), emphasizing his location, standing by the Beit Hamikdash, the dwelling place of G-d. Thus, both stories quoted in our Hagaddah to recount yetziat Mitzrayim transpired in a location that epitomizes the special relationship between G-d and the Jewish people.

Second, as noted above, both Yehoshua and the farmer begin their speeches by referring to a story from Sefer Bereishit, reminiscing about evil influences of our past that our ancestors had to overcome (Terach and Lavan). Yehoshua references Terach, a known idol worshiper, describing how Avraham leaves behind his family to discover monotheism. Why begin the story here? Yehoshua knows that the biggest challenge awaiting the next generation of the Jewish people is the influence of their idolatrous Canaanite neighbors in the land of Israel, who may pressure them to return to the idolatrous ways of Terach. Thus, Yehoshua chooses to gather the Jewish people to Shechem, the exact location where Avraham spoke to G-d for the first time in Canaan and is promised the land of Israel (Gen. 12:6), and commences his speech with a reminder that the Jewish story really begins with Avraham. Avraham was chosen to begin the nation of G-d because he rejected his family’s belief in idols. Therefore, in that spot, in **Shechem**, Yehoshua commands the Jewish people “הסירו את אלהי הנכר אשר בקרבכם” (Josh. 26:23), borrowing Yaakov’s language in Genesis

35, where he commands his own sons “הסרו את אלהי הנכר אשר בתכם” (Gen. 35:2), “*remove the foreign gods that are amongst you*,” referring to the idols that they took from the spoils of **Shechem**. Yehoshua’s goal of starting the story of yetziat Mitzrayim from Avraham and Terach and not from the moment of enslavement is to prepare the people of his generation for the greatest challenge of the next stage of Jewish history. Following in the footsteps of Avraham, they must reject the temptations and invitations of their idolatrous neighbors and remain loyal to Hashem alone.

So too the farmer, speaking on behalf of himself and his fellow farmers, is declaring a warning against succumbing to the greatest challenge facing them. A farmer can easily become overwhelmed by his wealth and successful produce and must protect himself from an attitude of “כחי ועצמי ידי עשה לי את החיל” — “*my own power and the strength of my hand has made me this wealth*” (Deut 8:17). To fight this instinct, he must publicly declare that G-d is the source of his precious produce and the collective success of Am Yisrael by repeating the story of yetziat Mitzrayim. To further emphasize this point, he begins the story by mentioning Yaakov escaping from the evil influences of Lavan. Lavan is a symbol of selfishness, always coveting more wealth and honor (see Rashi Gen. 24:29, 29:13) and, ultimately, to control Yaakov’s family. Rav Yosef Zvi Rimon in his Pesach Hagaddah explains that “Lavan wanted to control everything—to destroy the very essence of Am Yisrael’s identity. That is the greatest danger to Am Yisrael.” Thus, the farmer must commence his story of yetziat

Mitzrayim by describing how Yaakov’s family extricated themselves from the evil proclivities of Lavan, setting precedence that Am Yisrael attributes full credit and control to Hashem, not to any human being.<sup>10</sup>

With all of this in mind, we can now answer our opening questions: Why do we read these alternative versions of the yetziat Mitzrayim story instead of the narrative presented in Sefer Shemot? Perhaps it is to demonstrate that the purpose of the Seder night is *ve-higadeta le-vincha*, specifically to tell the story in way that we can make it relevant to our children, not just tell them stories of the past. Thus, we read two versions of **people** recounting the story of yetziat Mitzrayim, each giving over an appropriate message that was germane to that moment in time, specific to that generation.

Conceivably, this also explains why, in both recounts, the Ba’al Ha-Hagaddah leaves out the endings of their respective narratives. If the goal was to show how the story of yetziat Mitzrayim can be told in a manner that would provide distinct messages applicable for that generation and particular for that audience, then perhaps the endings are purposely removed. At our own seder, we need to personalize the retelling of yetziat Mitzrayim, teaching our children the messages that are relevant for our time. Thus, perhaps, the Ba’al Ha-Hagaddah left the endings of story open for us to fill in the blanks.

10 These two principles, reminding ourselves that everything is from Hashem (the farmer), and rejection of idol worship (Yehoshua) are joint together in the same warnings of Moshe towards all of Am Yisrael and how they lead to us forgetting Hashem in our lives. In Devarim chapter 8, he begins by warning us against the attitude of “כחי ועצמי ידי עשה לי את החיל” (v. 17), leads to forgetting Hashem’s involvement in our lives, “והיה אם שכח תשכח את ה' אלקיך” (v. 19), and that leads to directly to a life of idol worship “והלכת אחרי אלהים אחרים ועבדתם והשתחית להם” (v. 19).