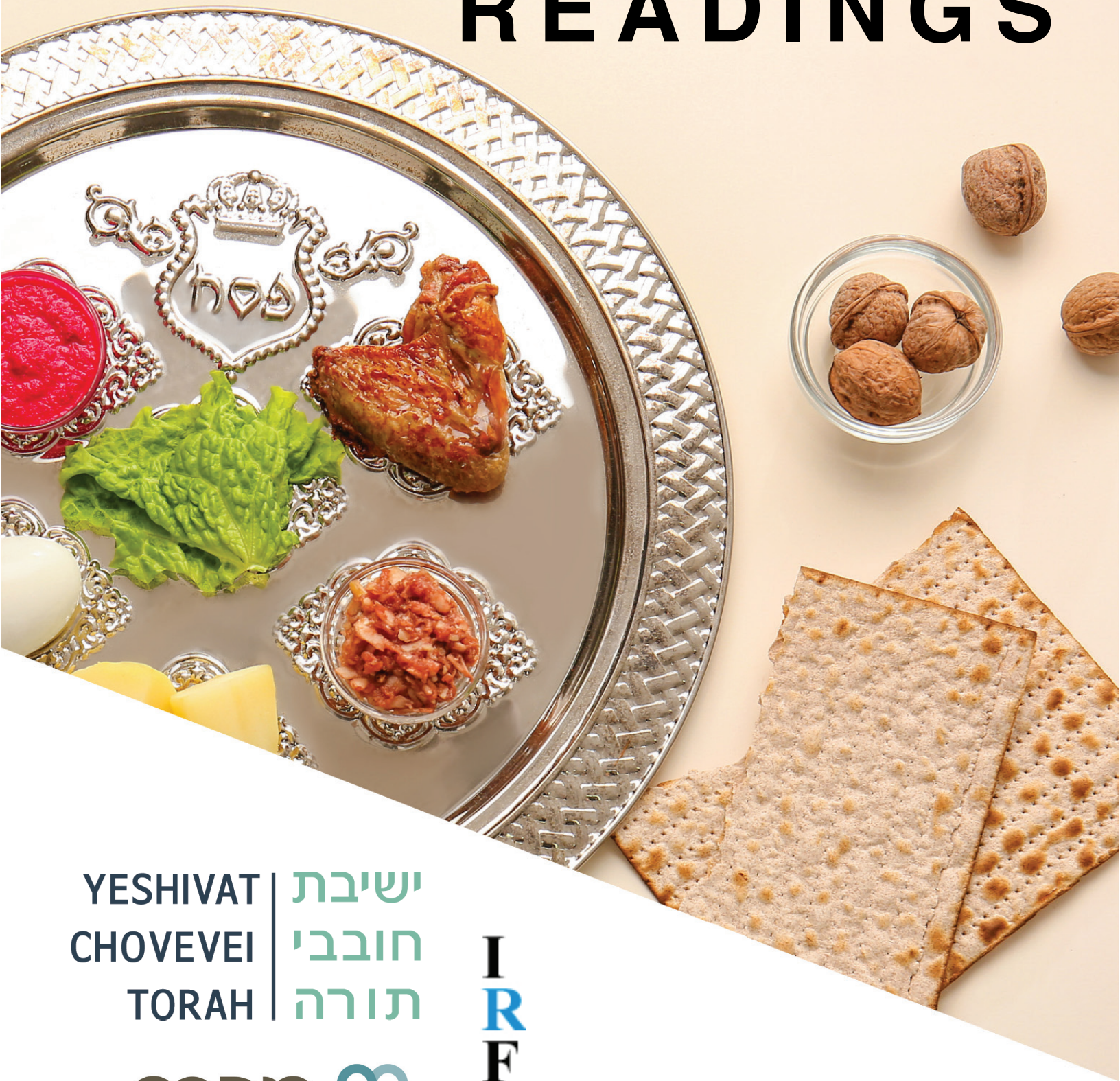
PASSOVER READINGS



YESHIVAT CHOVEVEI TORAH

ישיבת חובבי תורה

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Study Guides

As a nation, when the world seems dark and bleak, we find hope in the promising flicker of light, we seek joy and song.

The Gemara in Pesachim (85b) describes the Korban Pesach meal, the seder in the time of the Beit Hamikdash:

כְּזֵיתָא פִּסְחָא,
There was [only] as much as an olive of the Passover-offering to eat.

One tiny morsel of food does not sound celebratory. But the Gemara goes on:

וְהַלֵּילָא פָּקַע אִיגָּרָא.
Yet Hallel split the roofs!

Praising God through song is the ultimate response to difficult and challenging times. We gather ourselves together, and no matter whether we are together with all our loved ones or we are all celebrating separately; no matter whether we are eating a feast or a simple meal, we sing. We capture the essence of celebrating through Torah and song. We raise the roof with our words, offering hope and optimism and joy.

Through a joint effort of the IRF, YCT, and Maharat, we offer these words as a medium to help lift up your Pesach celebration. We thank Rabbi Yonah Berman, Maharat Ruth Friedman, Susan Greenspoon-Zemel, Rabbanit Gloria Nusbacher and Jen Vegh for their work in producing this publication, and all of the authors for their collaborative effort drawing on wisdom and scholarship from rabbis and rabbis in training from across North America, Israel, South Africa, London and Australia. May these words help you sing songs of praise and joy that will elevate and “split your roofs”.

Tze U-l’zmad. Go and Learn.

Rabba Sara Hurwitz
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Rabbi Dov Linzer
President and Rosh HaYeshiva, Norman and Tova Bulow Chair, YCT

Rabbi Saul Strosberg
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Living Lessons from the Korban Pesach

Rabbi Avi Weiss

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As we're about to leave Egypt, we are commanded to offer a Paschal Lamb. While the biblical mandate is presented rather briefly in chapter 12 of the Book of Exodus, the Talmud devotes five chapters to explicate its laws. Built into its intricacies are spiritual, relevant messages.

1) Stay Humble (lo tizbach al chametz): By noon on the day before Passover, when the sacrifice can be offered, no leaven (chametz) can be in the house (Exodus 23:18, Pesachim 28b). The sacrifice is a celebration of the great victory over Egypt. Precisely when victorious, one could become "bloated." And so, chametz, puffed up dough, symbolic in the Talmud (Berachot 17a) and in later chassidic literature of hubris and self-absorption, cannot be present or possessed – reminding us to remain humble even when most successful.

2) Make Space: Every morning and late afternoon, the Standard Sacrifice (Korban Tamid) is the first and last to be offered. There is one exception – the Paschal Lamb is offered after the afternoon Tamid. By dint of its constancy, the Tamid has the right to maintain its position as first and last always, yet it makes way for the Paschal Lamb, teaching the importance of stepping back and making space for others when necessary (Pesachim 58a).

3) Inner Meaning (Korban Chagigah-Pesach): Along with the Paschal Lamb, the holiday sacrifice (Korban Chagigah) is offered. The function of the Chagigah was to fill a person up prior to their eating the Korban Pesach. As a result, the Paschal Lamb was eaten when one was already satiated (Pesachim 70a). The eating of the Paschal Lamb is not primarily for satisfying our physical needs – it is rather to focus on celebrating the inner spiritual meaning of the holiday.

4) Empathize (ein korban tzibbur chaluk): If the majority of the community is impure, the Paschal Lamb is still to be offered by everyone based on the principle that impurity is waived for the sake of community (Tumah hudcha be'tzibbur). Interestingly, even those who are pure offer their sacrifice as if their status is one of impurity. In this way, we do not split the community (ein korban tzibbur chaluk, Pesachim 79b-80a). In other words, no matter my purity, if the majority is impure, I am impure – emotionally empathizing with the amcha.

5) Making a Difference (palga palga): And suppose, the Talmud asks, 50% of the people are pure, and 50% are not – what then? While the Talmud weaves a discussion about what to do in such circumstances (Pesachim 79b), one wonders, why the debate, as the possibility of such a perfectly even split is highly unlikely. Here, the law may inspire us to consider the observation made by Maimonides that we should view our deeds and the world as evenly balanced (Hilchot Teshuva 3:4). The next good deed we perform could make all the difference.

6) Reflect (piggul): Among the laws of the Paschal Lamb—and for that matter all sacrifices— is the concept of piggul (Leviticus 7:18, 19:5-7; Pesachim 120b). If one's thoughts are inappropriate, such as imagining eating the sacrifice after its prescribed time, the sacrifice is invalid. Our inner thoughts play a crucial role in our carrying out the details of the external ritual obligations; so too, in our daily lives as our inner thoughts are reflected in our actions.

7) Properly Prepare (minui): All who eat of the Paschal Lamb must RSVP (Pesachim 61a) – registering their intent to join a particular group for the ritual. This teaches the importance of intentionality – of focusing and preparing before participating in an important ritual. In the end, an act is as meaningful as its preliminaries. As Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik said, there is no holiness without preparation.

8) Turn Fate Into Destiny (tzli): The Talmud emphasizes that any accumulation of water on the skewer may leave the impression that the Paschal Lamb is being cooked, which would invalidate the sacrifice (Pesachim 74a). There must be absolute clarity that the animal is being roasted. This burning simulates the fire of exile. In the same breath, fire can transform metal into a more useful instrument for productivity. Indeed, we need to be on fire, we need inner passion, to be redeemed. History has shown that when oppressed, when aflame, we rise to the occasion, become tougher, and have the capacity, as Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik pointed out, to "turn fate into destiny."

9) See Good in Others (rimon): The skewer used is pomegranate wood (Mishna Pesachim 7:1). The pomegranate reminds us of the rabbinic teaching that even the greatest sinners – like the pomegranate's outer shell, which is not eaten and, if you will, is cast away – have endless inner pure seeds and have the capacity to return (Berachot 57a). This concept is reflected in the story told by Dr. Yaffa Eliach, of blessed memory, of the Judenrat Schneeweiss who turned on his own people. One Yom Kippur, however, he refused to submit to Nazi demands that he force Jews in the camp to eat. He was shot dead on the spot. Dr. Eliach commented: Like a pomegranate, Schneeweiss showed that those seemingly furthest away have sparks, seeds of goodness.

10) Not Shaming Others (nossar): If the Paschal Lamb becomes tameh (impure), it is burnt near the Temple. This, says the Talmud, is in order to embarrass the owner as, no doubt, he was negligent in allowing the sacrifice to become tameh. And yet, the wood used for fire comes from the pyre of the altar (not one's personal wood). This, says the Talmud (Pesachim 81b), is in order to not embarrass those who may be poor and not possess personal wood. An important teaching: While there are times that rebuke through shame is necessary, those moments are rare – ultimately, embarrassing another should be avoided.

11) Silence: The Talmud offers an intricate discussion on what one does and what one says if searching for a designated Paschal Lamb that had been lost. Interestingly, it concludes that sometimes the best solution can be achieved if one says nothing, i.e. not detailing to the registered group that he is conducting this search on their behalf. It concludes by underscoring the importance of holding back speech (Pesachim 99a). All my adult life, I've been encouraging people to speak out. But the Talmud teaches that sometimes it is best to remain silent. As Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel has said, "I have found nothing better for a person than silence" (Avot 1:17).

12) Foundational Mission (yachid me'ikra): Rabbi Yehuda in the Talmud posits that one cannot sacrifice and eat the Paschal Lamb alone, highlighting the importance of community. And while those registered in a group may drop out and join another group, minimally, says Rabbi Yehuda, one of the individuals first signed up must remain (Pesachim 99a). This perhaps teaches that while a mission may evolve, reshape, even expand, it should never turn its back on its original "roots" – an earlier participant must always be present.

13) Second Chance (Pesach Sheni): If one is too far from the Temple (derech rechoka), he or she is given another opportunity to offer the Korban Pesach thirty days later, on Pesach Sheni. How far is too far away? One position insists it is even one step outside of the Temple area (Pesachim 93b). Truth be told, one can be far, but close; just as one can be close, and yet far. And so Pesach Sheni could be a second chance for one who is physically close, but spiritually distant. Such individuals are warmly welcomed.

14) Passing Over (Pesach – pise'ach): The Talmud records differences between the first Paschal Lamb slaughtered and those that followed (Pesachim 96a). As we left Egypt, the blood of the lamb was sprinkled on the two side posts of the door and the lintel (Exodus 12:7). The Angel of Death, seeing the blood, passed over that home, sparing the first born Israelite inside. Hence, the holiday is called Pesach – Pass Over. But vocalized differently, Pesach could read pise'ach – literally, one who limps or is lame. While there is, to my knowledge, no Midrash that speaks to this association, it may teach an important message. Lest one think that Passover is meant to celebrate only those of particular strength, with an ability to "pass over," the term pise'ach reminds us to reach out to the disadvantaged, the vulnerable – those who even find it difficult to walk. As we were downtrodden in Egypt, so, too, should we be there for those who are downtrodden, forgotten, too often left out. The pise'ach plays a central role in Pesach – in the spirit of the ha lachma anya (this is the bread of affliction) – kol ditsrich yetei v'yifsach, all who are needy are welcome to join in the Pesach feast.

Yes, the laws are intricate. The folios of Talmud running one page, one chapter into another. Still, beneath its surface it imparts spiritual messages, touching the soul, helping us soar higher and higher.

The Seder without the Korban Pesach

Rabbi Dov Linzer

President and Rosh HaYeshiva, Norman and Tova Bulow Chair, YCT

(Previously published April 5, 2012)

The seder is one of the most powerful religious experiences of the year, attracting a large percentage of unaffiliated and secular Jews: 70% of American Jews and 80% of secular Israeli Jews say they will attend a seder this year. Even for religious and observant Jews, the seder is a profound event, a night that, certainly as children but even for adults, we eagerly anticipate and whose memory we cherish. Given the power of the evening, it is worth noting that we are missing a central part of the seder – the Pesach sacrifice. The korban Pesach is the one mitzvah that the Torah explicitly commands, many times and in great detail, to be done this evening. One would imagine that its absence would seriously undercut the meaning and impact of the seder, but instead this absence is barely noticed. How did this occur? How did the seder stop being about the korban Pesach?

Let us first look at the period immediately after the destruction of the Temple. Here was a time when the people still vividly remembered the Pesach sacrifice on the seder night, and its absence would have created a gaping hole in the seder. What was done to fill this hole?

An inspection of the Tannaitic sources reveals that there were those who actually continued to bring a pseudo-Pesach on this night. They would slaughter a lamb, roast it whole, and eat it on the seder night (Mishna Beitza 2:7). Some people, it seems, would even refer to it as a pesach (Tosefta Beitza 2:15)! While many Sages objected, Rabban Gamliel, who lived 30-50 years after the destruction, approved of this practice. According to one source, it would appear that he adopted this practice personally, and would roast a sheep and call it a pesach (Mishna Pesachim 7:2, and Reshash, ad. loc.).

Considering this practice of Rabban Gamliel, a new – and shocking – meaning emerges from the statement: "Rabban Gamliel used to say, whoever does not say these three things on Pesach has not fulfilled his obligation: Pesach, Matzah, and Maror" (Mishna Pesachim 10:5). While in our Haggadah the text is "The pesach that our forefathers used to eat – what did it symbolize?", the text in the Mishna does not place the pesach in the past, but rather in the present: "This pesach that we eat – what does it symbolize?" Perhaps this was the text that was said only when there was a Temple. But perhaps this was also the text that Rabban Gamliel said himself, when he ate his roasted sheep which he called a pesach!

We of course have moved away from such a practice, and many of us have the practice not to eat any roasted meat on the seder night so that it should not look like we are eating the korban Pesach. (Shulkhan Arukh, Orah Hayyim, 476:1-2). There are those, however, who go out of their way to eat roasted meat, to continue this practice of commemorating the korban Pesach in the spirit of Rabban Gamliel.

This, then, was one response to the loss of the korban – to try to create a substitute, to try to continue the practice as it had been, only now with a pseudo-Pesach rather than the real thing. However, another response was possible, and this was the response of Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai. Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai was the leader of the Jewish People both before and after the Temple was destroyed. After the destruction of the Temple, we read that he promulgated many practices in memory of the Temple (Mishna Rosh HaShana, 4:1 and 4:3). Most of these revolved around the yomim tovim – the taking of the lulav all seven days, the blowing of the Shofar on Shabbat in the presence of a beit din – practices that had in the past only been done in the Temple. It is thus striking that what is noticeably absent is a similar practice to commemorate the destruction on the seder night, when the loss of the Temple is most obvious. Why did Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai ignore the seder night?

The answer is that Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai was not trying – through these practices – to make us remember the Temple and mourn its loss. He was rather helping us transition away from a Temple-based Judaism. Remember that it was he who struck a deal with Vespasian Caesar, as Vespasian was about to destroy the Temple, to preserve Yavneh and its sages (Gittin 56b). Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai had the foresight to realize that the future of the Jewish People, what would keep Judaism alive, was no longer the Temple, but rather Torah. Yavneh would replace the Temple, Yavneh would be the new center of our religious life.

Thus, Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai's post-Temple practices, far from directing our focus backwards, towards the Temple, focused our attention forward, to a Torah-centric Judaism. The blowing of the shofar in a beit din shows that the Temple is not needed – the shofar can be blown on Shabbat without it. Taking the lulav for seven days without a Temple demonstrates the same thing – we can do these practices with or without the Temple. And that is why there could be no special practice on the seder night. To make a practice to replace the pesach would only focus our attention backwards, would only focus us on its absence, on what we are missing. This perhaps was the response of other Sages, but it was not the response of Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai.

[For a fuller analysis of Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai's approach, and the implications of this to the relationship between prayer and sacrifices, see my article, which originally appeared in Milin Havivin vol. 2 "Rabban Yohanan Ben Zakkai and Zekher L'Mikdash".]

So if we are to move on, what do we focus on if not the korban Pesach? The answer is obvious: talmud Torah. What is the central mitzvah of the seder night, other than the eating of matzah? It is the telling of the story of the Exodus. But it is not just a simple telling. If it were, we would just read the verses from Shemot that tell the story in a full and detailed manner. Our magid is not just a telling; it is an act of talmud Torah – it is the analysis of Torah verses through the medium of Torah she'b'al peh.

Consider, we begin the Haggadah with a mishna – the mitzvah to tell about the Exodus in the evenings. We then move on with "Barukh HaMakom", a passage that Rav Soloveitchik has explained as a type of mini-birkat haTorah: "Blessed is the One who has given Torah to his nation Israel." We then go on to talk about the four children, quoting the relevant verses. But this explanation – that these verses are referring to different types of children, not to different circumstances that evoked the questions – is not the simple sense of the verse, but rather how the Rabbis have understood these verses. Next up is the classic rabbinic teaching, "Perhaps this mitzvah should begin on Rosh Chodesh" – an inspection of the verses with rabbinic hermeneutics to prove that there is a mitzvah of magid tonight. This entire introduction is replete with talmud Torah and Torah she'b'al peh.

Then comes magid itself. Magid, as mentioned, is not just telling. The Mishna describes it as "One interprets, doresh, from Arami oved Avi, until he completes the entire portion." (Mishna Pesachim 10:4). What we engage in is classic Rabbinic interpretation, taking one section of the verse, giving a drasha on it, and then moving on to the next section of the verse. The mitzvah of the night is to tell the story through the process of talmud Torah. And, not just any Torah learning, but specifically Rabbinic interpretation – Torah she'b'al peh.

How did the seder stop being about the korban Pesach? The same way our religious life stopped being about the Temple. Through the leadership of Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai, talmud Torah has now become the center of our religious life. Yavneh was the successor to the Temple. Yavneh replaced the Temple, and the mitzvah of magid – of telling the story through Rabbinic talmud Torah – replaced the korban Pesach. And it is through the vibrancy of talmud Torah, of engagement, discussion, and reflection, that our Judaism remains alive and vibrant till today!

Chag Kasher v'Sameach!

The Spiritual Pull of Pesach Cleaning

Rabbanit Adena Berkowitz

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With the advent of Pesach 5781, we can't help but reflect on last year's yomtov. It conjures up difficult memories of the enfolding pandemic, lockdowns, unrelenting sounds of ambulances, and the resulting terrible suffering and losses of so many from our family, friends and community. Here we are a year later, and hopefully now, with the arrival of the COVID-19 vaccines, the severe threats to our health — both physical and mental — and our general wellbeing will begin to dissipate. As the vaccine becomes more widely available, we can begin to look forward to the time when our lives will take on more of a sense of normalcy. For some of us, it's beginning this Pesach, where we are hosting or being hosted at sedarim or even away at a Covid-safe program. Wherever we find ourselves, as we sit at the seder, it's a good opportunity to reflect on not only what transpired to get our homes ready, but also on whether we were nourishing our souls along the way.

I have been inspired by a story of Rabbi Levi Yitzhak of Berditchev, the well-known Hasidic Rebbe and leader (1740-1809) who was famous for advocating to God for justice for the Jewish people. When Pesach would be approaching, he would go out and watch all the Jewish women hard at work, as they labored to eradicate every last morsel of chametz. He would lift his eyes heavenward and in the same spirit evoked on Rosh Hashanah, when we ask that the angels born of the shofar blasts of (Ta)kshr"k (the identifying letters of the Hebrew words Tekiah, Shevarim, Teruah and Tekiah) should speak on our behalf, he would say "Master of the World! May it be Your will that the angels born of Toiling, Scrubbing, Rinsing and Tidying come before Your Throne of Glory and speak on our behalf." (In Yiddish the initials of these four terms are also (Ta)kshr"k —kratzen (scouring), shobben (scraping), rieben (rubbing), and kasheren (making kosher)).

Rabbi Levi Yitzhak of Berditchev's words remind us of something very meaningful. The cleaning we did for Pesach was not meant to be mere Spring cleaning. There is no question that we needed to seek out the places where chametz may have been, particularly where we eat, and make sure we gave it a good purging. But we should never forget that, while the main impetus to do so was to fulfill the mitzvot connected with the chag and in so doing live up to the halakhic requirements, after the fact, we need to feel the spiritual pull of our task. There is no doubt that the work was overwhelming (and hopefully the burden was shared by both women and men). But in retrospect, we can replace the feeling of having engaged in mere drudgery to get our homes ready for Pesach and rather see it as the Berditchever did: Holy Housework! Even in the seemingly mundane task of cleaning, holiness resides. In that way, as we sit like royalty at our sedarim, we can take a look back at the labor it took to reach this moment and begin to understand that our spiritual work began long before the start of the holiday. Chag Kasher v'Sameach!

Rabbanit Adena Berkowitz, a practicing therapist, is the author of The Jewish Journey Haggadah.

The Freedom Paradox

Nomi Kaltmann
(Maharat ‘23)

When one thinks of freedom, one often imagines going to a luxurious resort, travelling on a cruise ship to some far-flung exotic island, with all our needs taken care of for the duration of our holiday. Freedom often evokes an image of being free from work, commitments, responsibilities, and the banalities of everyday life. In the 21st century, freedom often seems synonymous with complete relaxation. Passover is the celebration of the freedom of the Jewish people from slavery. But we are left with the question of how can one really be free when the weeks leading up to Passover seem filled with mountains of work to do, from cleaning the house, to cooking for a small army? In addition, unlike the ultimate visions of total choice that may be part of an ideal “freedom holiday,” Passover has extremely strict requirements which often involve giving up on eating some of our favourite foods, and the rituals of the Seder require us to consume more matza and wine than we might choose. So how is Passover a celebration of freedom?

Our sages teach that every person in every generation is obligated to personally see themselves as if they went free from Egypt. What does this mean? I believe this is a challenge for each person to constantly move forward from their own personal “Egypt” and break free from the limitations that have been holding them back in their personal lives. We are challenged to break through our boundaries and live a life that is not only more fulfilling but that allows us to attain a higher level of sophistication and refinement in our everyday lives.

Our tradition teaches that the Divine Potential within each Jew is infinite. When one makes a commitment to better oneself and to take on even the smallest of commitments to progress forward, this is a form of freedom. It stimulates a person’s untapped potential to connect with the Divine Spark of God that is within each of us and allows that person to connect on a deeper level to a higher source.

The challenge the Rabbis set us to see ourselves as part of the liberation from Egypt is not limited to our intellectual understanding of what happened in the Passover story, but rather, is a challenge to set spiritual goals and to use our willpower to move towards attaining them. Freedom is measured by the extent to which we have reached our potential to serve God.

In 2021, Passover occurs at the one-year anniversary of the global pandemic. We enter the festival with the realization that our lives have significantly changed due to the pandemic, as well as the knowledge that the road ahead will be filled with many new challenges in our constantly shifting world. One of the most amazing things of the past year is the technology and global cooperation that has allowed us to research a vaccine, develop it, and administer it to large swathes of the public in just 12 months! This is an example of our collective ability to break through previously-existing barriers and to leap forward with vigour to achieve our goals.

The same is true with our Judaism. We have the ability to leap forward and connect with God in so many new ways. With concerted effort, we can be liberated from our own personal Egypt and break free of our boundaries and limitations that prevent us from connecting with God.

One message of Passover is that we can find God in the details of the world we live in – by dealing with the issues and limitations that we face and transforming them from within. At the Passover Seder, the ordinary act of eating and drinking is transformed to embody the will of God. Eating maror helps us internalize the bitterness of our ancestors' slavery. Listening to a small child asking the Four Questions evokes a sense of wonder and reframes the way we think about our past. By re-enacting and speaking about our historical slavery, we use our experiences as a stepping stone to continue our growth. And we too are set free, as we discover the transcendent sparks of God in the mundane areas of our lives by understanding that God is here with us and God can be wherever God chooses to be.

So while you are preparing your million and one Passover things, I ask you to consider the deeper meaning of the festival. While we may enjoy relaxation on an exotic island and letting someone else take care of our needs, that does not always allow growth, and, indeed, may foster a sense of complacency. In contrast to this, the festival of Passover challenges each of us to be the best version of ourselves and to develop our unique ability to harness the Divine Spark within us.

Bedikat Chametz and Korban Pesach: Mitzvot that Bind us Together

Rabbi Aaron Finkelstein (YCT '11)

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What exactly is a household?

Over this last year, we've thought about this question more than ever before. The definition of a household has come under new scrutiny as people grappled with Covid restrictions, school closures, pods and the like.

Interestingly, a similar question comes up related to two of the most important mitzvot of Pesach: Bedikat Chametz and Korban Pesach.

The Gemara (Pesachim 4a) brings up a fascinating insight:

אֲמַר לְהוּ רַב נַחְמָן בַּר יִצְחָק, תְּנֵיתוּהָ: הַכֹּל נֶאֱמָנִים עַל בִּיעוּר חָמֵץ,
אֲפִילּוּ נָשִׁים אֲפִילּוּ עֲבָדִים אֲפִילּוּ קְטַנִּים. מַאי טַעְמָא מְהֵימְנֵי?
הַכֹּל חֲבֵרִים הֵם אֵצֶל בְּדִיקַת חָמֵץ.

Rav Naḥman bar Yitzḥak said to them that we already learned the resolution to this dilemma based on a related baraita: Everyone is believed regarding biur chametz (the elimination of chametz), even women, slaves, and minors. What is the reason that they are believed? ***All are considered "chaverim" with regard to the search for chametz.***

In halakhic parlance, “chaverim” has a very specific meaning: someone who we presume to be trustworthy in completing a halakhic obligation. As an example, the Gemara describes the situation of a *chaver* who dies but leaves a barn filled with produce. In such a case, we have no doubt that the produce has been tithed, since it belonged to someone trustworthy. When it comes to bedikat chametz, everyone is suddenly considered trustworthy. Everyone is now a chaver and all members of the household are believed. Somehow, bedikat chametz elevates those in the household that might otherwise not automatically be considered trustworthy.

The concept of a household also comes up regarding korban pesach. The Torah tells us that “it shall be eaten in one house...the whole community shall offer it” (Shemot 12:46-47) and the Rambam codifies that the korban pesach had to be eaten in a chavurah, a group of a few individuals or families (Hilchot Korban Pesach 9:1).

In explaining this ritual, Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch takes it a step further, noting that this mitzvah bonded the nation together, and in so doing enabled the nation to renew its bond with God:

> “In the Pesach offering, the Jewish Nation asserts all its members, assembled in family groups, as God’s flock and at His disposal, and then, in eating the same, it receives itself back, freed from physical and civic death. This is the bond between God and Israel, which has eternally to be renewed...only those may take part in it who belong to the Jewish bond with God both by nationality and conviction...” (Hirsch commentary to Shemot 12:43)

The korban pesach must have had a profound impact on the community. This mitzvah was inherently social and communal, designed to include others and impossible to complete alone. In this structure, everyone was a part of a household and every Jew counted. Such inclusion highlighted the connections between people. According to Rav Hirsch, these connections presage the covenantal relationship between God and the Jewish people.

This past year has been one of plague, a period that strained trust and that limited connection between people. On the occasions that we ventured beyond our four walls, it was hard not to be bombarded by suspicion: who around us might have been sick, who among us could endanger us? We had to hold ourselves back from connecting with others, keeping our tables small, sometimes painfully so.

Pesach is the holiday that reminds us that trust and connection are essential ingredients in our spiritual lives. While all year round we might not fully trust those around us, all are deemed trustworthy – chaverim – when it comes to bedikat chametz. Similarly, the inclusive communal setting of a chavurah was required for korban pesach. It’s not surprising then that these two words share a shoresh (Hebrew root) – chet-bet-reish, meaning to bond or join.

In their own way, both bedikat chametz and korban pesach served to bring people together and rebuild the bonds between them. These mitzvot helped form deeper relationships among the Jewish people, ultimately allowing us to experience freedom and connect with God as a people.

YaKNeHaZ (יקנה״ז) and the Importance of Order

Dr. Liz Shayne
(Maharat ‘21)

Not everyone has a favorite acronym. I confess, however, that I do, and it is one with particular relevance for this year’s Passover. Whenever Yom Tov falls out on Saturday night, we find ourselves in an interesting position: we must both sanctify the new holiday and separate between Shabbat and the weekday using the same ritual act of drinking wine. The Havdalah cup does double duty as the Kiddush cup. But how do we manage these simultaneous obligations? Or, more precisely, in what order ought we combine all the necessary blessings?

The answer is my favorite acronym: יקנה״ז, pronounced YaKNeHaZ: יין (yayin) for the blessing over the wine; קידוש (kiddush) for the blessing over the new holiday just beginning; נר (ner) for the blessing over the flame; הבדלה (havdalah) for the blessing Hamavdil; and זמן (zman) for Shehechiyanu. Granted, the acronym is delightful and may have engendered some wonderful illustrations due to its similarity to the German phrase jag den Has, hunt the rabbit.

However, this order of the blessings was not an inevitability. As those of you who have kept up with daf yomi have undoubtedly discovered, Pesachim 102b-103a contains no fewer than eight suggestions for how to arrange these blessings. These examples leave out Shehechiyanu, which means the Gemara offers 33% of all possible configurations of the four blessings.

Even more interestingly, theTalmud leaves out the reasoning behind each suggested combination. It is up to Rashbam, the grandson of Rashi and a renowned commentator on the Talmud in his own right, to explicate the different opinions and clarify that each combination is not arbitrary, but the application of ideological principles held by the rabbi who suggested it. The Rashbam explains that Rav—who suggests the order that we follow—believes that the blessing over the wine goes first because of the principle of תדיר קודם: when there are two blessings and one is recited more often, we recite the more frequent one first. Kiddush comes next because we prioritize, existentially speaking, welcoming in new sacred moments over bidding farewell to old ones. Finally, we finish Havdalah in the order we usually say it. Shmuel, whose opinion we do not follow, agrees with Rav about the blessing on wine coming first, but disagrees that one ought to say Kiddush next. He believes that one ought to make all the blessings associated with Havdalah first, in their correct order, and only then recite Kiddush. According to him, the principle of תדיר קודם ought to apply to all of the blessings, and we say Havdalah over Shabbat more often than Kiddush for Yom Tov.

Rashbam continues to offer interpretations for each of the eight acronyms found in the Gemara. Mar the son of Rabana believes that the blessing over the candle should go first because the candles are the first thing one sees when entering the home. Levi arranges the blessings so that the candle separates between Kiddush and the wine for Havdalah. Rashbam, through his commentary, emphasizes that these arrangements are not arbitrary. They are not a matter of convenience or which acronym sounds the best, but a complicated matter of competing priorities. The eightfold disagreement in this sugya

touches on a topic that is probably familiar to many of us: when our worlds collide, how do we decide what to do when?

I imagine many of us have discovered the convenient inconvenience of dissolving boundaries. Our kitchen tables have become our offices, our workplace is now a school, and our carefully delineated spaces and times merge into one another. יקנה״ז reminds us that actions need structure if we expect them to maintain internal coherence. To create a sacred experience, we need all our ducks (or rabbits) in a row. Both Shabbat and Yom Tov deserve our full attention and, with the framework of יקנה״ז, we create space for each to receive its due. Seder night is a night of order and structure; we make meaning not only through content, but also through organization. יקנה״ז teaches us how to care for the chaos in our lives by noticing the character of the individual pieces. It is the nature of acronyms to represent simultaneously their constituent parts and the new word those parts have created. So let us enjoy our moment of יקנה״ז while also taking to heart the message of careful attention that it conveys.

Belief. Hope. Faith. Trust.

Rabbanit Bracha Jaffe (Maharat ‘17)
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American historian Stephen Ambrose stated: “The past is a source of knowledge, and the future is a source of hope. Love of the past implies faith in the future.”

Each year, as Pesach comes around, each of us finds ourselves in our own personal *Mitzrayim* (Egypt). *Mitzrayim* comes from the word *tzar* which means “narrow” or “confined”. Each year, on Pesach, we have an opportunity to think about the ways in which we feel personally confined and troubled. This year, the term “confined” feels more poignant than ever.

The *Sefat Emet*, Rabbi Yehuda Leib Alter of Ger, a Hasidic master, gives us a recipe for releasing ourselves from our *meitzarim*, our narrow places. He bases it on a classic debate on this famous quote from the Mishna (Pesachim 10:5) that we recite at the Seder:

בְּכָל דּוֹר וָדוֹר חַיָּב אָדָם לִרְאוֹת אֶת עַצְמוֹ כְּאִלּוּ הוּא יָצָא מִמִּצְרַיִם

In each and every generation a person must view himself as though he [or she] personally left Egypt.

The Sefat Emet continues with this quote (Deut 6:23):

וְאוֹתָנוּ, הוֹצִיא מִשָּׁם

And [God] brought us out of there [Egypt]

What does this mean? Are we to see Pesach as a commemoration of a seismic event that radically changed our people's history? Or are we to put ourselves back in time – actually imagine ourselves leaving Egypt and being saved?

The *Sefat Emet* astutely pulls these two views together. He explains that emunah, faith, is the cornerstone that connects the two.

If we can put ourselves back in Egypt, ***then*** we can feel the communal salvation.

If we can feel the communal salvation, ***then*** this can fuel our faith.

If this fuels our faith, ***then*** we can believe in the power of God's helping hand.

If we have faith in the power of God's helping hand, ***then*** we can believe that God can help each of us – today.

If we can do this – ***Dayenu!***

Experiencing Hope for Redemption at The Seder

Rabbanit Goldie Guy (Maharat '17)

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Mishna Pesachim 10:1

On **the eve of Passover, adjacent to *minḥa*** time, **a person** may **not eat until dark**, so that he will be able to eat matza that night with a hearty appetite. **Even the poorest of Jews** should **not eat** the meal on Passover night **until he reclines** on his left side, as free and wealthy people recline when they eat. **And** the distributors of charity should **not give** a poor person **less than four cups of wine** for the Festival meal of Passover night. **And** this *halakha* applies **even** if the poor person is one of the poorest members of society and receives his food **from the charity plate**.

(Translation from William Davidson digital edition of the Koren Noé Talmud, with commentary by Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz)

משנה פסחים י:א

עַרְבֵי פְּסָחִים סָמוּךְ לַמִּנְחָה, לֹא יֹאכַל אָדָם עַד שֶׁתֶּחְשַׁךְ.

וַאֲפִלּוּ עָנִי שֶׁבְּיִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא יֹאכַל עַד שֶׁיָּסֵב.

וְלֹא יִפְחֲתוּ לוֹ מֵאַרְבָּעָה כוֹסוֹת שֶׁל יַיִן, וַאֲפִלּוּ מִן הַתַּמְחוּי.

After dealing with the laws of chametz and the korban Pesach, in the tenth and last chapter of mishna Pesachim we finally read about what to do on seder night. Beginning chronologically on the eve of Pesach, the mishna teaches us about the prohibition of eating set meals from mincha time onwards so that we maintain our appetites for eating matza at the seder. The mishna then moves to focus on the obligations of an ani, a poor person, who, as Rashi explains, is a person who does not have spare resources enough to purchase two meals. The mishna teaches us that even a person who lives in poverty must recline while eating the seder meal, and should make sure to have four cups of wine on seder night, even if it means collecting from the communal food pantry.

If the first mishna of the tenth chapter is meant to introduce us to the laws of the seder, one would expect a basic description of erev Pesach or the seder meal. Instead, the mishna emphasizes the laws of the ani, and their obligation to partake in the obligations the mishna has yet to explicitly establish more generally: drinking four cups of wine and leaning at the seder. Why does the mishna's teaching about the seder begin by putting the ani in the center?

One way of understanding the emphasis on the ani is as a practical communal reminder: we cannot experience a real holiday of freedom if there are members of our community who are still not free in some way. If people in our community are experiencing their own Mitzrayim – living in a narrow place – we must be sensitive to their plight and moved to act, until we can all experience freedom fully together. Rav Yakov Nagen explains that this is why the mishna describes the ani not just as an ani, but "ani she-b'Yisrael" - one who is "among the community of Israel", and thus deserving of communal care and attention.Therefore the Haggadah also begins with ha lachma anya, a call to all who need, to come eat at our tables—a reminder that if we are not already doing what we can to make sure those in need are invited to the table, we need to be doing more.

Another way of understanding the mishna's emphasis on the ani is through the framework of the experiential goals of the seder. On the night of the seder, every individual is meant to see themselves as if they were enslaved in Egypt, and then brought to freedom. Rav Yakov Nagen explains that the ani is emphasized because they have the potential to feel this redemption most viscerally each year, when experiencing the contrast of their day-to-day scarcity with their drinking of four cups of wine on the seder night.

Experientially, the seder is designed to reenact this narrative of going from slavery to freedom. Throughout the night, we progress through the story: beginning in slavery with the recitation of avadim hayinu, and ending with the singing of a triumphant Hallel on being redeemed. An opinion cited in Bavli Pesachim 108a takes this a step further, teaching that the first two cups of wine at the beginning of the seder are drunk at a point in the night when we are still "enslaved", and the second two cups after we have gone out of slavery. Since leaning while drinking is an expression of freedom, this opinion states that we should only lean during the second two cups of wine.

This year, we are all in some way holding the tension of a person living in a reality of Mitzrayim, a narrow place, who is still tasked with enacting the transition from slavery to freedom. So much has changed since last Pesach. Though there is bright hope for the end of this dark time we've been living through, we are still in the narrow place of a pandemic, and have barely processed the toll it has taken on us, individually and collectively. And yet, we are asked to reenact the story of going from slavery to freedom. This year, may we all be able to lean into the experience of redemption at the seder, like the mishna asks of the ani. And may we take from it a sense of hope that one day we will be fully redeemed, learning how to tap into this hope in our daily lives.

Finding Freedom

Talia Weisberg
(Maharat '24)

Every year at the sedarim, I think about the extensive divrei Torah that my beloved fourth grade rebbe, Rabbi Asher Heber z"l, taught me about the Haggadah. He died shortly before Pesach last year of complications from COVID-19. It is my privilege to share his words of Torah, and I hope to give his neshama an aliyah upon his first yahrtzeit.

Rabbi Heber pointed out that Ha Lachma Anya is written entirely in Aramaic except for the last line – "*l'shana ha-ba'ah bnei chorin*" ("next year we will be free people"). He explained that while the Haggadah was being compiled, Aramaic was the lingua franca of both the Jews and their non-Jewish neighbors. Lest the local non-Jews hear Jews celebrating impending freedom and worry that they were plotting a rebellion, this line was instituted in Hebrew, a language only Jews were presumed to understand. This idea has stayed with me since Rabbi Heber taught it. Although I did not internalize it as a nine year old, it's very heavy to think about how much the concern about anti-Semitic violence permeates our tradition. Even though the Haggadah is a generally ebullient text, and one of the central purposes of Pesach is to rejoice in our freedom, fear and uncertainty are still present within our celebrations of this holiday.

The Maharal bears a different perspective on this language switch. In his commentary on the Haggadah, the Divrei Negidim, he explains that the Hebrew word for year, shana, is intentionally used because it is linguistically related to the Hebrew word for change, *shinui*. The use of this root indicates that we do not just want to be returned to our homeland – something that the Jewish people achieved in 1948 – but we want an even more radical change in the status quo: to become fully free people with complete autonomy.

These explanations can be placed in conversation with one another to understand the shift from Aramaic to Hebrew as a recognition of a painful past while looking towards a more joyful future. The Haggadah acknowledges the difficult moments that we have gone through in our history; it explicitly states the various ways that the Egyptians inflicted suffering upon the Israelites, and it also contains references to other modes of anti-Semitism, such as the acknowledgment in Ve'hi She'amdah that our enemies seek to destroy us in every generation. However, its main goal is to celebrate freedom: the emancipation of our ancestors, the liberty that we are privileged to have today, and the future Redemption that God has promised us.

Ha Lachma Anya can be understood as a microcosm of the multitudes that the seder contains, noting both Jewish traumas and Jewish joys. Perhaps this is one of the reasons we begin the Magid section with this proclamation. Redemption will only be complete when we recognize all of the historical phenomena that had to occur to bring us to where we are now, and we can only be fully free when we understand the wonders and miracles that God bestows upon us in comparison to the challenges that we have had to face as a nation. *L'shana ha-ba'ah bnei chorin*.

Half Slave - Half Free: Yetziat Mitzrayim, Taking out Egypt

Rabbanit Michal Kohane
(Maharat '20)

The name Pesach, aside from being a reminder of God's "passing-over", can also be read as pe-sach, literally, "a talking mouth". No wonder that such a holiday is accompanied by a book called Haggadah - "Telling", which instructs us that:

כָּל הַמַּרְבֶּה לְסַפֵּר בִּיצִיאַת מִצְרַיִם הֲרֵי זֶה מְשֻׁבָּח.

> anyone who increases (spends extra time) in telling the story of the Exodus from Egypt (*yetziat mitzrayim*) is praiseworthy.

But… what does the term *Yetziat Mitzrayim* actually mean?

If it means "the Exodus from Egypt", as the Haggadah suggests, the phrase should read "*yetzi'a mimitzrayim*"; and if it means the exit of the Children of Israel then it should be "*yetziat bnai yisrael*"….

Yetziat Mitzrayim literally means "the going out of Egypt." This phrase suggests that there is something about Egypt that needs to be "going out". It suggests that this story has a greater scope than our own slavery and freedom, that it possibly also has to do with our relationship with the world around us, and that our redemption is not isolated, but that Egypt also needs to be redeemed.

Is there any evidence in the Torah or Talmud to support this reading? Or does it result solely from a very nuanced understanding of the Hebrew phrase?

The opening Mishna in the 8th chapter of Masechet Pesachim discusses how to determine which group a person should join for eating the *korban Pesach* when the person has loyalties to multiple groups. Three such situations are discussed – a married woman, an orphan who has multiple guardians, and a slave who has two masters. The Mishna then discusses a person who is half slave and half free (because one of his two masters has freed him), and states that such a person may not eat from his master's *korban*.

In his commentary on this Mishna, Rav Steinsaltz explains that "it is assumed that the master did not intend to allow this person's free half to partake of the lamb (korban), and therefore the master did not slaughter the lamb with him in mind. Consequently, the half slave is not included among those registered for his master's offering unless he was explicitly included". (English from William Davidson digital edition of the Koren Noé Talmud, on Sefaria)

The Gemara (Pesachim 88a-b) further delves into the absurdity of the situation. What should someone do who is half a slave and half a free person? Beit Hillel says that such a person serves his master one day and himself one day. Beit Shamai disagrees, because while that works out fine for the master,

it leaves the person in a limbo status in which he is unable to marry anyone – the free part of him cannot marry a slave, and the slave part of him cannot marry a free woman. Instead, Beit Shammai says we force his master (who still half owns him) to make him a free man, and the slave then writes a bill accepting his responsibility to pay half his value to his master. Beit Hillel ultimately agrees with this position.

Who is this half slave, half free person who's mentioned here?

There's a hint in the opening verse of parshat Beshalach (Shemot 13:17) which tells us:

וַיְהִי בְּשַׁלַּח פַּרְעֹה אֶת הָעָם, וְלֹא נָחָם אֱ-לֹקִים דֶּרֶךְ אֶרֶץ פְּלִשְׁתִּים, כִּי קָרוֹב הוּא:
כִּי אָמַר אֱ-לֹקִים פֶּן יִנָּחֵם הָעָם בִּרְאֹתָם מִלְחָמָה וְשָׁבוּ מִצְרָיְמָה.

> Now when Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, although it was nearer; for God said, 'The people may have a change of heart when they see war, and return to Egypt.'

"When Pharaoh let the people go"… but wait! Who let the people go?

Placing this seemingly *halachic* discussion of the person who is half slave and half free here in Pesachim hints at the status of Bnai Yisrael: We too were like a slave to two masters: God, who let us go, and Pharaoh, who would have rather kept us in but was forced to set us free, against his will. As we saw in the Gemara, the slave has to "write a bill accepting his responsibility to pay half his value to his master" (the one who did not want to let him go). Similarly, we too, are left with a debt to the world, represented by Egypt. That is Yetziat Mitzrayim: it's not just about ourselves, but about the world. On this Pesach, we might wonder, are we done "taking out Egypt"?

Chag Sameach!

I Am Like a Man of Seventy Years

Rabbi Yosef Kanefsky

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Ben Zoma proves from a verse in the Torah that we are commanded to speak of the Exodus not only each day but also each night. The Sages counter that Ben Zoma's verse teaches not about night, but about our obligation to speak of the Exodus even in the days of the Messiah. In the Talmud their discussion continues, as Ben Zoma asks the Sages, "Why do you think we would continue speaking of the Exodus in the days of the Messiah?! After all, Jeremiah prophesied that God's gathering up the exiles in the Messianic days will be so dramatic that we will no longer speak of 'God who redeemed us from Egypt', but of 'God who redeemed us from among the nations'!" The Sages counter, "Jeremiah did not mean that the Exodus story will be abandoned, only that the story of the Messianic redemption will be 'ikar' (primary), and that the story of the Exodus will be 'tafel' (secondary)".

It's worth asking though: "Why will the story of the Exodus be 'tafel'? The redemption from Egypt is a great and mighty story!" Perhaps the Exodus will be "tafel" because it was a redemption in which we were the only ones who were redeemed. The Egyptians, for their part, suffered and died. The ultimate redemption, the 'ikar', is a redemption for all, when "the world is filled with knowledge of God, as the water fills the seas".

The Wise One - חכם

Rabbanit Alissa Thomas-Newborn (Maharat '16)

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The wise son learns that we do not consume anything after the korban Pesach (today, the afikomen). Our practice today seems odd, since we know that at our sedarim AFTER we eat the afikomen, we still have two more cups to drink. How can this be? Perhaps it is an acknowledgment that the afikomen we eat is not truly comparable to the korban Pesach, so we allow wine to be consumed after it. In this way we feel the reality that the Temple is not standing, and so we cannot savor the korban Pesach and entirely practice what the wise son is told. But it is also a recognition that even in our experience of redemption today, there is still more to strive toward, more work to be done once we are freed. And with that work and our engagement in it, more cups overflowing. In Pirkei Avot we learn "Who is wise? The one who learns from every person." The wise child not only asks a wise question, but she is given an answer that inspires the pursuit of wisdom: Recognize that there is more to the law than its implementation. There is the potential and the hope it carries. And there is the responsibility to hear its call.

Arami Oved Avi: Disgrace and Praise for our Times

Aliza Libman Baronofsky
(Maharat Advanced Kollel ‘22)

The Mishna in Pesachim (10:4) tells us:

מַתְחִיל בִּגְנוּת וּמְסַיֵּם בְּשֶׁבַח, וְדוֹרֵשׁ מֵאֲרַמִּי אוֹבֵד אָבִי, עַד שֶׁיִּגְמֹר כֹּל הַפָּרָשָׁה כֻּלָּהּ׃

> He begins with disgrace and concludes with praise. And he expounds from “Arami Oved Avi” (Deuteronomy 26:5, deliberately not translated), until he concludes the entire section.

This mishna introduces a narrative arc that is required for the Seder: we must begin with something negative before concluding with something positive. In media as varied as novels, plays and scripted TV, it is generally understood that no conclusion can be as satisfying as when it is preceded by adversity. Which adversity we must discuss is subject to rabbinic dispute, with the rabbis grappling over whether it is spiritual disgrace (our forefathers were idolaters) or physical (we were enslaved).

The narrative genius of the Haggadah is that it marries both approaches. It reads “Arami Oved Avi” as both physical and spiritual subjugation:

צֵא וּלְמַד מַה בִּקֵּשׁ לָבָן הָאֲרַמִּי לַעֲשׂוֹת לְיַעֲקֹב אָבִינוּ׃
שֶׁפַּרְעֹה לֹא גָזַר אֶלָּא עַל הַזְּכָרִים, וְלָבָן בִּקֵּשׁ לַעֲקֹר אֶת־הַכֹּל.
שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: אֲרַמִּי אֹבֵד אָבִי, וַיֵּרֶד מִצְרַיְמָה וַיָּגָר שָׁם בִּמְתֵי מְעָט,
וַיְהִי שָׁם לְגוֹי גָּדוֹל, עָצוּם וָרָב.

> Go out and learn what Lavan the Aramean sought to do to Yaakov, our father; since Pharaoh only decreed [the death sentence] on the males but Lavan sought to uproot the whole [people]. As it is stated (Deuteronomy 26:5), “An Aramean was destroying my father and he went down to Egypt, and he resided there with a small number and he became there a nation, great, powerful and numerous.” (Sefaria translation)

This translation of אֲרַמִּי אֹבֵד אָבִי is familiar to us from its annual repetition—The idea that “An Aramean [Lavan] was destroying my father” is followed by the idea that Lavan tried to erase the Jewish future through assimilation, which is followed by the Jews going down to Egypt.

But this translation is particularly troublesome for those who prefer to read the Bible according to its simplest interpretation, particularly the medieval commentators Ibn Ezra and Rashbam. The words אֲרַמִּי אֹבֵד אָבִי are in fact terribly difficult to parse: First, if the Aramean is the subject of the sentence, why does it say “He went down to Egypt” when it was not Lavan (the Aramean) but rather Yaakov who

went down? Second, אֹבֵד is incorrectly conjugated to say “was destroying”; Ibn Ezra insists it ought to be “מאבד”.

The translation that won out did so for a reason – because the Jews who told the story of the seder had substantial experience with external threats. They could easily understand the nefarious Lavan and the spiritual dangers he posed, as well as the peril in being subject to foreign rulers’ whims. Reading the text this way made the story engaging and even more satisfying. An external enemy can be defeated.

Many translations of Deuteronomy adopt the opinion of Rashbam by translating the phrase as “My father was a wandering Aramean.” The key features here include making “my father” the Aramean and thus the subject of the sentence as well as making “oved” an adjective rather than a verb. Rashbam believes that the Aramean was Avraham, who was indeed wandering, with proof that the word “oved” is used that way elsewhere in Tanakh.

In contrast, Ibn Ezra attempts to address the same issues by telling us that the verse should be translated as “My father [Yaakov] was a poor Aramean”, using a verse from Mishlei to show that “oved” can mean poor and that having lived in Aram, Yaakov can plausibly be called Aramean.

The Torah scholar Nehama Leibowitz, z”l, did much to popularize the commentaries of Rashbam and Ibn Ezra in her writings on Parshat Ki Tavo. She notes the importance of interpreting the verse in its Biblical context, as it comes to us from a speech given by a pilgrim bringing first fruits to the Temple. Calling their commentaries “more plausible,” she writes: “The story thus begins with wandering and ends with its converse: permanent settlement.”

In our era, we can see the appeal of this interpretation. Many of us know struggles that don’t come with an antagonist to vanquish. Aren’t we all poorer for a year without social interaction, travel, time with family? Many of us thought last year was our Passover of “גָּנוּת” - adversity, which we hoped would be followed by the praise of this year’s return to normalcy and glory.

The adversity that our forefathers and our foremothers faced is printed in the Torah in part to give us strength as we face our own struggles. This Passover, we are not all in the same place, physically or spiritually. We have not yet reached our ‘permanent settlement.’ Some of us feel truly lost and wandering without our old habits and routines. We feel impoverished when we see others getting scarce vaccine appointments as we wait our turn. Let us think of our personal journeys as we read the Arami Oved Avi, thinking of the challenges we face and trusting that God will deliver us, too, from the bondage of this global pandemic.

By Whose Blood Do We Live?

Rabbi Dr. Jon Kelsen
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Exodus 12:2-3, 6 reads:

> This month shall mark for you the beginning of months; it shall be the first of the months of the year for you. Speak to the whole community of Israel and say that on the tenth of this month each of them shall take a lamb to a family, a lamb to a household … You shall keep watch over it until the fourteenth day of this month; and all the assembled congregation of the Israelites shall slaughter it at twilight.

In these verses, God commands Moses to instruct each Israelite family to take what would become the paschal lamb on the tenth of the first month, four days before it was to be slaughtered. The Israelites are told to keep watch over the lamb from the tenth to the fourteenth of the month. Then, they are to slaughter it.

Why, we wonder, was it necessary to take and keep watch over the lamb for those four days? For that matter, why was it necessary to command this as part of the process at all? The commandment could have been limited to the offering of the lamb, which would necessitate each Israelite to acquire the lamb beforehand on logistical grounds.

The Midrash (*Mekhilta de-Rabbi Yishmael: Bo, Mesekheta d-Piskha* n. 5) offers some insight:

> Why did Scripture require that the paschal lamb be taken four days before its sacrifice? Rabbi Matia b. Heresh would say: Behold, it says “Now when I passed by you, and looked upon you, and, behold, your time was the time of love” (Ezekiel 16:8). The time arrived for The Holy One to fulfill the promise made to Abraham our father that He would redeem his sons, but they had no mitzvot to busy themselves with in order that they might be redeemed! As it says, “Your breasts were fashioned, and your hair was grown; yet you were naked and bare” (ibid. 16:7); that is, nude of the mitzvot. The Holy One (therefore) gave them two mitzvot: that of the paschal lamb and of circumcision, that they should busy themselves with them in order that they be might be redeemed. As it says, “And when I passed by you, and saw you wallowing in your blood, I said to you: In your blood, live; I said to you: In your blood, live” (ibid., 16:6). And furthermore it says “As for you also, because of the blood of your covenant (I send forth your prisoners out of the pit wherein is no water)” (Zechariah 9:11). Therefore, Scripture required that the paschal lamb be taken four days before its sacrifice: for we are rewarded only for deeds.

In the first response to this question, Rabbi Matia ben Heresh deploys a midrash (cited by Rashi on Exodus 12:6) on a celebrated passage in Ezekiel 16, in which the prophet describes how a passer-by rescues an abandoned infant girl, washing and swaddling her, bringing her home, and eventually, when she grows up, marrying her. The story is taken as a metaphoric retelling of God’s salvation of Israel in Egypt, in which Israel is pictured as a helpless babe dependent on divine intervention.

Several features of the Ezekiel passage indicate that it is indeed referencing features of the Egypt narratives, most prominently the reference to God's seeing and passing-over (*va-e'evor alayikh*) the infant, evoking Exodus 12:23. In Ezekiel's telling, the Passover story is a tale of grace, in which God saves Israel the helpless babe, raises her, and marries her (See *Keritot* 9a).

Rabbi Matia, however, inverts the order of the verses in Ezekiel, working backwards from verse 8 to 7 to 6. This inversion, coupled with his midrashic interpretations of those verses, creates an inversion of Ezekiel's message as well: Israel is saved, not out of grace bestowed to an undeserving and helpless foundling, but because they have earned salvation via their performance of mitzvot. According to the parallel recension of this midrash in *Pirkei De-Rabbi Eliezer* 29, the mitzvah of the paschal sacrifice, exemplified in the smearing of its expatiating blood on the doorposts and lintels, is literally co-mingled with the blood of the related mitzvah of circumcision (for only circumcised males were allowed to eat of the lamb).

According to the midrash, the Israelites merited God's "passing over" because of the mitzvot of the paschal sacrifice and circumcision. Similarly, the *Mekhilta* argues, the Israelites are instructed to extend their performance of the commandment of the paschal lamb to a four day enterprise. In the words of Ezekiel, by our blood we live—that is, by our mitzvot.

In part, I would argue, the notion that the blood of circumcision protects the Israelites during Passover is generated by the similarities between Exodus chapter 12 and earlier in chapter 4, in which Moses is attacked by a mysterious destructive power and is only saved when his wife circumcises their infant son and touches ("*va-taga*," paralleling "*ve-higatem*" of Exodus 12:22) Moses with the bloody foreskin. Moses, the bloody bridegroom, is saved by virtue of the mitzvah and blood of circumcision. The *Mekhilta* here expresses this relationship by transposing a feature of chapter 4 (the protective application of circumcision blood) onto the narrative of chapter 12, co-mingling the bloods and stories.

Yet there is more to this midrash. The claim that the mitzvot of circumcision and the paschal sacrifice saved—indeed, are necessary for saving—the Israelites from death, stands in stark contrast to a competing claim circulating at the time. This is found in *Justin's Dialogue with Trypho*, Chapter 111:

> [O]ur suffering and crucified Christ was not cursed by the law, but made it manifest that He alone would save those who do not depart from His faith. And the blood of the passover, sprinkled on each man's doorposts and lintel, delivered those who were saved in Egypt, when the first-born of the Egyptians were destroyed. For the passover was Christ, who was afterwards sacrificed, as also Isaiah said, 'He was led as a sheep to the slaughter.' And it is written, that on the day of the passover you seized Him, and that also during the passover you crucified Him. And as the blood of the passover saved those who were in Egypt, so also the blood of Christ will deliver from death those who have believed. Would God, then, have been deceived if this sign had not been above the doors? I do not say that; but I affirm that He announced beforehand the future salvation for the human race through the blood of Christ.

In this reading, the blood on the doorposts signals the blood of Jesus, which saves from death all those who would otherwise be cursed by the law. The commandments kill; only faith in the Christ vivifies. An understanding of Jesus as the paschal lamb, whose blood expiates, is found in the Gospels, e.g., *Matthew* 6:26-28:

> And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, take, eat; this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; for this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.

In fact, *I Corinthians* 5:3-8 states all this much more explicitly: "Purge out the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, even as ye are unleavened. For our passover also hath been sacrificed, even Christ." The *Mekhilta* here counters precisely this claim. The blood of the literal paschal lamb, metonymic of mitzvot in general, are the only source for 'salvation.' It is only the law, that is, which can redeem. Hence, the conclusion of the midrash: "Rabbi Matia ben Heresh's argument that we may redeemed only through deed—i.e., mitzvot—stands in opposition to the Pauline notion that redemption is achieved not by deed (works), but via faith in Jesus:

> Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified (*Galatians* 2:16).

If this analysis is correct, this explanation provides yet another explanation for the claim that the blood of circumcision—and not only of the lamb—was painted onto the lintels of Israelites' homes. The necessity of circumcision for entry into the covenant and people of Israel, after all, is denied (at least for Gentiles) by Paul (for example, in *Galatians* 6:15; *Colossians* 2:11). Rather than salvation achieved via belief in the 'Paschal Lamb, ' through whose blood we are redeemed, for the *Mekhilta*, we are redeemed via the blood of the literal paschal lamb and the blood of the circumcision 'in the flesh;' or, more broadly, via *ma'aseh*—in other words, via the work of *mitzvot*.

Seder in the Times of Plague

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At the seder we will count out the plagues in drops of wine. Until recently this has always been a bit abstract for me. When my children were young we made a game of the plagues — throwing around plastic frogs and other toys. This year, unfortunately, we have a new understanding of the plagues in general and specifically the plagues of darkness and the slaying of the first born. Given our newfound insight into the experiences of the suffering of the Egyptians, what new understanding can we bring to our seders? To find meaning in such pain is a tall order, as is to reinterpret the story of the Exodus, one that we know so well. Yet on the other hand, the Haggadah tells us that in every generation we have to see ourselves as coming out of Egypt. How do we do that this year?

We are told that the plague of darkness forced the Egyptians to stay home, an experience we now can relate to well. They could barely move. Rashi says the darkness of night became even more black and dark. The darkness was palpable. Ramban described it as a fog from the sea that even a candle could not illuminate. The Egyptians were isolated and scared, like so many of us this year. Similarly, the plague of the slaying of the first born touched every family, from the poorest to the royal house of Pharaoh. At the burning bush God had referred to Bnei Yisrael as God's first born, and in Egypt God spared the Jewish people. Unfortunately, this year all too many of us have been touched by our plague.

In the midst of the final plague, God commands Moshe to tell the people to get ready to leave Egypt. The Torah commands us

וּשְׁמַרְתֶּם אֶת־הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה לְחָק־לְךָ וּלְבָנֶיךָ עַד־עוֹלָם׃

You shall observe this as an institution for all time, for you and for your descendants.
(Shemot 12:24)

The Jewish people have been observing Pesach for three thousand years, through easy times and challenging ones. Like last year, for many this Pesach will be celebrated with challenges. But we are not the first Jews to have seders amidst dark times. Don Yitzchak Abarbanel, a fifteenth century nobleman and Torah scholar, was forced to flee from Portugal, Spain and Italy. He used his experiences to renew his understanding of the Pesach story. In his introduction to the Haggadah he wrote that "the poverty of my exile surrounds me and I will encircle it with wheels of redemption and miracles, including commentaries and requirements and purposes, new and respected which do not discredit the first ones which were 'sweeter than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb'. (Ps.19:11)"

How will we encircle this year? In a very Jewish way, we will talk about it. The Talmud, in Pesachim 115b, tells us that the matzah is the bread upon which we answer many questions. In fact, even if we are celebrating alone we still ask ourselves the four questions. We will carry on the tradition for ourselves and for future generations. The Torah tells us

וּלְמַעַן תְּסַפֵּר בְּאָזְנֵי בִנְךָ וּבֶן־בִּנְךָ

that you may recount in the hearing of your children and of your children's children
(Shemot 10:2)

What will we tell the next generations about this year? How will we tell the story of our time in Egypt and our redemption? We will start with the matzah and the invitation it brings to tell our stories, and the hope that, even if we are still slaves this year, next year we will be free. It may still be too soon to know how we will ultimately recount this story. We are still in the midst of the experience and so can only tell this story in the present tense. The Exodus teaches us to experience redemption both in the past tense and in the present tense. We will tell our children that we too were redeemed from our own Egypt.

Saadia Gaon's Seder and Ours: A Lesson in Pedagogy

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Embedded within the beginning and end of the magid section of our seder is a debate about pedagogy.

In order to understand this debate, we must look more closely at the texts we find at the end of magid. The section concludes with the famous saying of Rabban Gamliel about the significance of Pesach, Matza and Maror. This teaching is originally found in Mishna Pesachim 10:5. Incorporated into the text of our Haggadah, however, are an additional four statements that are not found in original manuscripts of the Mishna:

1. בְּכָל־דּוֹר וָדוֹר חַיָּב אָדָם לִרְאוֹת אֶת־עַצְמוֹ כְּאִלּוּ הוּא יָצָא מִמִּצְרַיִם,
2. שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: וְהִגַּדְתָּ לְבִנְךָ בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא לֵאמֹר, בַּעֲבוּר זֶה עָשָׂה ה' לִי בְּצֵאתִי מִמִּצְרָיִם. (שמות יג:ח)
3. לֹא אֶת־אֲבוֹתֵינוּ בִּלְבָד גָּאַל הַקָּדוֹשׁ בָּרוּךְ הוּא, אֶלָּא אַף אוֹתָנוּ גָּאַל עִמָּהֶם,
4. שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: וְאוֹתָנוּ הוֹצִיא מִשָּׁם, לְמַעַן הָבִיא אוֹתָנוּ, לָתֶת לָנוּ אֶת־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע לַאֲבֹתֵינוּ. (דברים ו:כג)

1. In each and every generation, a person is obligated to see himself as if he left Egypt,
2. as it is stated (Exodus 13:8); "And you shall explain to your son on that day: For the sake of this, did the Lord do [this] for me in my going out of Egypt."
3. Not only our ancestors did the Holy One, blessed be He, redeem, but rather also us [together] with them did God redeem,
4. as it is stated (Deuteronomy 6:23); "And He took us out from there, in order to bring us in, to give us the land which He swore unto our fathers."

Interestingly, the Haggadah of Rav Saadia Gaon (10th century CE) only includes Statement #1 after Rabban Gamliel's teaching ("In every generation…"), and includes the final two statements (#3 and #4) at the *start of magid* (right after we read *Avadim Hayinu*, Deuteronomy 6:21).

Rav Saadia Gaon's version feels appropriate for at least two reasons.

First, contextually, his version reads Deuteronomy 6:21 and 6:23 together, at the start of magid, instead of splitting them up and placing them at the start and end (though one could also argue that splitting these verses up, as our Haggadah does, helps to frame the entire magid section).

Second, Saadia Gaon's placement of these two statements seems to convey a valuable pedagogical approach. Why must we remind ourselves at the start of the seder (as statement #3 says) that God did not only redeem *them* but *us as well*? It's because if we don't mention these important statements now, we may proceed with an incorrect assumption for the rest of our seder.

How so? Our Haggadah, which positions the text of *Avadim Hayinu* at the start of magid without statements #3 and 4, focuses at the start of magid primarily on what *happened* to us: We were slaves in Egypt, and had we not been set free, we would still be enslaved. This version of the Haggadah might lead us to conclude (incorrectly) as we begin magid that the seder is mostly about *retelling* the past and not about *reliving* it. Saadia Gaon's Haggadah, on the other hand, makes a pedagogic choice to remind us *at the beginning* of our seder of one of the central messages of the evening: **that magid is not only about talking about the past but about connecting to it. Not only are we descended from those who were slaves, but we were also redeemed and are part of our ancestors' story.**

Put simply, Saadia Gaon wants us to begin magid with one of the most important messages of the seder. If we don't do it now, we may proceed with magid and forget it altogether. And, it's worth noting, Saadia Gaon still includes Statement #1 ("In every generation") at the end of magid, as a way to reiterate and emphasize the message of seeing ourselves in the story. His pedagogical approach is akin to writing the conclusion of a lesson on the board at the start of class, and pointing to it at the end of the lesson as a reminder.

Our Haggadah's placement of these statements together with the Rabban Gamliel saying at the end of magid can also be justified pedagogically. Perhaps it is too ambitious to ask of ourselves (and especially the children at our seder) at the outset to see ourselves as part of the Exodus, before we have even retold the story. This is a very lofty idea for some. Moreover, there is something worthwhile about saving the ultimate message of magid for the end, as a way to summarize and "bring home" everything we have just said (another pedagogic tool).

Put simply, our Haggadah builds up to a climactic moment at the conclusion of magid. There is more suspense involved. It's akin to writing the conclusion of a lesson on the board only at the *end* of class.

One can imagine that different educators may have various approaches to how and where we place our most important messages within a lesson plan. This pedagogic debate between Saadia Gaon's Haggadah and ours serves as a reminder for us all that the seder is primarily about pedagogy. It is incumbent upon all of us to choose whatever teaching method may work best for those present at our seder!

Eliyahu's Role at the Seder

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The seder night is full of *minhagim* (customs) that shape our experience and memories of Pesach. One such *minhag* is the universal custom of *koso shel Eliyahu ha-navi* – Elijah's cup. Many explanations have been offered to explain this custom and its historical development. I would like to share one explanation of the custom, attributed to the Vilna Gaon (the "Gra", 1720-1797).

The Gra explains that there is a debate in the Halachic literature over how many cups of wine one is supposed to drink at the seder. We have the practice of drinking four cups – which is often explained

as corresponding to the four phrases/expressions of redemption that God promised Moshe in Exodus chapter 6—*ve-hotzeiti, ve-hitzalti, ve-ga'alti ve-lakachti* (I will take the Israelites out of Egypt, save them from oppression, redeem them, and take them as His treasured nation). There is also a fifth term of that promise—*ve-heiveiti* (God will bring them to the Land of Israel).

Although the Talmud (Pesachim 108a) says very clearly that we drink four cups of wine, there are different versions of the text that refer to a fifth cup. The tradition of five cups is preserved by the Rambam (Hil. Chametz u-Matzah 8:10). The Rambam rules that we complete "Regular Hallel" over the fourth cup and then pour a fifth cup to say *Hallel ha-Gadol* (Psalm 136).

We thus see that there is a *machloket* (halachic dispute) over how many cups of wine we are supposed to have at the seder – four or five. The Gra explains that the Cup of Eliyahu that we pour is meant to draw our attention to this *machloket*. We pour a fifth cup but do not drink from it, showing that we are aware of the debate and have not dismissed the position of the Rambam outright. He explains that the fifth cup is named for Eliyahu the Prophet because we have a tradition that Eliyahu will resolve all machlokot (halachic disputes). We know this from the Talmudic term *teiku* which appears at the end of a *sugya* which reaches no clear conclusion, and is seen as an acronym for the words: *Tishbi yitaretz kushiot u-ba'ayot* (Elijah the prophet will resolve difficulties and problems). We similarly find in the Mishnah (Bava Metzia 37a) that if there is disputed property about which no compromise can be reached, the principle is *yehei munach ad she-yavo Eliyahu* (it remains undistributed until Elijah comes). Eliyahu's role in tradition is to resolve disputes and provide answers to questions that we are incapable of answering ourselves.

The approach of the Gra highlights an interesting element associated with Eliyahu's cup. As we pour the cup, we symbolically open the door and invite Eliyahu to join our seder. Yet we do this only after the meal has been eaten and we are preparing to say Hallel! It seems that we should invite him at the beginning of the seder. One explanation for this odd practice lies in Eliyahu's role as being able to answer all questions and difficulties. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks z"l has a beautiful essay in his Haggadah titled "The Art of Asking Questions." In it he writes: "In Judaism, to be without questions is not a sign of faith, but of lack of depth...Many of the customs of seder night were introduced solely to provoke children to ask 'Why?' Judaism is a religion of questions... Religious faith has often been seen as naive, blind, accepting. That is not the Jewish way."

The essence of the seder is to ask questions. So much so, that the Rambam rules that one who is having a seder alone must nonetheless pose questions before telling the story of the Exodus. To include Eliyahu at the beginning of the seder, before any questions have been asked, would be counter to the goals of the seder. Only after the meal is complete, and our questions have been posed and reckoned with, can we include Eliyahu and the certainty that he represents.

The past year has certainly been full of questions and living with the uncertainty of the COVID pandemic. As we prepare for another Pesach different from what we would have ever imagined, it is crucial that we appreciate Eliyahu's role in the seder. We include Eliyahu in the seder only at the end as a way to say that the focus of the seder should be to ask difficult questions, even if the answers are not readily apparent. Eliyahu's appearance at the end of the seder serves as an assurance that there are answers to the difficult questions, and that things that don't make sense now eventually will make sense.

“Next Year in Jerusalem” This Year

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The Passover Seder formally begins and ends with a pair of hopeful declarations. Magid opens with *Ha Lahma Anya*, an invitation welcoming all those who have no place to eat and a declaration that this year we are here, but next year we hope to be in the Land of Israel; this year we are enslaved, but next year we hope to be free. *Nirtzah*, the final section of the Seder, likewise includes a similar (though notably not identical) declaration: “Next year in Jerusalem!”

The short yet powerful phrase “Next year in Jerusalem” orients the future both temporally (“next year”) and spatially (“in Jerusalem”). “Next year” promotes conceiving a better future, not in the distant future but in the imaginable future. *A better time*. The words “in Jerusalem” reinforce the notion of Jerusalem as a place of longing and encourage hope for return, but they also function metaphorically – Jerusalem as an idea. *A better place*. “Next year in Jerusalem” can thus mean at least two things simultaneously. First, literally, the hope that by next year redemption to Jerusalem will have arrived. And second, figuratively, the desire for a future that is better than the present in which we are currently living – that we’ll figuratively be in Jerusalem. *In a better time and place.*

This year is our second pandemic Passover. Last year, we imagined this year; this year, we imagine next year. What might the phrase “next year” mean this year? In the midst of an impossible year, what does it mean to focus on the future?

The History of “Next Year”

In a poem for the conclusion of Yom Kippur, the twelfth-century poet Judah ha-Levi asks God, as the sun sets and the day wraps up, to forgive Israel and assist those who are suffering. He ends the stanza with the hopeful phrase “Next year in Jerusalem!”

For ha-Levi, traveling to Jerusalem was more than a poetic fantasy. He desperately wanted to be in the city, writing to his friend Halfon ha-Levi that “I have no secret wish, only the open one that I made plain to you and that I laid out before your lofty presence – to go eastward as soon as possible, if God’s will grants me assistance” (trans. R.P. Scheindlin).

Ha-Levi’s desire to travel to Zion was indeed no secret: anyone who reads his writings learns how deeply he felt this urge, declaring most famously: “My heart is in the east, but the rest of me is far in the west.” This wish for Jerusalem emerged out of a long tradition of Jewish longing to return from exile. It also developed within ha-Levi’s own contemporary context, including the First Crusade and its aftermath, which prompted communities of Christians, Muslims, and Jews to renew their attachment to Jerusalem and enlivened their imaginations about it. Later in the same poem in which ha-Levi declares that his heart is in the east, he references Crusader Jerusalem explicitly: “How, in the bonds of the Moor / Zion chained to the Cross / Can I do what I’ve vowed to and must?” (trans. H. Halkin).

Ha-Levi's poetic phrase – "Next year in Jerusalem" – is one of the very earliest instances of it in extant Jewish sources. A variation, "in Jerusalem next year," appears in an eleventh-century piyyut for Shabbat ha-Gadol composed by the French Rabbi Joseph ben Samuel Bonfils, known in Hebrew as Yosef Tuv Elem, attested in Ashkenazi Mahzorim through the modern period. (Bonfils also authored *Hasal Siddur Pesach*, which was later incorporated into the conclusion of the Passover Seder. Even though in most contemporary Haggadot "Next year in Jerusalem" immediately follows *Hasal Siddur Pesach*, these two passages' inclusion into the Haggadah seem to have unconnected histories – "Next year in Jerusalem" was included earlier, and at first they were two separate Seder customs.) Some early Geniza documents use the phrase "Next year in Jerusalem" as well, often as a formulaic wish or greeting – including in a letter about Judah ha-Levi's arrival in Alexandria on his way to Jerusalem in 1141!

Precisely when and where the practice of ending the Passover Seder with the hopeful "Next year in Jerusalem!" originated is unclear. It was certainly a medieval addition, perhaps emerging in a Crusader or post-Crusader European and Iberian context and becoming far more widespread in the centuries thereafter, though a more thorough search through the documents of the Cairo Geniza might reveal that the custom developed even before then. One of the earliest extant Haggadot to include the phrase is the Bird's Head Haggadah from the early fourteenth-century Rhineland, a region devastated by the Crusades some decades earlier. This Haggadah includes the words "Next year in Jerusalem" in big letters before the final blessing on wine; an intricate depiction of Jerusalem's gates, with people entering the city, appears on the facing page.

By the fifteenth century, the custom of reciting the phrase was more common – the phrase appears far more frequently in Haggadah manuscripts after the fourteenth century. The Barcelona Haggadah from Catalonia, dated to 1370, dedicates a full, ornate page to the words "Next year in Jerusalem, Amen." The phrase also appears in large lettering in the Rothschild Haggadah (c. 1450) from Northern Italy and the Washington Haggadah (1478) from Germany. It was not confined to a single region, but is attested in a broader European landscape from Catalonia to Italy and the German lands. Many other Haggadah manuscripts from this period do not include the phrase, however, suggesting that it was by no means a universal custom to recite it. The fifteenth-century Rabbi Isaac Tyrnau records in his Sefer Minhagim that after drinking the fourth cup of wine and reciting the blessing after it, members of the seder say "Next year in Jerusalem"; he explains that this declaration, together with *Hasal Siddur Pesach*, formally ends the Seder and beckons participants not to eat or drink anything after reciting those words. Despite Tyrnau's precise instructions for when to recite the phrase, its location shifts around in manuscripts and printed editions, all the way to the present day.

The custom of concluding the Seder by reciting "Next year in Jerusalem" became more widespread with time, almost the default practice, especially by the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, when Jewish communities all over the world had easier means of sharing texts and traditions. Its meaning was adapted to numerous contemporary circumstances and contexts. Yet in many Haggadah traditions it was never added, and in some it was deliberately omitted. It did not gain the formal status that many other parts of the Haggadah did: the phrase has an especially exciting history precisely because it remained so flexible and could speak to so many circumstances.

"Next Year" This Year

In different years, different parts of the Haggadah resonate. There has been and continues to be so much death, illness, suffering, loss, despair, inequality, and injustice – it has truly been a year of plagues. As Passover approached last year, in the early and devastating months of the pandemic, I thought a lot about the concept of plague: I identified more with the enslaved Israelites, the Egyptians who suffered

the plagues, and with those who endured other plagues (biblical, medieval, modern), than with those who had been redeemed. I prayed for redemption from contemporary plagues. I also could not help but ask myself "what's different – *ma nishtana*?" And of course the answer was "everything." At the beginning of the pandemic, the situation was so new and different, and rapidly changing each day. We had never celebrated a Passover quite like it.

This year, we're in a strange time and place: what was so different and new last year is now routine, even if we don't like it. In many ways, this year is harder: to have endured so much, to be so isolated and apart, to have faced illness and death, to have forgotten what life used to be like. But there's also hope, especially now with vaccination efforts underway – hope that we'll get through this time, that the pandemic will end, that we will make the time to mourn and heal. That hope is uneven, more palpable in communities and countries with resources to acquire and administer the vaccine and less imaginable for those currently in the throes of tragedy; it is a tangible hope for some, and a more distant hope for others.

This year, I would propose, the focus is not primarily on the present – what is different – but on the future: declaring that next year (that is, the future) will be better, and hoping that we might eventually make it, next year or in some coming year, figuratively or physically, to our Jerusalem – whatever and wherever that is.

Making It Happen

Rabbi Tevele Bondi, in his 1898 commentary on the Haggadah titled Maarechet Heidenheim, explicitly connects the *Ha Lahma Anya*, found at the beginning of the Seder, to the final declaration of "Next year in Jerusalem," placed at the conclusion of the Seder. Bondi writes that the Seder is bookended by these paired declarations because it is the merit of charity, exemplified by the *Ha Lahma Anya*, that will lead to an eventual return to Jerusalem. Action guided by the values of generosity and welcoming those who are enslaved, oppressed, impoverished, and hungry will facilitate the redemption promised by the evening's conclusions, and by the Passover narrative itself. The beginning of the Seder encourages us to be driven in our actions and our words by our values, and the end of the Seder promises that doing so will eventually lead us to a better time and place.

At our Seders this Passover, we might wish to ask ourselves what we hope the next year will bring, where – literally and metaphorically – we would like to be a year from now, and what we can do to create this better future. We have, at last, reached a time when contemplating the future can offer hope rather than despair. And in hoping for a better year, we'll be joining a long Passover tradition.

May you each have a healthy and happy Passover this year, and an even better one next year.

Next Year in Jerusalem

Rabbi Eryn London
(Maharat ‘17)

L’shana Ha-Ba’ah B’Yerushalayim!
Next Year in Jerusalem.
Next Year in person.
Next Year with the people I love.

Throughout the seder, we are reliving the leaving of Egypt. Reliving a time when we and our community, and all of our ancestors, together experienced something great, overwhelming, and all-consuming.

We are meant to see ourselves as if we had left Egypt:

Imagining building bricks. The heat of the sun on our bodies. The sand and dirt under our fingernails. The smell of cement, mixed with dirt, water, and some spices that happened to waft over.

Imagining living in the fear of what might happen next. Never knowing what new rules might come to be. Never knowing when we might be treated more harshly.

Imagining mourning the loss of loved ones, but not being able to fully mourn. Holding that sadness and grief and anger. Wondering who will be next and when, and will we have a chance to be with them, hold their hand, or hug them one more time.

Imagining trying to take care of our neighbours and friends to the best of our ability. Knowing that we are all struggling right now, that there still must be a way to be compassionate. Trying to alleviate suffering to the best of our ability.

Imagining just getting by day by day, taking it one day at a time because more than that is too overwhelming.

However, the seder does not end there. Like the Israelites, we are also able to leave Egypt; we are also able to remember that experience as well.

Remembering the slight joy that we might have felt, watching as our enslavers suffered, while also feeling empathy for their sadness, anger, and fear.

Remembering the fear and confusion as things started to change – how the world as we knew it was no longer. Simultaneously wishing for the world to be like the ‘before time’ and hoping that it will be different, better. Knowing that although our ancestors had wisdom, some of it no longer fits and we must be on our own and discover a new way.

Remembering what it was like to pack our bags, to be ready to go at any moment. To hold onto that anticipation. Thinking about what were our essential items. What were the things that helped each of us in Egypt, what were the things that needed to stay there, and what did we need to take to the new place.

Remembering the cold of the night. The stars in the sky. The energy from the people around us.

Remembering the joy to be free, but also the fear of not knowing what it means to be free. The fear of what it means to be able to do whatever I want, when I want. To not stay in one place. To move about freely.

Remembering the worry that it might happen again. What if we have to go back to that time? What if that time happens to our children or our children's children or generations down the line? How will they survive? Will they be strong enough? Will too many of them watch people they love die? Will they have to feel pain?

Remembering the awe and joy of crossing the sea. The realisation that a huge miracle just happened. The tears running down our faces. The joy of hugging each other. The wanting to tell the world that this happened.

Although it is not always easy to be hopeful for the future, the words are there: '*Le'shana Ha-Ba'ah B'Yerushalayim*' - Next year in Jerusalem.

This Pesach, may we be able to travel back in time and forward to the future – to a future of hope, a future of a better world, a future full of health and wellbeing.

L'shana Ha-Ba'ah B'Yerushalayim!
Next Year in Jerusalem.
Next Year in person.
Next Year with the people I love.

From a Passover of Alienation to a Passover of Empathy

Rabbi Hanan Schlesinger
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One of the most oft-repeated themes of the Torah is that we must remember that we were slaves and strangers in the Land of Egypt, and that God redeemed us with an out-stretched hand. Both the experience of slavery and the experience of redemption are meant to radiate one central and fundamental call to action that the Torah comes back to again and again:

Slavery and stranger-hood: Love the stranger and care for him, provide for him and show him empathy. Feel his pain and act to alleviate it, deal kindly with him, for you yourself know what it means to be a stranger and a slave.

Redemption: Walk in the footsteps of God who redeemed us from Egypt, and redeem the slave and the downtrodden. Provide for them as God provided for us. Just as God's mercies are upon all His creatures, so ought our mercies to be upon all His creatures.

The world is divided into *us* and *them*. That is the way that it has to be. In order to experience the security and the love of the family, the clan, the nation, there have to be those who are not part of our inner concentric circles. But at the same time, one of the most central directives of the Torah is that this division must never be so stark as to alienate the *us* from the *them*. Our love and concern must radiate out beyond the *us* towards the *them*. Our sense of *us* must empower our people to reach out to *them*.

We recall and relive our experience in Egypt on the holiday of Passover that is now at our doorstep. Passover is the centerpiece of the Jewish year and the focal point of the process of handing down the tradition to the next generation. And the focal point of Passover is the Seder night with its Haggadah text. The Haggadah tells us – "In every generation one must see himself as if he personally went out of Egypt". We spend the whole night bringing alive the events of slavery and redemption.

Towards what end? What is the take-away? Clearly the answer ought to be – To develop within us the historical memory that will constantly remind us and inspire us to love the stranger and redeem him from his suffering!

Yet this message is completely missing from the Haggadah. It certainly harps on our misery in Egypt, but instead of using that experience to nurture empathy for those who suffer, it sees in it a paradigm for the panorama of Jewish history, reminding us "in every generation they rise against us to annihilate us, and the Holy One Blessed be He saves us from them".

The reason for this lacuna – at least one of the reasons – may be that during the 1,000-plus years during which the Haggadah text developed, we Jews were the slaves and the strangers, and the dominant cultures were antagonistic to our way of life and often to our very existence. We were the *other* and little love was lost on us. Our forefathers were too busy surviving to find room in our hearts and in our texts to teach ourselves about love of the stranger and empathy for his suffering. The larger message of Passover was postponed for the distant future.

That future may have arrived. Reality today is different, in Israel and to a large degree in many parts of America, from that which our forefathers knew. We are no longer the *other* that we used to be, and there are other peoples, cultures and ethnic groups that have taken our place. In Israel we are the dominant culture and in America we are part of the mainstream.

These are the conditions of life that the Torah envisioned, and not the circumstances under which our forebears have lived for the past 2000 years. As such, it is time for our Haggadot and our celebration of Passover, as well as our Jewish consciousness and our behavior, to reflect that change and to go back to basics.

Let the seder be our forum to proclaim and inculcate an ethic of empathy for the other emanating from two intertwined experiences: One – Never Again! Never again shall any people suffer what we suffered in Egypt. And two – We take it upon ourselves to continually struggle to redeem the other, just as God redeemed us!

STUDY GUIDES

Presented at YCT's Seder Sense Program,
March 14, 2021 – Rosh Chodesh Nissan 5781

How To Make the Seder Accessible to Children With Language-Based Learning Challenges

Hannah Zweig Kelsen
Faculty, SAR Academy Middle School, Riverdale, NY

As we head into our second pandemic-Pesach, forced to separate from family and friends, we have the opportunity to find one of the silver linings of a more intimate seder. This year perhaps we can make the seder more inclusive and more meaningful for kids who might have felt hesitant to participate in the past.

The seder is text-based, with the Haggadah as the guide. For kids with language-based learning disabilities, the struggle to access text means that it's easy to feel lost, no matter how many experiential elements there are.

Below are some concrete ways to make the seder more accessible.

- Plan in advance:
  - Find an accessible Haggadah to use at the seder – or make your own!
    - Avoid extra/excessive text
    - Avoid transliteration
    - If your child wants to use a Haggadah from school that doesn't include all the elements of the seder, make sure that that the child can follow along with someone else
  - Review the elements of the seder and selections from the Haggadah to determine what your child feels comfortable reading out loud.
    - If necessary, practice new, seder-specific sight words in advance (Egypt, Pharaoh, slaves, etc.)
    - Use Post-it notes or highlighters to keep track of who is reading which parts, and when you should pause for a Dvar Torah. Assign different colored Post-it notes for the different people at your seder to more easily keep track at the seder and also to have a sense in advance of how to share the space.

- Prepare *and print* four short Divrei Torah in advance (two for each night)
  - Help your children turn the lessons/story they've learned into something they can comfortably express at the seder
  - Have your child pick out an interesting section from the Haggadah and look up some interesting information about it or share some personal ideas
  - Use Dvar Torah sentence starters and/or an outline to help get the ball rolling. See below for examples.
  - If your child doesn't want to/can't write a Dvar Torah, help him or her choose a *short* commentary from a Haggadah (and mark this with a Post-it note)

- At the seder itself:
  - Do as much in English as possible!
  - Create spaces for your child to engage:
    - Reading select passages from the Haggadah
    - Sharing Divrei Torah
    - Reading selected commentaries
    - Other jobs – make sure that your child has a defined role, or "owns" something *at* the seder table

Dvar Torah Outline

1. Introduce the part of the Haggadah that you are talking about. Give some context as necessary.
2. This is interesting/confusing/important because _____
3. I saw/read/heard someone say something interesting about this part of the Haggadah: _____
4. This reminds me of _____ [can be something from your own life or something you know about the world]
5. This teaches us that _____ [Is there a message here? Does this connect to a lesson you've learned in the past?]
6. This raises more questions about _____ [Feel free to pose a question to your listeners]

Dvar Torah Sentence Starters

1. I want to talk about this part of the Haggadah: _____
2. This is interesting because _____
3. This is confusing because _____
4. This reminds me of _____
5. One lesson that we can learn from this is _____

Sippur Yetziat Mitzrayim--a Night of Story Telling: What is your Story?

Rabbi Ysoscher Katz

Rebbe and Chair, Department of Talmud, YCT

1) Pesachim 116a-b פסחים קטז עמוד א׳-ב׳

רַבָּן גַּמְלִיאֵל הָיָה אוֹמֵר: כׇּל שֶׁלֹּא **אָמַר שְׁלֹשָׁה דְּבָרִים אֵלּוּ** בַּפֶּסַח לֹא יָצָא יְדֵי חוֹבָתוֹ,
וְאֵלּוּ הֵן: פֶּסַח, מַצָּה, וּמָרוֹר. פֶּסַח – עַל שׁוּם שֶׁפָּסַח הַמָּקוֹם עַל בָּתֵּי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ בְּמִצְרַיִם,
[שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: **״וַאֲמַרְתֶּם** זֶבַח פֶּסַח הוּא לַה׳ אֲשֶׁר פָּסַח וְגוֹ׳״]

*MISHNA: Rabban Gamliel would say: Anyone who did not **say these three things** on Passover has not fulfilled his obligation: The Paschal lamb, matza, and bitter herbs. When one mentions these matters, he must elaborate and explain them: The Paschal lamb is brought because the Omnipresent passed over [pasaḥ] the houses of our forefathers in Egypt. [as it is stated: "**That you shall say**: It is the sacrifice of the Lord's Paschal offering for He passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt …]*

Questions:

1) Why is it important to SAY these things?

2) Which obligation is incomplete if you don't mention those three matters?

2) Shemot 10:2 שמות י פסוק ב

וּלְמַעַן תְּסַפֵּר בְּאָזְנֵי בִנְךָ וּבֶן-בִּנְךָ אֵת אֲשֶׁר הִתְעַלַּלְתִּי בְּמִצְרַיִם
וְאֶת-אֹתֹתַי, אֲשֶׁר-שַׂמְתִּי בָם וְיִדַעְתֶּם כִּי-אֲנִי ה׳.

And that you may recount to your sons and sons' sons how I made a mockery of the Egyptians and how I displayed My signs among them in order that you may know that I am the Lord.

Comment:

We were redeemed so that we can tell our stories. That is a sign of freedom; enslaved people don't have stories, their personal narrative is subservient to others.

3) Shemot 13:8 שמות יג פסוק ח

וְהִגַּדְתָּ לְבִנְךָ בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא לֵאמֹר בַּעֲבוּר זֶה עָשָׂה ה׳ לִי בְּצֵאתִי מִמִּצְרָיִם.

And you explain to your son on that day, "It is because of what the LORD did for me when I went free from Egypt."

Comment:

While a simple reading of this pasuk suggests that it was meant to be read descriptively, the Rabbis read it prescriptively, turning the noting of "telling our story" into a mitzvah.

4) Rashi on Bereishit 1:1 רש״י (בראשית א פסוק א׳)

אָמַר רַבִּי יִצְחָק לֹא הָיָה צָרִיךְ לְהַתְחִיל אֶת הַתּוֹרָה אֶלָּא מֵהַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה לָכֶם,
שֶׁהִיא מִצְוָה רִאשׁוֹנָה שֶׁנִּצְטַוּוּ בָּהּ יִשְׂרָאֵל, וּמַה טַּעַם פָּתַח בִּבְרֵאשִׁית ?

THE BEGINNING — Rabbi Isaac said: The Torah [which is the Law book of Israel] should have commenced with the verse (Shemot 12:2) "This month shall be unto you the first of the months" which is the first commandment given to Israel. What is the reason, then, that it commences with the account of the Creation?

Questions and Comments:

The Torah consists of two parts: law and narrative. It teaches us how to live our lives but also tells our foundational narrative. Which of these two is "means" and which one is "ends"?

Rashi assumes that the narrative is in service of the law, that the Torah is primarily a book of law.

Is it possible that it is the other way around, that the law is in the service of the narrative?

5) Robert Cover (Nomos and Narrative)

We inhabit a nomos - a normative universe. We constantly create and maintain a world of right and wrong, of lawful and unlawful, of valid and void. The student of law may come to identify the normative world with the professional paraphernalia of social control. The rules and principles of justice, the formal institutions of the law, and the conventions of a social order are, indeed, important to that world; they are, however, but a small part of the normative universe that ought to claim our attention. No set of legal institutions or prescriptions exists apart from the narratives that locate it and give it meaning. For every constitution there is an epic, for each decalogue a scripture.

The Four Children: Who really is the Wise One?

Rabbi Nissan Antine (YCT '06)
Senior Rabbi, Beth Sholom Congregation and Talmud Torah, Potomac, MD

1. Study the Pesukim that are quoted in Midrash of the 4 children

a. Devarim Chapter 6: 20-25
b. Shemot 13: 11-16
c. Shemot 12: 21 -28
d. Shemot 13: 6-9

Questions:

- What is the broader context of each section? Is the child's question about Pesach or something else?
- What does the word "Mah" (often translated as "what") mean in each context? (It can either mean "what" or "why")

2. Chacham (Wise One)

- Compare the Haggadah's version with the Yerushalmi below
- What does the word "Mah" mean in each version?
- How does each version define wisdom?

Yerushalmi's Version of Wise One (Pesachim 70b2)

בן חכם מהו אומ׳ מה העדות והחקים והמשפטי׳ אשר צוה ה׳ א-לקינו אותנו
אף אתה אמור לו בחוזק יד הוציאנו ה׳ ממצרים מבית עבדים

The wise one, what does he say? "What are the testimonies, the statutes and the laws which the Lord, our God, has commanded us?"

You, in turn, shall say to him "With a strong hand the Lord took us out of Egypt, from the house of slaves."

3. Tam (simple one)

- Compare the Haggadah's version with the Yerushalmi below
- How does the Yerushalmi refer to the "simple one"?
- Look at the answer given to each version's "simple" one. What definition of being "simple" is being offered by each text?

Yerushalmi's version of Simple One (Pesachim 70b2)

טיפש מהו אומר מה זאת אף את למדו הילכות הפסח
שאין מפטירין אחר הפסח אפיקימון
שלא יהא עומד מחבורה זו ונכנס לחבורה אחרת

***The stupid one**, what does he say? "What is this?" Thus you shall instruct him in the laws of Passover, [up to] "one is not to eat any dessert after the Passover-lamb", so that he does not get up from one group and go to another group.*

Korech: The Most Meaningful Sandwich You'll Ever Eat

Rabbanit Sara Wolkenfeld

Chief Learning Officer at Sefaria and Fellow, Hartman Institute

Pesach Haggadah, Korech 1-4

Wrap: All present should take a *kazayit* from the third whole matsa with a *kazayit* of *marror*, wrap them together and eat them while reclining and without saying a blessing. Before he eats it, he should say: In memory of the Temple according to Hillel. This is what Hillel would do when the Temple existed: He would wrap the matsa and *marror* and eat them together, in order to fulfill what is stated, (Numbers 9:11): "You should eat it upon *matsot* and *marrorim*."

הגדה של פסח, כורך א׳-ד׳

כּוֹרֵךְ כל אחד מהמסבים לוקח כזית מן המצה
השְׁלישית עם כזית מרור, כורכים יחד, אוכלים
בהסבה ובלי ברכה. לפני אכלו אומר. זֵכֶר לְמִקְדָּשׁ
כְּהִלֵּל. כֵּן עָשָׂה הִלֵּל בִּזְמַן שֶׁבֵּית הַמִּקְדָּשׁ הָיָה קַיָּם:
הָיָה כּוֹרֵךְ מַצָּה וּמָרוֹר וְאוֹכֵל בְּיַחַד, לְקַיֵּם מַה
שֶּׁנֶּאֱמַר: עַל מַצּוֹת וּמְרוֹרִים יֹאכְלֻהוּ.

#1) The Missing Middle

שמות י״ב:ג׳-ח׳

דַּבְּרוּ אֶל־כָּל־עֲדַת יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר בֶּעָשֹׂר לַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה
וְיִקְחוּ לָהֶם אִישׁ שֶׂה לְבֵית־אָבֹת שֶׂה לַבָּיִת... וְלָקְחוּ
מִן־הַדָּם וְנָתְנוּ עַל־שְׁתֵּי הַמְּזוּזֹת וְעַל־הַמַּשְׁקוֹף עַל
הַבָּתִּים אֲשֶׁר־יֹאכְלוּ אֹתוֹ בָּהֶם: וְאָכְלוּ אֶת־הַבָּשָׂר
בַּלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה צְלִי־אֵשׁ וּמַצּוֹת עַל־מְרֹרִים יֹאכְלֻהוּ:

Exodus 12:3-8

Speak to the whole community of Israel and say that on the tenth of this month each of them shall take a lamb to a family, a lamb to a household... They shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they are to eat it. They shall eat the flesh that same night; they shall eat it roasted over the fire, with unleavened bread and with bitter herbs.

Korech is a sandwich that is missing its central component! The experience was designed around the Passover sacrifice, which is no longer a part of our holiday experience. You could imagine a world in which this ritual might have been cast aside in the wake of destruction and change, but instead, it was reinvented.

- What components might be missing from your Seder, this year or in past years? What have you had to change or reinvent?
- If you had to pick the food that most epitomizes Passover for you and put it in the center of your sandwich, what would it be, and why?

#2) A Flavor to Savor

פסחים קט״ו א:ה׳-ח׳

מַאן תַּנָּא דְּשָׁמְעַתְּ לֵיהּ מִצְוֹת אֵין מְבַטְּלוֹת זוֹ אֶת זוֹ?
הִלֵּל הִיא. דְּתַנְיָא, אָמְרוּ עָלָיו עַל הִלֵּל שֶׁהָיָה כּוֹרְכָן
בְּבַת אַחַת וְאוֹכְלָן, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: ״עַל מַצּוֹת וּמְרוֹרִים
יֹאכְלוּהוּ״. אָמַר רַבִּי יוֹחָנָן: חוֹלְקִין עָלָיו חֲבֵירָיו עַל
הִלֵּל. דְּתַנְיָא: יָכוֹל יְהֵא כּוֹרְכָן בְּבַת אַחַת וְאוֹכְלָן
כְּדֶרֶךְ שֶׁהִלֵּל אוֹכְלָן, תַּלְמוּד לוֹמַר: ״עַל מַצּוֹת
וּמְרוֹרִים יֹאכְלוּהוּ״, אֲפִילּוּ זֶה בִּפְנֵי עַצְמוֹ וְזֶה בִּפְנֵי
עַצְמוֹ. מַתְקֵיף לַהּ רַב אָשֵׁי: אִי הָכִי, מַאי אֲפִילּוּ?
אֶלָּא אָמַר רַב אָשֵׁי, הַאי תַּנָּא הָכִי קָתָנֵי: יָכוֹל לֹא יָצָא
בְּהוּ יְדֵי חוֹבָתוֹ אֶלָּא אִם כֵּן כּוֹרְכָן בְּבַת אַחַת וְאוֹכְלָן
כְּדֶרֶךְ שֶׁהִלֵּל אוֹכְלָן – תַּלְמוּד לוֹמַר: ״עַל מַצּוֹת
וּמְרוֹרִים יֹאכְלוּהוּ״ – אֲפִילּוּ זֶה בִּפְנֵי עַצְמוֹ וְזֶה בִּפְנֵי
עַצְמוֹ. הַשְׁתָּא דְּלָא אִיתְמַר הִלְכְתָא לָא כְּהִלֵּל וְלָא
כְּרַבָּנַן, מְבָרֵךְ ״עַל אֲכִילַת מַצָּה״ וְאָכֵיל, וַהֲדַר מְבָרֵךְ
״עַל אֲכִילַת מָרוֹר״ וְאָכֵיל, וַהֲדַר אָכֵיל מַצָּה וְחַסָּא
בַּהֲדֵי הֲדָדֵי בְּלֹא בְּרָכָה זֵכֶר לַמִּקְדָּשׁ, כְּהִלֵּל.

Pesachim 115a:5-8

The Gemara asks: **Who is the tanna that you heard** say that **mitzvot do not nullify each other? It is Hillel, as it was taught** in a *baraita*: **They said about Hillel that he would wrap** *matza* and bitter herbs **together and eat them, as it is stated: "They shall eat it with *matzot* and bitter herbs"** (Numbers 9:11), which indicates that these two foods should be consumed together. **Rabbi Yoḥanan said:** Hillel's **colleagues disagree with him, as it was taught** in another *baraita*: I **might** have thought that **one** should **wrap** *matzot* and bitter herbs **together and eat them in the manner that Hillel eats them;** therefore **the verse states: "They shall eat it with *matzot* and bitter herbs,"** meaning that one may eat **even this,** the *matza***, by itself, and that,** the bitter herbs**, by themselves. Rav Ashi strongly objects to this** proof: **If so,** if the Sages disagree with Hillel and maintain that mitzvot nullify each other, what is the meaning of the word **even** in this *baraita*? This wording indicates that Hillel's opinion is not

rejected entirely, but that one fulfills his obligation even if he eats the items without combining them. **Rather, Rav Ashi said: This is what this tanna is teaching:** I **might** have thought that **one fulfills his obligation with them only if he wraps** *matzot* and bitter herbs **together and eats them in the manner that Hillel eats them.** Therefore, **the verse states: "They shall eat it with *matzot* and bitter herbs,"** i.e., one fulfills his obligation **even** if he eats the *matza* **by itself and** the bitter herbs **by themselves.** The Gemara comments: **Now that the halakha was stated neither in accordance with** the opinion of **Hillel nor in accordance with** the opinion of **the Rabbis,** one **recites the blessing:** Commanded us **over eating *matza*, and eats** *matza* to fulfill his obligation**. And then he recites the blessing:** Commanded us **over eating bitter herbs, and eats** the lettuce as bitter herbs. **And then he eats *matza* and lettuce together without a blessing in remembrance of the Temple, in the manner of Hillel** in the days of the Temple, who ate *matza* and bitter herbs together with the Paschal lamb.

Korech is a culinary experience designed to help you experience a blend of flavors and experiences. This is the central insight of Hillel's position that we must eat these components together. Each represents a different aspect of the Exodus, and there are moments throughout the night when we experience each one. Yet, Hillel insists, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

- How does reflecting on a sad or bitter experience feel different when you are currently in a happier frame of mind?
- Can you think of other examples, in Jewish life or beyond, when combining several elements transforms your experience of one or all of them?

#3) A Sandwich for your Spirit

Marbeh Lesaper on Pesach Haggadah, The Simanim 8

(8) ***Maror Korekh***: Even if some disagreement or bitterness burns in his heart, let him 'wrap up' (*hikhrikh*) any hurts with love and let him judge all people favorably...There are those who remain calm even when their body is aching, a fire is burning in them and bitterness is dripping within them – such people are subject to terrible diseases...Others, however, remain completely calm and do not allow their hearts to become angry. This is a great quality – greater than conquering a city, and not everyone merits this quality.

מרבה לספר על הגדה של פסח, סימני הסדר

(ח) **מרור כורך** ואף אם יבער בלבו איזה קנטור ומרירות לב. אזי יכריכנו ר"ל על כל פשעים תכסה אהבה וידין כל אדם לכף זכות...והכוונה כי יש מי שטבעו להאריך אף. אבל בשרו עליו יכאב וכאש תוקד בקרבו הרוגז והכעס וזה קשה לגוף מאוד כי הכבד כועס והמרה זורקת בו טיפה ונולד כמה תחלואים ממרה ירוקה...אמנם יש בני אדם שמזגו טוב ואינו נותן אל לבו כלל
הבזיון והקצף ואינו מזיק לגוף כלל והוא דבר גדול ולאו כל אדם זוכה לכך ...

Korech is a chance to hold on to the pain and bitterness, wrapped and cushioned by other emotions, and transform the impact it might have on our souls and our behavior.

- We often think it is best to forget anger and hurt, but it isn't always possible. Can you think of a source of pain that will always be a part of you? How have you grown and cushioned that part of yourself?
- How is it important to the experience of liberation that we remember the bitterness of Egypt, but also surround it with other symbols and emotions?

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